

## August 2021 Minister's Board Report

Greetings Board,

It's difficult writing a Board report during this time of uncertainty. We have been building toward a Sept. 12 "re-gathering" date, but that date remains only a possibility, not a certainty. I've seen our UU churches across the country re-open for in-person worship and I've seen many of them close again as Covid numbers increased. Both online and in-person attendance has been low throughout the nation—perhaps affirming what we UUs have been saying for so long: community—a hands on, hugging, singing, hand holding community—is central to what we do. There's just no substitute for it.

Central to my thinking as we go forward is how to truly practice what we preach when it comes to caring for one another and doing what is best for the larger community. With the current information about Covid variants, I struggle to see how in-person gatherings can be safe for the most vulnerable among us, including the children in our community. In the weeks ahead, both the Board and the Covid Safety Task Force will have to consider very carefully how we navigate these complexities. I have always said—and I still believe—that our ethic as a liberal faith community has to be of a higher level than what we might see of businesses and other organizations—or even public schools.

Had the pandemic not happened, I would currently be on a five-month sabbatical centered around completing my doctoral work for a June 2022 graduation. As I informed the Board last year, I have struggled with knowing when to take this time away from the congregation with so many uncertainties. However, I would still like to graduate on time and am asking for the Board's flexibility in the months ahead. Perhaps once we are meeting again in-person, and things are going smoothly in the First Christian building, there will be an opportunity for me to—on short notice—use at least a portion of that sabbatical time.

Ultimately, I think we have much to be grateful for. Financially, we are in a far better position than many congregations that have been saddled with large mortgages or rent during this time. As a community, we still have pockets of active engagement. Our future looks bright in a new location with a scaled down rental budget and more opportunity for growth. We have made great strides in honestly assessing our strengths and weaknesses, from everything to racial diversity, hiring practices, and religious diversity.

I'm grateful to this Board and to the new members who have come aboard. This is not easy work in these times, and I encourage you to continue coming back to the bigger picture of what we do: we are a faith community dedicated to caring for one another and caring for the larger world. I believe that despite all the challenges we face in these times, we can still work to fulfill this mission.

In gratitude,

Rev. Jason Cook