

*“We kindle the light within and inspire courage to nurture the web of life
and to create a just and compassionate world”*

**Whatever your heritage, Whatever your faith
Whomever you love, However you identify...**

Welcome!

The service will begin shortly

HERE WE GO AGAIN

(Pandemic year #2)

FIRST UNITARIAN CONGREGATION OF OTTAWA

ANNUAL REPORT 2021



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Pandemic Poetry

From the KidsPost page of the Washington Post, COVID Pandemic Poems

A Day in the Year

My eyes are open
the sun is now rising
The perpetual quiet...
...tranquilizing
I get dressed and washed for almost no one
A full day is ahead
another slow one
Logged in to zoom
I study my reflection
My camera is off
to hide my complexion
I cover my eyes
with my new blue-light glasses and slowly
and grudgingly attend all my classes
Tomorrow's the same
our lives on repeat
The sun's at last set
another day is complete
My pilot stays lit
but no gas is provided
Stay hopeful, stay sanguine 'til this all
has subsided

by Bobby Goldyn, 13. Makawao, Hawaii

Light in the dark

When the world hit the bell that dinged
at danger
and the people faced massive
destruction,
we knew that good things end
but so do the bad.
If you close your eyes, you can see a gap
in the dark, and you
know that light is never really gone as
long as you believe.
And we all have our voices and I still
have
pancakes with my family on Saturday
mornings.

By Fiona Moats, 7. Alexandria, Virginia



Programming



Message from the Minister

A year ago tomorrow, May 2, 2021, this congregation called me to be its next settled minister. I remain as grateful now as I was then.

Our year together actually began on Tuesday, January 12, 2021, when the Search Committee and I engaged in a preliminary interview via Zoom. I'm still not sure I've adequately thanked the members of that team: Amy Bérubé, Jane Lindsay, Mary Ella Keblusek, Mike Lloyd, Jody McIntosh, Phil Nagy and Lena Talback. Each of them worked tirelessly on your behalf during the course of the year (and before).

Early in my many conversations with her, Rev. Pat Guthmann Haresch offered a clear observation about you, "First Unitarian Ottawa is not afraid to go big." I keep discovering just how true that statement is. From the scope of our development ideas to sponsoring a Syrian refugee family, this faith community makes a mark well beyond its size.

While campus plans and the continuing COVID-19 pandemic may have been at the top of what garnered the most of our attention last year, many other topics come quickly to mind: making real the Ajashki Food Security Garden, welcoming Jennifer Berntson as your new Music Director, sponsoring more refugees as I mentioned before, and welcoming a new minister among you (which included gently correcting his rather un-Canadian pronunciations and, occasionally, congratulating him those occasions when he got it right).

And, of course, the year included your offering bittersweet goodbyes to both Rev. Pat and your former Music Director Deirdre Kellerman.

Over my initial months with you, I've met with as many committees and groups as I could, though I'll be the first to admit that COVID slowed this down more than I would have hoped.

I am particularly grateful for the warm welcome members and staff of Unitarian House offered my wife Ann and I early in the autumn. I keep the welcome mat they presented us as a gift outside my office door.

How well this congregation rose to the challenge posed by COVID remains most clear in how you chose to structure Hospitality Hour after our Sunday worship services. There's a joke that Unitarians have no sacrament save our devotion to Coffee Hour, and many of our faith communities stumbled when coffee hour was no longer possible. Not First U Ottawa. Your COVID Years Hospitality Hour is the best I have experienced, bar none, and I served two other congregations during these years in addition to preaching at several others. I hope you will take some justifiable pride in how you have risen to this challenge. And our Hospitality Hour is only one example of this.

During the fall, we returned to Worship Hall once again, offering hybrid worship services. Gareth Auden-Hole and a small volunteer team made this possible. They deserve our continued and hearty thanks.

And speaking of those who deserve our continued thanks, I want all of you to know that your other professional staff – Jen Brennan, Michelle Jackson, Neo Yaxley and Jenn Berntson – are among the most capable and committed of any staff I've ever had the honour of working alongside. I hope you appreciate them as much as I do.

Turning now to our worship life together, I long for the day when we can sing in our younger ones as they come forward to light our chalice, but that day has yet to come. Hopefully it will before long. Until then, we continue to do our best. Hearing from our choirs more recently has both been a balm to my spirit and been a reminder of how much we have missed over the last years.

While this report is technically for only 2021, I will make two exceptions: first to thank the staff, Board members and other lay leaders I invited to join me in a two-part New Minister Start-Up Workshop led by Rev. Linda Thomson of the Canadian Unitarian Council. These two-hour Saturday morning Zoom sessions taught me much about this congregation and how we can best move forward together.

The second exception I will make in this report is to offer a Save the Date announcement. Please mark off Sunday afternoon, October 23, 2022, on your calendars. That's when we'll hold our Installation celebration. This is an event that happens for settled ministers to formally mark the covenant between a minister and the congregation they serve. If you've been to one before (the last time you held was with the Rev. John Marsh), you'll know that this is about as High Church as we get. I'm inviting some colleagues who have especially impacted (read improved) my ministry to be with us then, and they will be joined by an other Canadian Unitarian Universalist clergy and interfaith colleagues. While I don't want to take the analogy too far, there are ways in which the relationship between called religious leaders and the congregations who call them in service is similar to a marriage. Yes, let's not take this too far, but in that light, the installation ceremony is like a wedding celebration. Namely, the ritual of making that commitment public. These can be magical events, and I am very much looking forward to this day, as well as many years' service as your Lead Minister.

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In shared faith,

Rev. Eric H. Meter





Religious Exploration

Neo Yaxley, Director of Religious Exploration

Our children's program aims to provide children with opportunities for growth through creating a supportive environment where individual children's diverse ways of being are celebrated. We strive to kindle the light within each child. Children are offered options through stations; however, we often follow their individual interests, which communicates that we value their pursuits and who they are. We consciously strive to model UU values and take advantage of teachable moments.

Our numbers are currently low. However, those who attend are committed to Sunday mornings.

Our parent's needs, like the children's, are diverse. Some choose to have their cup filled by only staying downstairs, where we have a check-in focused on positive and supportive communications. Other parents choose to be in the sanctuary to have their cup filled, and some do a mix.

Currently under the DRE position we have one Child Care Leader and one youth volunteer.

Online is challenging for young children. Our goal was to offer in-person, outdoor RE as frequently as possible to maintain routine and connection between children during the year. When we could not meet in person, faith-based lessons were posted in the eUU. We also held virtual classes which focused on connection and fun. When permitted, we enjoyed a few outdoor masked family walks together.

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It was a challenging year for RE, and it was difficult to know what to expect and how to best plan. We would frequently open for in-person RE and then have to close again and did not know what the next week would bring. When together, we focused on connecting and providing high-interest activities to engage participants.

During the new church year (fall 2022), we will move forward toward a program that uses a project-based learning model presented as a miniseries. The more significant focus will be to support children in cultivating their UU identity. The completion of each series will have a recognition piece; it could be a certificate or badge that they receive to demonstrate completion. The goal is that parents will feel more significant buy-in, resulting in more consistent attendance of children and enticing some new parents. For example, they present preschool-aged OWL as a course, not as part of our regular Sunday programming in RE. Through a holistic project-based learning approach, we will help participants develop the process of inquiry, grow their talents and offer opportunities to share and support one another through learning. This method



might best help us through the challenge of a one-room schoolhouse where we have significant age gaps between participants.

