

## January 2024 Minister's Board Report

Dear Board members,

As we move into this new year, I want to make an observation: **this current UUCF board (with Sam and I as ex officio members), represents one of the most diverse (in relation to race, culture, sexual orientation, gender identity, etc.) if not *the* most diverse board in UUCF's history.** I'm familiar with those who have served on the board going back around twenty-five years, and I think it's safe to make at least the former assessment with some degree of certainty. This is an important thing to acknowledge because it's also indicative of changes within Unitarian Universalism as a whole. As we work to broaden our inclusivity, we recognize that this work means making sure there are seats at the leadership table for people whose voices have perhaps not been heard as frequently in our history. This current board represents several of those voices. *(And, I say this knowing that I, personally, if this were 1974, and not 2024, would not have been allowed anywhere near this table in my current role.)*

**I hope this will serve as encouragement to remain at the table, doing the work in this new year.** I know having so many new board members coming on at the same time this past summer was challenging—and I'm sorry to those who have had a rough time. Until early 2023, the board received thorough and timely reports from our paid bookkeeper. Before her time began with us (six years or so ago), there was a period of great upheaval while we searched for a new bookkeeper after having hired an inadequate one. These transition times around bookkeeping can create a chain reaction, despite everyone's best efforts: budget committees struggle to complete their budgets on time, stewardship committees struggle to set goals, board members and staff struggle to know where the numbers fall and to feel confident in what they are doing. It can feel like lack of transparency and confusion.

Having been through this period once before at UUCF during the beginning of my ministry (and lived to tell the tale), I believe we are moving out of a similar time with the recent steps that have been taken, thanks to the efforts of so many of you, including our Treasurer who is working closely with our new bookkeeper. **All the signs indicate that this challenge will continue to get better as we move into this new year.**

And this brings to mind what have been some of the other biggest challenges for the UUCF board since I got here. I think it's important for you to be aware of them so you can have more context for the work you are currently doing. I'll list them:

- a. Maintaining a healthy relationship with our landlord at our previous location.
- b. Managing ever-increasing finances related to rent at our previous location.
- c. Having enough building access at our previous location.
- d. Finding people willing to work the small number of hours we were offering for part-time positions.
- e. Paying staff adequately and formalizing hiring procedures.
- f. Responding to ministerial and/or staff misconduct issues.

- g. Making sure UUCF's committees were populated with enough people.
- h. Integrating newer members into leadership roles/moving people out of leadership roles they had held for a long time.
- i. Inspiring the congregation to work on an updated mission statement.
- j. Engaging the congregation through alternative/up-to-date means (especially during the pandemic).
- k. Writing up formal policies and procedures.
- l. Creating a disruptive persons policy.
- m. Creating a covenant of right relations.
- n. Communicating the board's work/decision-making to the congregation in a transparent way that the congregation pays attention to.
- o. Creating policies and procedures to be more inclusive and reflect the work of anti-racism and anti-oppression.

Some of the challenges continue for us and some are now mostly historical. **The point is that each year brings different challenges.** The year ahead looks like one in which we will continue to work on orienting our newer staff members while we also continue to look for people to staff unfilled positions. We will be doing "catch up" on our bookkeeping, which will, in turn, create a chain reaction of informing our budgeting, stewardship drive, helping us to set goals for the next year, and better informing the congregation of where UUCF stands in several areas. We will continue **(thank you for your amazing efforts in this area so far!)** to find people for underpopulated committees and get some of our more dormant committees re-energized. And, of course, there are all those "unknowns" ahead, which keep our shared ministry from ever being boring!

With all this said, the important thing to remember is that the board and the volunteers on committees are first and foremost congregants we are ministering to. **This includes all of you.** Board members have lots going on in their lives: family issues, health concerns, life transitions, employment blues, etc. While there are important responsibilities here as a non-profit, we also prioritize everyone's well-being—and how we can look out for one another. If we do it right, people step off the UUCF board having learned something about themselves and other people, and feel more empowered in who they are. Over the years, I've watched our Board be there for one another in those ways. It's not always easy; but it is really meaningful when we intentionally cultivate it.

**I hope this message serves to encourage all of us as we begin this new year. I'm so grateful to each and every one of you for your work with UUCF. I'm always here if you have questions.**

In gratitude,

Rev. Dr. Jason Cook