During the next reporting period, I hope to rebuild numbers to what they were pre-COVID. It's very important that each child from each age group feels like they have a buddy to connect with. Having enough children to operate two separate spaces is essential, especially as we move towards a program that is curriculum-specific.

Music Program

The Music Program runs three choral ensembles; our mandate is to enrich Sunday services through music and leadership, and to provide opportunities for social connection, artistic fulfillment, and community building to the congregation. Typically the group would also perform 2-3 extra musical events per year, though this wasn't possible in 2021 due to COVID-19.



From January - June, all choral activities were online only, in the form of online choir rehearsals and song circles. 8 virtual choir projects were completed by the three choirs under Deirdre Kellerman's leadership; these involved choristers recording their music from home, and submitting the recordings to be edited together. From June - August, there was a break in the music ministry; however, hymns and other music had been pre-recorded by Deirdre for online services. I began in the position of music director in mid-August. In September, the choirs were able to meet in-person for the first time since the beginning of the pandemic, beginning with outdoor rehearsals. While very pleasant on nice days and still preferable to online, these proved to be challenging due to the background noise, poor acoustics, and potential for inclement weather. We were able to move indoors starting in October, where we recorded 12 pieces of music to be used in services. We also were able to involve small groups of singers and sometimes instrumentalists from the congregation in services; some highlights were the Folk Song Philosophy service, UN Sunday, and Christmas Eve.

In December, with the new omicron variant taking off, the choirs moved back to online engagements only, including workshops and a carol singalong.

Of course it's challenging to predict how we will move forward during the pandemic. I hope that the choirs will be able to return to more public performances in the next calendar year, including regularly participating in Sunday services and concerts, and more normal rehearsal formats. This cannot be reliably planned on in the current public health crisis, however. Some of the goals that I hope are reasonable to work towards in the next calendar year:



- Expansion of the music library to include more diverse composers; this includes the choral library, but also the music used in preludes, postludes, and interludes.
- More intergenerational music programming and/or children’s music programming; this is highly dependent on the public health situation, however, since it involves potentially unvaccinated and unmasked children in a higher risk setting (singing).
- More participation from congregation members in providing music for services
- Growing membership in the choirs, as some have (understandably) lost membership during the pandemic from choristers who prefer not to participate in online choir and/or sing with a mask.

Administration

Message from the President, Board of Directors

- Lisa Sharp, president



2021 was an exciting year for our congregation, with many opportunities learning new things and building our community.

Our congregational focus of addressing the “Climate Crisis” was led by incredible energy of the Environmental Action Group. They offered Earth Speaks workshops all year; submitted Enviro Bits and Enviro Advocacy for our weekly EEU newsletter, wrote letters to government about hydro and nuclear energy issues (to name just two), and continued to lead in achieving our Green Sanctuary certification.

In January we held a Campus Planning (CPC) Town hall and learned about the dreams and concerns of our congregants. Several more CPC Town halls were held throughout the year and in June we embarked on a Feasibility Study with our consultants Cahdco and Theia. The results of the feasibility study were presented to the congregation in December, when we learned that our dream of building affordable housing was possible. We also held special meetings with the residents of Unitarian House with many non-member residents in attendance.

By May, Justine de Jaegher, Irvin Waller, Lisa Sharp and Rev Pat had developed the first draft of our new 5 year Strategic Plan; which was then finalized and presented to the congregation by our November meeting.

We held emotional farewells in June for outgoing Music Director Deirdre Kellerman and Rev Pat Guthmann Haresch; and welcomed a new Director of Music, Jennifer Bernston and a new Settled Minister, Rev Eric Meter. We also hired a part-time Communications Coordinator, Allison Armstrong, in order to broaden our messaging on social media and improve our website.

In April, under the leadership of Irvin Waller and Lisa Sharp, First U sent 19 delegates to the UU-UNO Spring Seminar, including 6 youth and young adults where we learned about Climate Change and Food Insecurity locally and internationally.

In the spring, the Ajashki Garden, Kayoki Whiteduck and volunteers Sharen Bowen and Lynn Kofmel-Preston, started digging and began the creation of a Heart Garden. The garden expanded over the



summer with the help of several Food Warriors; and was producing lots of vegetables that we donated to the Parkdale Food Bank. Many other volunteers from our congregation have supported this incredible project and we appreciate all of their energies.

Board members attended meetings all year round including: Finance, Shared ministry, Governance, Embracing Diversity, Personnel, Communications, Campus planning, Leadership Council, SJAN, and Executive Team meetings. We also participated in several Leadership Council meetings where we learned about many aspects of our Communication Systems and our Caring Network. We also participated in a “Welcome to Newcomers” meeting and in September we had a board retreat where we launched our visions for the upcoming year.

Our involvement with the Canadian Unitarian Council continued to expand as we sent delegates to the annual AGM; participated in National Services on Zoom; and about 12 of us participated in the educational opportunities surrounding the 8th Principle, which we then voted for in November.

In the fall, the Social Responsibility Committee changed its name to the Social Justice Action Network. (SJAN) Throughout the year, various action groups offered workshops with a variety of guest speakers, and worked with community partners such as Multifaith Housing, Ancoura and Minwaashin Lodge.

The Embracing Diversity Committee developed a new Welcoming Guide for our use. We continued to work with many community partners and developed our relationship with our campus partners, including Or Haneshamah.

5 Although we could not hold the Fall Fair for our second year, we did manage to raise some money with an online auction and by holding a book/puzzle sale outside. Many enthusiastic volunteers made these activities happen.

Our members also know how to have fun! They attended weekly hospitality hour, discussion groups, book groups, men’s group, women’s groups, line dancing on zoom, and board game nights. Many of us went to bridge on Friday nights, organized by Brent Nicolle and Barb Ryan; and Trivia on Saturday nights with Mary Ella and Andrew. Our families with kids went for hikes in the woods and other outings.

We finally opened the church for in-person services in October; and then had to close again right before Christmas. If nothing else, we have shown how resilient we are. Although we lost 16 members last year, despite being physically closed for most of the year, we gained 6 new members; and because of generous donations from our members, we weathered our operating deficit.

I wish to thank all of our congregational leaders – I can’t possibly name them all - for continuing to do the work, and not giving up hope in a very difficult year. We see you and appreciate all of you and all that you do.

Finally, the board wants to thank our staff, including Rev Eric Meter, Jen Brennan, Michelle Jackson, Neo Yaxley, Jenn Bernston, Lori Clarke, Gareth Auden-Hole and Ellen Bell for their ongoing strength, good humour and patience. We really appreciate every single one of you.



Operations and Facility Management

-Jen Brennan, Operations Manager

2021 meant working at home again for most of the staff except for our custodians, who continued to keep everything maintained, sanitised and welcoming.

In early 2021 we welcomed Allison Armstrong as our Communications Coordinator. Allison has taken on production of the eUU, creating and populating our social media platforms, website and formatting Orders of Service. It has been a huge support having a dedicated and skilled person to maintain the quality, consistency and frequency of our media.

There were a very small number of rentals for 2021, only during times of low transmission of the virus. As in 2020, much work and research went into keeping up with adhering to the current pandemic restrictions and criteria for operating safely. The COVID Task force was a necessary and welcoming presence, and I hope there will not be a need for a mention of this group in next year's report.

Operations and Facility were involved in ensuring our newest staff members, Rev Eric and 'Music Jenn' were able to settle in comfortably to their new offices.

By the end of 2021, after an amazing amount of research done by Gareth our Audiovisual Coordinator, we were able to secure a camera and large projection screen to be erected in Worship Hall in early 2022. This is after the realization that the need for superior audio-visual equipment was required, and that hybrid services and events were here to stay. We had also purchased a 360° conference camera to be used by our internal groups to facilitate hybrid meetings.



To echo last year's report, we are looking forward to returning to the campus in the near future, and engaging again with everyone.

Archives

-Brian Cowan

The purpose of our archival system is to help find documents (if we have them), to help safeguard the retention of documents we are legally obligated to keep, and to help preserve the main outlines of our congregational history. I am the only person maintaining the system at present.

The year 2021 witnessed the final setting into place, in a preliminary way, of a complete archival system in regard to our paper documentation. I say "in a preliminary way" because there are still a considerable number of loose ends to be tied up and a significant amount of fine -tuning to be carried out as concerns our tens of thousands of documents dating back more than 125 years. Another activity, new in 2021, was to assist our Finance/Human Resources Manager in getting our committee, team, and other group



meeting minutes archived in an organized fashion. My main goal in 2021 was simply to keep our system moving along to completion, and I think I was reasonably successful in this despite intervals of building lockdown due to COVID-19. As regards finances, any small incidental expenses incurred by the archives volunteer were covered under the budget of the church office due to the fact that that this volunteer serves as part of the office volunteer team.

My aims for 2022 are to continue to tie up loose ends and to keep up the fine-tuning work with the ultimate goal of getting our system onto a strictly ongoing maintenance basis. One of the key goals of our 5 Year Strategic Plan is to be in possession of reliable congregational structures and resources. I believe that a reasonably well functioning archival system will support this goal.

Three points to consider looking into the future:

- While I feel I am doing reasonably well in getting our paper documents organized, archived and digitally cataloged, I have no way of archiving important voice or video recordings that might be worth preserving for future generations of congregants. If we, as a congregation, do wish to preserve such recordings well into the future, we may, at some point, want to investigate how this might be done, assuming it can be done. If we do decide to proceed along this route, we probably would have to call in outside expertise to assist us, and this would, of course, involve expense.
- Perhaps a future time may come when we, as a congregation, will want to think about the possibility of producing a searchable digital copy of our archived documents either starting in 1898 (when our congregation was established) or starting at some later date, for example, 2000. Should we decide to proceed along this path we will almost certainly have to call in outside expertise to help us, and this, too, will involve expense. As well, there would be the expense of purchasing specialized scanning and related equipment in order to proceed with the project.
- Next year (2023) is the 125th anniversary of our congregation which was established in 1898. In connection with this anniversary, I will be happy to serve as the archival consultant if one is required.

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Committees of the Board

Campus Planning Committee (CPC)

-Terry Kimmel, chair

CPC assists the Board and Congregation by helping to provide watchful and careful monitoring of, review/propose policies for, and facilitate communication related to campus planning.

This committee has a long-term planning and policy focus with respect to how we use our campus, including the land, buildings and other features such as landscaping, road and other access, and parking, with due consideration to both internal and external factors, the latter including City of Ottawa planning policies and decisions and the evolution of neighbouring properties and their uses.



This distinguishes the committee’s charter from the charter of the congregation’s property Team, which reports to staff and focusses on planning and implementing maintenance, repairs and improvements to the congregation’s own building and common lands on our campus.

Membership of the Committee will be at least 5 FirstU members who will have voting rights:

- At least one Board member will serve as a member of this committee
- The Board of Directors shall appoint other members from the congregation that include at least one from the Poverty Action Working Group and one from the Environmental Action Working Group
- Unitarian House, River Parkway Child Care and Or Hanesamah will be asked to participate with no voting rights.
- From time-to-time meetings deemed of a confidential matter will be held with only FirstU participants

The Committee, in recent years has, at the request of the congregation, engaged in a process to establish more affordable housing on the FirstU campus, recognizing the significant need for this within Ottawa. This fits the congregation’s social justice mission.

The CPC goal was to continue the process of meeting the deliverable from the 2018 meeting that approved the building of affordable housing on our campus. This led to a very busy year for campus planning as it was in the midst of a second phase of planning for affordable housing on the campus.

At the June 2021 AGM our congregation approved a motion to conduct a feasibility study to build mixed income housing on our campus. A sub-committee from FirstU was formed to guide the process and to identify priority areas that were contained in our goals and guiding principles. The results of the feasibility study were reported to the congregation in November 2021. Supporting information was also provided in the way of presentations on affordable housing and market housing. A Town Hall was held in January 2022 to discuss the study reports and solicit feedback from the membership. The study led to the prospect of having 2 buildings; one for affordable housing and the other for mixed income housing. That meeting also identified the need for FirstU to develop an integrated campus plan that considered many of the ideas for campus features that were raised at the meeting. These included such things as playgrounds, meeting spaces, areas for rites of passage, gardens, etc. things that would help build community.



Also during the year the Committee attempted to communicate with the owners of Lima Dental on Richmond Road to discuss plans for Lima to build a 9 storey building on its site. FirstU took exception to the location of the building as it would have implications on potential future development at FirstU. Communications with Lima, the City and our Councillor ensued.

The CPC did not raise any new funds during the year and relied on funds raised earlier in support of the development of affordable housing.



While general goals were reached it is understood that the process of developing affordable housing is complex and lengthy. And, it requires a good deal of communication with the congregation because of those complexities. While the idea of 2 buildings on the campus to meet our needs for affordable housing and revenue for the congregation seems straightforward it leads to multiple other questions that require answers. So, as of March 2022 a proposal has been received from our consultants to deliver an integrated campus plan, referred to now as a Master Concept Plan. This will be the subject of a motion to proceed at the AGM.

We hope to move forward to deliver, with our consultants, a Master Concept Plan for the campus. The plan will present options for placement of two buildings as well as affordable housing partners, locations of roadways, walkways, playgrounds, etc. There will be Town Halls and meetings with the congregation to explore the many elements of the plan.

At the next reporting period we hope to introduce a Master Concept Plan that meets the needs of our congregation.

Committee on Shared Ministry (CoSM)

The Committee on Share Ministry serves FirstU's mission by helping to coordinate and strengthen its various teams, working groups and activities, ensuring that all are working towards our shared goals and priorities. To do this, CoSM supports the work of the Leadership Council, assesses how well we are doing in meeting our goals and priorities and seeks ways to develop and support our volunteer and leadership resources. In addition, the mandate of the CoSM includes undertaking periodic assessments of ministry programs to ensuring they are continuing to meet the needs of the congregation. .

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The CoSM has continued to use the Leadership Council as a key vehicle for coordinating the congregation's committees and ministries, to deepen connections among leaders and to share ideas on areas of mutual interest or concern. At its first meeting in 2021, the Leadership Council explored what it would look like for Green Sanctuary, a UUA program focused on climate action, to be a truly congregation-wide, transformative experience. At the June meeting, Rev. Pat Haresch shared her parting thoughts with us, highlighting what she had learned during her time at FirstU and encouraging us to revisit the stories we tell about ourselves. The fall meeting provided an opportunity for Rev. Eric to introduce himself to the leadership team, where he encouraged us to be bold, to set priorities and to look for those unique things we can offer. The fall meeting was also used to begin thinking about how we can rebuild our community after COVID and to 'build back better'. The CoSM is also continuing to explore how it can strengthen our volunteer base and help develop our leadership team. In 2021, a repository of volunteer and leadership resources was added to the FirstU website. Different models for recruiting and retaining members and volunteers were also explored, including the Benevon model. In keeping with its mandate, CoSM was also involved in assessing the achievement of developmental ministry goals and priorities. In addition to continuing its work with the Leadership Council, CoSM will be developing an approach for tracking and reporting on progress on the Strategic Plan. CoSM will also continue to explore and develop ways to support volunteers and leaders and to promote leadership development. This will include looking at things like volunteer recruitment and recognition as well as ways to ensure that good information is available to support each step in the volunteer/leadership development process.



Finance Committee

-Phil Nagy, Chair

The Finance Committee (FinCom), in conjunction with the Financial Manager, has responsibility for monitoring our overall finances, managing our investments and annual audit, directing the annual pledge drive, coordinating the donation of major gifts and bequests, and communicating our overall financial health to the membership. There was a change in treasurer and several retirements from the Finance Committee. Members include Andrew Drake, Margaret Linton, Philip Nagy (chair), Charles Triemstra and, ex officio, the Manager of Finance and Human resources, Michelle Jackson.

Activities consisted of the annual audit review and recommendations, review of and input to the 2022 budget preparation, ongoing review and updating of financial policies, and initiation and direction of the annual pledge campaign.

The FinCom contributes to the Strategic Plan as follows:

Objectives O15, O16 O17. FinCom ensures that campus development, campus maintenance, and the affordable housing initiative proceed in a financially responsible manner.

Objective O18. This objective is the primary responsibility of FinCom, through the budget, the audit, the pledge drive, our investments, and our management of major gifts and planned giving.

Governance Committee

-Guy Belleperche, chair

The Governance Committee assists the Board by helping to provide watchful and careful monitoring of, review, propose and recommend policies for, and facilitate communication related to, governance matters.

The Governance Committee reviews and updates existing governing documents and policies, and works with other committees and teams to develop new policies where required. We updated the Board Handbook and Governance Manual to reflect changes to governance structures and Committee, Group and Team roles and responsibilities, and updated our org chart and published it in a standalone format. We also continued work on revising our Charitable Purposes.

Key activities will be:

- Updating our Governing By-law, including ensuring general neutral language,
- Reviewing revised and new policies, addressing gaps in policies; recommending policy approval to the Board;
- finalizing updates to our charitable purposes and beginning the work of updating our Articles of Incorporation;
- Guiding the Board through the self-evaluation process.

Nominating Committee

- Joseph Connor

The Nominating Committee exists to recruit new members when vacancies appear on the church's Board of Directors. In 2020 and part of 2021 the Nominating Committee consisted of Jan Glyde, Sharmila Khare, Doug MacDonald, and Joe Connor. In the middle of 2020 Jan and Doug stepped down and were replaced by Tara Paterson and Mike Fletcher, In 2021 Mary Jackson and Barb Ryan joined the Committee.



January 2021 to December 2021, in the heart of the Co-vid lockdown, was a busy time for the Nominating Committee. In 2020 we had nominated 4 new members of the Board who were approved by the congregation at the Spring Annual Meeting.

In 2021 we nominated three new members to the Board to replace departing members.

The Nominating Committee also posted openings for the Ministerial Search Committee.

Fourteen individuals expressed an interest in being on the committee. We would like to acknowledge the contribution of Maury Prevost in that process. Maury chaired the

Ministerial Search Committee a few years ago when we sought an interim minister.

His documents, letters with the UUA and other congregations' search processes informed our process and made our Co-vid cramped process easier. We nominated eight candidates to the MSC.

tasked with finding a new settled minister. If we look at our congregation's response to our new minister, I think the MSC did an excellent job.

We look forward to the loosening of Co-vid restrictions and a return to "normal" church relations. The members of our Board of Directors will lead that effort.

Personnel Committee

-Chuck Shields, chair

Assist the Board by helping to provide watchful and careful monitoring of, review/propose policies for, and facilitate communication related to personnel general practices and policies. The committee shall also provide assistance, as requested, to staff regarding personnel matters. As stated in the committee's charter, its membership consists of: 5-7 people:

- The Lead Minister, and at least one Director shall serve as members.
- The Board of Directors shall appoint additional members from the Congregation.
- The Board of Directors shall designate the Committee Chair.

Membership should provide a balance of skills, experiences, and gifts that include:

- Knowledge and experience, either general or specific, in human resources and/or personnel management.
- Knowledge of the mission and goals of the Congregation.

Currently the membership includes: Amy Berube (board rep), Barry Coburn, Michelle Jackson, Kate Kirkwood, Rev. Eric Meter and Chuck Shields.

The committee has not met as often this year as in past years, but has been working on a variety of items:

- Conducting a review of staff compensation that takes into consideration local and national benchmarks;
- Discussing ways to address staff burnout;
- Development of a staff social media policy; and,
- Investigating the possibility of engaging student co-op placements.

The committee will continue working on the items mentioned above and will also be looking at rotation of some of its members. The committee, as noted in the Strategic Plan, has a role in addressing the objective that staff feel supported, motivated and have high job satisfaction. While the minister, as chief of staff, has the lead in directing how this will be accomplished, the committee is available to assist and will monitor that identified actions take place.



Fundraising

Fall Fair

-Carol Card, chair

The Fall Fair generally runs a large bazaar in November, which is the major fundraiser for the congregation. Some 350 volunteers transform nearly all areas of the church building into a giant marketplace. The purpose is to raise funds for the operations of the church, build community within and beyond the congregation, disperse unsold donations to charitable organizations, and put our environmental principles into practice in dealing with waste and recyclables.

For the second year in a row, we were unable to hold our usual Fall Fair because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Although we put substantial planning into a mainly outdoor sale to be held in October, COVID case numbers began rising again in September and the decision was made to cancel the event. We did hold a Puzzle & Book Sale outdoors in late October that raised approximately \$1300.

Earlier in the year, a successful online auction raised just over \$16,000. Most of the work (intake of items and research on them) was done by the Fall Fair Silent Auction team in late 2020, but the auction itself took place in March 2021 based on the auctioneers' availability. Some items were donated by members of the Unitarian House Residents Association, and the proceeds from those sales went to that group. Given the success of this first online auction effort, a subsequent one was proposed; preparation began in the late fall of 2021, with the auction scheduled for late April 2022.

In addition to the online auction described above, our goal is to return to the more traditional Fall Fair format for 2022, with a November sale of various categories of items. COVID may again be a spoiler, but time will tell. It will have been three years since our last large-scale bazaar.

ITEM CATEGORIES INCLUDE

- Inuit art & sculpture
- Jewellery
- Original artwork
- Figurines
- Sterling flatware
- Coinage
- Canadiana housewares
- Military memorabilia
- Other high-value collectibles

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Teams

Adult Learning Team

The Adult Learning Team promotes learning for all ages a fundamental spiritual practice in our community, with intention, willingness and forethought. We coordinate and manage the structure and process of providing learning opportunities for adults consistent with the mission and charitable purposes of the congregation.

Many of the groups under the Adult Learning Team continued to meet by Zoom during 2021. This includes the Bridge Group, Mindfulness Meditation, Monday and Friday Reading for Growth Groups, the Poetry Sharing Group, the Spirituality and Philosophy Discussion Group and the Women's Personal Growth Group. No funds were raised because the groups were not meeting in person.

The Empower Dance Group continued to meet in a member's home each week.

The Knitters' Group continued to stay in touch with each other and continued to make their creations which they sold at the church before Christmas making \$1234.

Arts Night, First U 55+ Program and the BookShelf are still on hold until the Pandemic is over.

Most groups will continue to meet on Zoom until it is safe for the church to open up again. Several groups, including Empower Dance, Knitters' Group and the BookShelf said they were really looking forward to being able to meet again at the church.

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Caring Network Executive

-Maryan O'Hagan, chair

The Caring Network is responsible for encouraging and nurturing a caring presence in the congregation. There are 8 members currently on the executive, and a large number of volunteers who carry out activities as required. The whole congregation has a responsibility to provide a caring presence and as such is part of the Caring Network.

- Caring Contacts, two per month, are listed in the weekly e-UU and the quarterly Spire as the Network's first contact for those seeking a listening ear, assistance, comfort or recognition for themselves or others.
- Caring contacts refer to others such as an appropriate volunteer, Minister, or Spiritual Care Visitor and arrange for Caring cards to be sent to those requesting
- 7 new Caring Contacts were recruited to bring the total to 28 including 5 men
- 75 Caring cards were sent
- A Caring Network Executive member links with the Spiritual Care Council
- 35 Cards were sent to isolated and ill congregants at Christmas
- Recognition and thank you to the Caring Network as a whole through messaging and photos in the e-UU during February heart month

Volunteers who are Caring Contacts were sent a thank you card and a simple gift in April for volunteer month.

Following the Presentation of the Caring Network to the Leadership council in February 2022 there will be a review of the ideas generated. A continuing search for those who might drive to appointments or assist in other ways such as grocery shopping.



Communications and Outreach Team

-Carl Sonnen and Brent Nicolle, co-chairs

The Communications and Outreach (C&O) Team aims to help increase the spiritual growth, social conscience and sense of community in our world, by helping to connect people to FirstU values and activities. Our mandate is to plan, implement and monitor the strategies and processes for communicating information within the congregation and to the general public.

In October, the C&O Committee (reporting to the Board) was reorganized to the C&O Team (reporting to the Minister), to recognize the operational nature of most communications matters. At year-end, there were two congregants and two staff serving on the C&O Team, with room for more to join.

In 2021, we interviewed and hired a part-time Communications Coordinator. We created a Members-only Facebook Group for member communications, to supplement our Facebook Page for official posts; about 80 congregants joined the Group with occasional posts. We updated the website to provide a new, consistent look, and we analyzed website traffic metrics for future improvements. We improved YouTube procedures for livestreamed services and EarthSpeaks forums. By December, we initiated an online photo-directory subscription, to aid in getting to know each other as a congregation and especially useful for a newly settled Minister.

Funding for the part-time Communications Coordinator required (post-budget) Board approval, but has largely been viewed as an investment worthy of renewal. The goal was to increase our social-media presence, which was achieved, and we are attracting some newcomers including younger demographics to our services and forums, despite COVID.

Going forward, we plan to educate leaders and congregants on how to use their own word-of-mouth and social-media networks to describe how FirstU is important to them. We plan to review and update our own communications policies, including both traditional and electronic media. We plan to continue to improve website based on distinct use-cases, such as “first-time visitor”, “Sunday congregant” or “member seeking information”.

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Denominational Affairs Team (DAT)

-Maury Prevost, chair

The Denominational Affairs Team’s (DAT) mandate is to connect our congregation and its members to other UUs and their activities in Canada and around the world, especially through the Canadian Unitarian Council (CUC). These connections strengthen the congregation’s ability to fulfill its mission and charitable purposes beyond just the local community. Membership in the DAT includes our delegates to CUC meetings and other interested people at FirstU.

2021 was a very busy year for the CUC, especially related to the 8th Principle debate that took place between the CUC AGM in May and the Special Meeting in late November that approved the 8th Principle calling us “to dismantle racism and other systemic barriers to full inclusion”. Leaders and others in our congregation were very engaged in all of these activities, including a series of online CUC forums and an early October Town Hall at FirstU on the subject.

On the communications side, the DAT provided numerous items in the weekly e-UU newsletter and contributed articles to the Spring, Summer, and Fall 2021 issues of the Parkway Spire concerning CUC activities and the 8th Principle.

As a result, FirstU was also well represented in CUC national services in February, May, and November 2021, a virtual national conference in May, and online national gathering in November



One activity beyond the CUC in 2021 was our participation in the UU Office at the United Nations intergenerational spring seminar in April on the theme of “All In For Climate Justice: Food Equity and Sustainability”. About 20 people from our congregation participated in this completely online event, including 4 youth and young adults. This was an excellent turnout. We also played a role in encouraging participation from some other Canadian congregations.

The DAT’s activities, which will continue in the same vein in 2022, help FirstU to meet several of the key goals in the current Strategic Plan by making our leaders and other congregants aware of the programs and resources (staff and other) of the CUC and best practices of other Canadian congregations. Being part of a national organization enhances what we do.

Property Team

-Jen Brennan

2021 was a typical year for the Property Team, completing routine maintenance, scheduled repairs and general upkeep, so the campus and building would be a welcoming and safe place for all.

We partnered with the Environmental Working Group to determine the best course of action regarding the installation of air conditioning in Fellowship Hall, a much-anticipated project that has been debated for a long time, and was part of the Spiritual Home Campaign. We wanted to ensure we were making an environmental as possible choice. We hope to finally complete this project by the end of 2022.

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We worked with the Ajashki Garden group to determine the best space for the beds and rain barrel. We worked out an agreement for the coming year, to increase the planting area by almost double, and to allow use of the Volunteer Centre for starting seedlings in early spring.

Parking spot rental on the campus for three months in the fall resulted in approximately \$10,000 revenue for the congregation.

We worked with Gareth Auden-Hole, our Audio Visual Technician, to plan and purchase a new large screen and projector for Worship Hall, which would be installed in early 2022. We have realized that the capability to offer hybrid services, rites and passage and events will be a permanent need for both ease of participation and accessibility for all.

Our plan for the coming year is to continue to monitor the condition of our beloved campus and building, so that we may all worship, work and play in a functioning, aesthetic and comfortable space.



Right Relations Team (RRT)

-Lisa Boulay And Marilen Gerber, Co- chairs

The Right Relations Team assists the congregation and staff of the FirstU of Ottawa in fostering and maintaining harmonious relations within the congregation. The RRT mitigates conflict through education and training. RRT members may be called upon to facilitate/mediate conflicts between individuals/groups.

Highlights January-December 2021

- The RR Team completed the new Relational Covenant with multiple inputs from the congregation and several presentations.
- The motion to vote on the Relational Covenant was successfully affirmed at the June 2020 AGM.
- The Board requested the RRT edit the Congregational Covenant to take any language that was now part of the Relational Covenant out and to refresh the wording of the Congregational Covenant This was completed in 2021.
- RRT had consulted with the Rev. Pat, the Environmental Action Committee, and the Diversity Committee to ensure that the language of the revised Congregational Covenant was appropriate.
- RRT presented revised Congregational Covenant to the Board in the fall of 2020.
- The RRT worked with First U's Operations Manager Jen Brennan to have the new Congregational and Relational Covenant created and hung in Worship Hall.
- Banners made and to update the website with the new covenants
- The RRT met with the new minister, Rev. Eric Meter this past year to have his input and experience and to present our history and role within the congregation.
- We were not referred any conflict situations last year.
- The RR team continues to meet via Zoom during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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The RR team successfully met throughout the year, virtually by Zoom which improved our ability to have full attendance at meetings. We feel that we met our goals very well, in spite of the restrictions on meeting in person. We continue to discuss RRTs role and develop it with the support of our new minister.

The RRT is planning to use the bulletin board, present articles in the Spire and in general to remind the congregation of our role and that we are available if requested for mediation of conflicts.

Welcome and Membership Team (W&M)

-Jane Lindsay, chair

The Welcome & Membership Team helps ensure FirstU's sustained vitality by welcoming newcomers and congregants, supporting them to feel connected and engaged with our community and helping those who wish to do so to become members. The team meets on an as-needs basis. It currently has 11 members. In addition to the team itself, there are about 17 additional congregants who volunteer as greeters at live services.

Activities this year included: as Greeters, Welcomers or Emcees, one-one-one outreach to newcomers at, and often subsequent to, online Hospitality Hour and live services; response to email inquiries about First U; conducting of the member application process; organization and delivery of one Introducing Ourselves event (online in March) for new members and interested visitors; organization of a New Members Welcome segment of a June online service; assistance to the scrutineers for the 2021 annual



and special congregational meetings and to the callers for the pledge campaign. Also, the realities of COVID and some return to holding of live services meant that substantial time was spent in frequent revision and associated oversight of our process for greeting and seating participants to live services. Our intended holding of in-person breakfasts to welcome new members was not possible given COVID.

W&M will continue to provide the ongoing services as or similar to the above. In addition, we are actively involved in rethinking how we “do church” post COVID, including: Sunday hospitality hour; how we better engage all congregants in truly welcoming and including all people as per the 8tu Principle; and how we present First U in marketing communications and in interaction with visitors. We will also update our steps to membership and how they are presented on our website and undertake an extensive Project Reconnect initiative to call members who have not engaged with us in the COVID years. Recruitment of additional volunteer greeters will be needed as many current ones are also volunteers for other Sunday activities.

Worship Associates

-Lisa Boulay, chair

The Worship Associate Team is comprised of 8 members of the congregation. Our role is to assist and support the Minister during Sunday services. The Worship Associate Team takes the lead in supporting and facilitating services during the summer.

17 Due to the COVID-19 pandemic the Worship Associates have been nimble in shifting from on-line zoom services and/or pre-recorded services to in-person services when restrictions have been lifted. In 2021 the Worship Associates began meeting in order to ensure smooth transition with our new Minister Rev. Eric Meter. The Worship Associate team continues to meet with the Minister every second month.

We continue to assist and support the Minister in the delivery of Sunday Services and to build a robust Worship Associate Team.

Social Responsibility

Social Justice Action Network (SJAN)

-Sherri Watson, chair

The SJAN is responsible for coordinating FirstU activities in Action Groups through which social problems of priority concern to Unitarian Universalists and FirstU are identified and solutions pursued.

The Social Responsibility Coordinating Team (SRCT) was renamed late 2021 to SJAN to encourage different ways of working together e.g. working across various projects, & attract new diverse volunteers. Membership has fallen slightly in some groups (Mental Health, Environment, Poverty), remained unchanged in others. Child Haven group ceased operations due to low membership & COVID restrictions. Work on indigenous issues was reinvigorated in the Truth & Reconciliation Action Group with high interest & new co-chairs. The work plan time frame & process was changed to align Church priorities of the draft Strategic Plan & Group projects as well as rationalize allocation of funds by



priorities. This had a measure of success to broaden thinking & increase awareness of opportunities for collaboration. Despite COVID restrictions, much work continued in 2021, through zoom & with adjustments to plans. The allocation from the church budget for SJAN activities was supplemented by successful fundraising in Poverty, GoGos, and Global Justice Action Groups. The food security indigenous led youth project Ajashki has demonstrated collaboration across several Groups, engaged outside organizations well & raised funds to enable the envisioned work and expand beyond expectations.

Efforts will continue to attract new volunteers & eventual leaders through better communication with the congregation & on the website. Poverty Action Group, including Refugee work, will become a part of Global Justice, with co-chairs to share the work. Through improved planning & reporting to each other, Groups will continue to develop mutual support and to integrate Green Sanctuary goals (climate mitigation, adaptation & resilience, & justice), as well as create opportunities for smaller projects that might boost participation. Partnerships with outside groups will be pursued & strengthened.

The Embracing Diversity Committee is welcome to join the SJAN but remains a committee of the Board. This seems inconsistent with the mandate of SJAN & does not promote good integration or collaboration with other social justice groups & activities.



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Ajashki

-Sharen Bowen, Ajashki Support Coordinator and Eva Berringer, Project Liaison

Ajashki, meaning soil in Algonquin, is an indigenous-led food security and climate change initiative. Initiated through the Environmental Action Group as a climate justice initiative under Green Sanctuary (see EAG's report), Ajashki is also supported by the Truth and Reconciliation, Global Justice and Mental Health Support and Action Working Groups. By providing part-time employment and hands-on gardening experience to marginalized youth facing poverty, food insecurity and mental health issues, Ajashki is helping FirstU give life to its first principle, recognizing the inherent wealth and dignity of every person. Through its emphasis on teaching about climate change and sustainable gardening practices, Ajashki is also helping to protect the interconnected web of life, our 7th principle. Ajashki is also a major reconciliation initiative for the congregation. Ajashki arose out of a Sharing Circle held in 2020 with



Algonquin Anishinaabe Elder Verna McGregor, who conceived the idea of an Indigenous Learning Centre. From this grew connections with Kayoki Whiteduck, a young Algonquin Anishinaabe farmer, whose vision is to teach Indigenous youth how to grow their own food, in an effort to address food insecurity among urban First Nation communities. A Circle of Support was created and with Kayoki, they built a common understanding and direction for the initiative. In 2021, permission was obtained to plant a food garden on FirstU property and Ajashki was off and running. During the pilot year, two youth Future Food Warriors were hired, one with funding from Nature Canada and the other with funding from the Youth Services Board. Under the leadership of Kayoki as the Food and Climate Educator, Ajashki provided hands on-gardening experience combined with teachings on climate change, sustainable gardening practices and native plants which can be foraged. Faced with the needs of the initial Future Food Warriors, the program was expanded to include both breakfast and lunch, with the lunch program providing opportunities for teachings on preparing food from the garden. Surplus garden produce was donated to the Parkdale Food Centre.

Ajashki has continued during the winter months with continued funding from Nature Canada for two Future Food Warriors. FirstU has provided indoor space for starting seeds for outdoor gardening and for four hydroponic growing towers donated by Growing Futures which will allow for year-round gardening. Education on climate change and adaptation is continuing.

While the initial year was not without challenges, Ajashki has shown how impactful the combination of hands on gardening and nature-based teachings can be. Testimonials from Future Food Warriors attest to the success of the program. As one Future Food Warrior noted, “the experiences I’ve had with Ajashki growing food and learning about food sovereignty and production has helped set goals for how I want to live my life: in harmony with nature through a reciprocal relationship.”

Ajashki is a key initiative under FirstU’s Strategic Plan Goal 3, demonstrating the congregation’s commitment to social and climate justice. Building on the successes and learnings from 2021, Ajashki hopes to expand in 2022 and will continue to focus on working with Indigenous youth. Applications have been submitted for grants to support the expanded program. Subject to funding, Ajashki’s plans for 2022 include

- Continue to expand our partnerships, including with Kitigan Zibi First Nations, Inuugatigiit Centre for Children, Youth and Families, and the Metis Youth employment program. Mino'Weesini (Parkdale Food Centre) has committed to become Ajashki’s weekly supplier of vegetable cuttings for compost and will also receive produce from the garden.
- Expand the summer program from one day a week to two beginning mid-May and increase the number of FFW to between 6 and 10. Gardening space will also be increased, through an expanded on-campus garden and possible garden sharing.
- In addition to the continuing focus on food security and climate change, introduce more teachings on Indigenous culture and language including monthly sessions with an Indigenous Elder, a role with Elder Albert Dumont has agreed to take on.
- Expand Ajashki’s ‘in-reach’ by working with Religious Exploration to develop an accessible children’s garden. Plans for a wheelchair-accessible garden container are also in the works. Congregants and Unitarian House residents will also be encouraged to volunteer with Ajashki.



Environmental Action Group (EAG)

-Mike Fletcher, chair

EAG has a broad mandate covering all environmental issues and a specific lead for the congregational social justice focus on Confronting Climate Catastrophe: changing fear to action 2020-23. EAG was also approved in 2020 to seek accreditation for FirstU through the UUA "Green Sanctuary 2030" program, a whole congregational faith approach to dealing with climate change through mitigation, adaptation & resilience, and justice.



EAG work has a strong link to the 7th principle but, as environment issues and climate change in particular affects social justice and the stability of the world, the 2nd and 6th and 8th principles also come into play.

Most positively, the EAG group jelled in many ways with each member of the group contributing in their best ways, taking on projects quietly and making some great progress. Despite a number of programs not being able to be implemented because of COVID lockdowns e.g. single use plastic, we were able to launch the Hope in Action Workshop and Photovoice and Story Telling Project, and advance the use of a heat pump in Fellowship Hall. The Ajashki Food Security and Climate Change Special Project has engaged RE in collaboration and will provide a 16 year old Indigenous Youth to help Neo, children and family members learn how to grow a children's vegetable garden to be built by Ajashki on children's playground land outside of Room #4.. We continued: communications on climate issues in the e-UU, on the website, & in Spire; initiated 23 advocacy actions; held monthly "Earth Speaks"; saw rapid development and funding through congregational donations and grants for the indigenous-led Food Security and Climate Change Special Project. "Ajashki" is supported by the Environmental Action Group, Global Justice Action Group, Mental Health Support Action Group, Truth and Reconciliation Action Group; and the Social Justice Action Network related to educating Indigenous youth called Future Food Warriors about ancestral and modern gardening practices.

EAG, having had approval in 2020 to lead FirstU in becoming accredited by UUA as a "Green Sanctuary 2030", submitted the required lengthy documents on our congregational profile and the opportunity assessment which were received positively. We are one of the first UU congregations to be using the latest "Green Sanctuary 2030" which focuses most almost exclusively on the climate crisis. The program focuses on three areas of the climate crisis: mitigate (reducing emissions), resiliency (ensuring that we are able to withstand the damage which has been done to the planet) and climate justice (which involves partnering with a disadvantaged group being affected by climate change).

We strive to:

- Complete our Green Sanctuary work plan document and implement across the church
- Improve our outreach and participation in Earth Speaks
- Continue to be known as a standout congregation in Ottawa on Climate Initiatives Food Security, and other environmental initiatives
- We will complete an energy audit on the church which should lead to reduced greenhouse gas emissions, in line with the requirements of green sanctuary
- Have a fun event when the EAG can get finally together in person!



Truth and Reconciliation Action Group (TRAG)

-Jan Andrews and Jane Lindsay, co-chairs

TRAG supports reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, in the context of the conclusions and calls to action of such bodies as the TRC, MMIWG, Human Rights Tribunal, and Supreme Court. We will do this through awareness-raising and education, fund-raising for and/or donating to selected Indigenous organizations on behalf of FirstU, participating as an ally in initiatives led by Indigenous people or organizations, and being advocates for systemic change (with the approval where needed).

TRAG replaces what was the Indigenous Relations Working Group, which was in hiatus until July 2021. TRAG's focus, and enhanced membership, was stimulated by the finding of bodies on residential school grounds. From then to the end of the year TRAG: held a sharing circle to process feelings about Canada Day in the context of the findings, raised money for the Indian Residential Schools Survivors Society, organized an Orange Shirt Day service, attended associated events in Ottawa, were witnesses of one survivor's walk to Ottawa, and began to collaborate with the Ajashki team, including helping make evergreen decorations, some of which TRAG sold to raise money for Ajashki.

The heightened awareness by Canadians, including congregants, of residential school atrocities stimulated our work and success. Efforts in early 2022 to collaborate more intentionally with the EAG, as well as Ajashki, should help us optimize use of time and resources and seizing of opportunities for impact.

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We aim to raise awareness about the truth of settler-Indigenous relations and to support meaningful reconciliation efforts, working as best we can with other groups. We hope to: collaborate in an initiative with the UU Fellowship of Ottawa; co-host with the EAG one or more Climate Justice-related events; collaborate with/support the Ajashki team; bring attention to Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls and the experience of Inuit with residential schools; engage the congregation in developing meaningful land acknowledgements; and develop a relationship with at least one Indigenous organization for collaboration on initiatives the organization leads or desires

Mental Health Support and Action Group (MHSAG)

- Linda Goonewardene and johnnie gall, Co-Chairs

The Mental Health Support and Action Group serves within the Social Justice Action Network and has about six active members. We offer a listening presence and mutual support for those of us who live with mental illness and as caregivers, thereby upholding the inherent worth and dignity of every person – affirming equity, compassion, and acceptance of one another just as we are. We strive to increase our congregation's awareness about mental illness – its stigmas and marginalization, mental health issues, and addictions: through education, advocacy for



affordable and supportive housing, and via partnerships. Ancoura's mission of creating homes and community for mental health has always been a core mandate of MHSAG, and we continue to champion this charity.

We sang our songs of sharing in providing a listening presence and mutual support at every MHSAG meeting throughout 2021. Given the stress and isolation of the pandemic, we continued our 2020 practice of meeting twice a month by Zoom for mutual support, then reverting to our monthly schedule by mid-year. While we missed the in-person contact, online meetings afforded members the opportunity to participate from long distances including from Vancouver and when ill. MHSAG continued to support Ancoura through our annual congregational donation and the volunteer efforts of our members. We sensitized congregants to mental health challenges and caregiving needs by sponsoring the Breakfast Forum's *Wisdom of Caregivers* and a sequel worship service. We also participated in the yearend service, *Resilience: Finding Light in Dark Days*. As an active member of the Social Justice Action Network, we continued our partnerships with the Environmental Action Group and Food Warriors of Ajashki.

MHSAG will continue its commitment to social justice and an energized spirituality through mutual support at our meetings, education of our congregants and each other, and advocacy on issues related to mental health and affordable housing. In 2022, we will organize a Mental Health First Aid course and possibly other lifespan learning activities. During the provincial and municipal elections, we will advocate for affordable and supportive housing for people having mental illness. Finding ways to integrate addiction service supports into our activities is underway. We will support Ancoura, welcoming them to our FirstU community and MHSAG meetings. MHSAG will continue partnerships with Ajashki and SJAN action groups. As in the past, we plan to participate in worship services and other forums to further our goals. We look forward to hybrid meetings and attracting new members in 2022.

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Poverty Awareness Action Group

-Kathy Yach, chair

Our mandate is to study and bring to attention of the Congregation the concerns and needs of economically marginalized people in our community: to recommend special processes and criteria for deciding who will be supported; and to promote action on anti-poverty and affordable housing. Plus we are now bringing a refugee family in from Syria.

Again because of the coronavirus lockdowns this past year we were unable to complete all of our plans. We continued, directly or virtually, to support several Indigenous aid projects. We raised close to \$5000 for the annual Tulipathon for Multifaith Housing Initiatives at the end of May; supported the 'Chew On This' Campaign marking the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty; participated in the Campus Planning Committee on building affordable housing and market rent housing on the First U campus. We also formed a subcommittee to bring a Refugee family in from Syria. The Or Haneshamah that rent space on our campus joined our committee. We were able to raise over \$60,000 that is required to apply to forward the application into the government. The brother of the family we have applied to bring in lives here is Ottawa. He was the person who approached us.

This coming year we will have joined with CGAG committee to form one committee. We will still be doing the same things as this past year but hopefully we will find some new members. That is our goal. We are seeking speakers and we will be hosting a fund raiser for our primary sponsorship of the Syrian refugee family. Plus our other commitments.



Unitarian GoGos

-Joan Turner

Unitarian GoGos began meeting at First Unitarian 15 years ago in January 2007. Some of us witnessed on TV the powerful meeting of grandmothers from Africa with grandmothers from Canada, arranged by the Stephen Lewis Foundation (SLF) that preceded the International HIV / AIDS conference, August 2006, in Toronto. “We will not rest until they can rest, “promised the Canadian grandmothers, and they meant it.

GoGos means grandmothers in the Zulu language. Most of us are members of First Unitarian, some are not. To this day, everyone is welcome to join at any time. We are often identified by our bright turquoise t-shirts. Words on the back of the t-shirts tell how we work. “In Solidarity with African Grandmothers Easing the Pain of HIV/AIDS through the Stephen Lewis Foundation”.

Today there are 16 other Granny groups in the Ottawa-Gatineau region and 176 groups in Canada. The Stephen Lewis Foundation has provided support, literature, inspiration and opportunities.

There are 19 women in our group. Most of us are seniors. Since March 2019 and COVID protocols, we have been meeting most often via Zoom on the third Thursday of the month at 1:30 p.m. We are retired teachers, social workers, child care providers, HR personnel, editors and authors, administrative personnel, and more. Many of us have adult children and grandchildren.

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Members of the congregation have supported our educational and fundraising endeavours. This past year we were able to resume most of our fundraising activities with changes made to include COVID 19 safety measures. Our annual plant sale was held at the home of one of our members instead of the church parking lot for the second year. Lists of plants were circulated and were ordered and paid for on line. The purchasers were then invited to pick up their purchases according to a schedule so that social distancing was observed. It was a tremendous amount of organizing and labour as we had an overwhelming response from plant donors. Our Dinners at Biaggio’s was held in the fall outside on a large patio. An online silent auction was held at the same. The event was fun and successful. We also revived our December bake sale for the first time since the COVID 19 pandemic. Orders and payment were done online and people were able to pick their items up from the entrance off the parking lot after the church service on Sunday. There was a lot of support and enthusiasm for the baking which has always been popular with the congregation. We also participated in a walkathon that was organized by another SLF grandmother group that involved many Ottawa based groups. Going forward we are hoping to continue to carry on with our established activities and re institute some of our other fundraising activities that have not been possible up until now. We have reconnected with some theatre groups that we worked with in the past for fundraising activities. We are always looking for and open to new ideas.

As part of the Social Justice Action committee, our focus is on global nutrition and medical justice and on empowering elder women in the global community as well as supporting grass roots community organizations that advocate for the basic rights of elder women and orphaned children.



Social Groups

Bridge Group

-Brent Nicolle and Barb Ryan

The Bridge Group is a fellowship group and outreach activity: we build community with each other, and we practice learning and teaching playing skills in a respectful environment. We have a list of 35 email contacts.

During COVID, the Bridge group has consistently met online using Zoom and played using online software; we met once a month during the summer and twice monthly October through May, for a total of 18 meetings in 2021 (typically 8-16 players per meeting). Several of our regular players are currently non-members, which helps to engage with our wider community. We had plans to try in-person workshops for beginner players (a nominal-cost fundraiser), but COVID restrictions forced us to cancel that for now. We will continue to meet online in 2022, and reconsider in-person meetings, including hopefully workshops for beginner players, when it is safe to do so. We will continue to discuss and promote other upcoming congregational activities within our group.

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Friends of the Meditation Gardens

-submitted by Margaret Linton

The Meditation Garden Team has the following mission: we nurture the web of life by maintaining the Gardens as an outdoor sanctuary which provides spiritual and physical peace and renewal for all; builds connections among humans, plants, wildlife, water and soil; and celebrates the circle of life and death.

The Friends of the Meditation Gardens nurtures and maintains the North and South Gardens surrounded by the parking lot. The volunteer team of around 20 members, works under the guidance of a group leader who prioritizes the tasks to be undertaken throughout the season. Major garden decisions affecting the property are decided with the Property Team and the facilities manager, Lori Clarke. Our goal is to maintain and enrich the Gardens as an oasis for the enjoyment of the Congregation and visitors.

This year included many upgrades to the garden. A watering subsystem was installed (designed by a garden team member) that eliminates the need for gardeners to drag heavy hoses across driving areas. We needed to replace a damaged well-used picnic table and chose an accessible 3 seated table made entirely from recycled plastic. Three 'memorial' benches, made of the same material were purchased to replace broken wooden seating.

The usual garden work of weeding, pruning, watering and maintaining the paths, pond, and bird baths continued through the seasons. A main focus was the effort to control the many invasive species in the garden – these species are Buckthorn, Black Locust, Japanese Knotweed, Black Dog-strangling Vine, Creeping Bellflower, and Garlic Mustard being the top 6. We are holding our own against these species, but not winning. The compost bins were maintained thanks to one member – it is hard work. Seasonal transitions were performed as necessary.



The organic vegetable garden is provided and maintained for and by Unitarian House. It continues to evolve as techniques are developed to mitigate the ravages of wildlife. A permanent herb garden is being established in this area along with a "wild garden strip" as a pollinator attraction.

Financially, the meditation garden receives donations for memorial items (one bench in 2021), direct donations for our projects (watering system, picnic table). Other expenses are drawn from the account with plant sale fundraising and a number of bake sales.

Our season ended with an elegant outdoor potluck where our retiring group leader of 5 years – Lori Snyder – was honoured and shown appreciation for her creative and gentle leadership, particularly during the past stressful COVID years. Plans for 2022 are to continue to maintain the garden and keep the invasive species under control. We hope a new leader will emerge.

Knitters Group

-Coral Sato

25 The year 2021 continued our at-home knitting, as in 2020, through a weekly "Greetings and Salutations" email sent to each member of the "Crafty Crafters - Knitters" group. In it were recounted various updates about members, including those who do not have email but have been in touch with another member by phone, thoughts about current events, updates about church news or requests received for knitted items, humorous anecdotes to lighten the mood during the pandemic etc. Further, knitter Maureen Amey has been hosting regular Zoom meetings during which we discuss knitting and anything else while enjoying interacting with each other in "real time" and sometimes showing off our latest knitting/crocheting projects. These two forms of communication have the great advantage of being able to include a former member of the group who has moved to BC.

During the warmer days of spring and summer some of us started meeting outdoors at the church, sitting and knitting and chatting under the trees at the end of the parking lot. When the weather turned cold and rainy in October we were able to move back into Room 3 for a few weeks allowing us to access our supply of yarn more easily for further knitting projects. Although there was no Fall Fair in November 2021, we were able to set up sales tables in Fellowship Hall on Mitten Tree Sunday in December to provide mittens for the Tree and also to sell other hand-made knitted/crocheted items after the church service. This sale raised \$1,234.00 for the church. After the sale, pairs of unsold mitts and scarves were donated to the Snowsuit Fund along with the Mittens decorating the Tree.

We look forward to resuming our in-person Knitters' Meetings in the spring of 2022 and adding to our supply of items to sell at Fall Fair 2022.

