

UU Church of Columbia, MO

2021-2022 Annual Report



Highlights of Our Year

This church year has been one of in-between as we have begun to emerge from Pandemic conditions that have totally re-shaped and then re-shaped again what ministry will look like in this era. We are moving now into a time of **Hybrid In-Person/ Online Church, Climate Adaptation**, and re-envisioning **the future of church**. This period holds its share of challenge, but is also full of possibility, and we carry with us **DNA** of this church, which has from its very earliest days embodied a can-do spirit, a wealth of volunteer energy, and a deep warmth and care for one another. Deepening into those ways of being we already share will serve us well as we continue to evolve in these times!

It was a wild year for worship, as we have gathered in at least three different ways these last 9 months - from continued **online worship**, to **outdoor worship**, to finally returning to our beloved sanctuary and figuring out **live-streaming!** Our staff, volunteers, and attendees rolled with us through it all with such grace - this is what it is to be church! The learning curve on all of these changes was steep, and we did a lot of trouble shooting with things like sound quality, camera positioning, and logistics. Special and undying thanks go to **Larry Lile** for taking the lead and putting in countless hours of work on our livestream set up and to **Jeff Ordway** for building a stage and taking on sound and equipment set up and break down for almost all of our outdoor services!

Thanks to Larry's excellent start and a lot of recruitment we have a growing and **multigenerational Livestream Team** working on the tech aspect of our Sunday services - we are overjoyed to have High School youth, young adults, and some of our most experienced members all working together to get our services out over the inter webs!

An obvious high point of our worship year was the arrival of **Violet Vonder Haar** as our new **Director of Music Ministry** in October! Violet has already revitalized our music program with her own gifts as an instrumentalist, vocalist, and song writer, her community oriented spirit in bringing in guest musicians, her attention to nurturing musicians of all ages in our congregation, and her re-launch of the choir. While Violet has brought a vital burst of energy, things like the re-emergence of our choral program move slowly as folks' comfort level with singing and engagement continue to grow in this late Pandemic Time. We cannot wait to see how the music program continues to grow with Violet's vision and collaborative spirit.

We are also incredibly lucky that Violet's wife **Phylshawn Johnson** is an experienced sound technician and was able and willing to join us a few hours a week in that role to troubleshoot our Livestream sound issues and keep things running smoothly with some of the technical aspects of our worship!

With the combination of online attendees and in-person attendees, our worship **attendance is back to pre-pandemic levels!** With musical energy, the return of our children to the sanctuary, and robust hybrid attendance, our worship life is thriving.

Our wise **Covid Task Force** helped us navigate many different changes in how we gather as the pandemic conditions evolved over the course of the year. We are so grateful for their wise counsel, research, and thoughtfulness that helped us adapt as circumstances changed.

We have begun our indefinite foray into fully **hybrid ministry**, offering most of our programs in addition to worship simultaneously in-person and online. We had a wonderful lecture series from Rev. Dr. Dawson that saw attendance in both formats and several small education programs that I have run with online and in-person attendees. We will continue to reflect on how to best live into this reality so that we may continue our work of **inclusion** in as many ways as possible.

Our biggest work of inclusion, of course, is our **Rising to the Moment Accessibility Campaign** during which we raised \$400,000 to install an elevator, add handrails to the chancel, make an accessible entryway with automatic door openers, replace hazardous carpets throughout the building and freshen up some paint. This project is moving forward with a ground-breaking date in June! We have found that we are affected alongside many by the soaring construction costs, and we will be returning to the congregation to raise additional funds for this project to the tune of around \$150,000.

Generosity is alive at the UU Church of Columbia. Our **Stewardship Team** re-launched with many new members and energetic new leadership. They ran an incredibly robust generosity campaign with a focus on connection and were able to increase our annual giving by \$10,000 as we continue to grow our giving to meet our budgetary needs over the next two years. This was an incredible feat in a landscape where many churches are seeing their giving decline due to pandemic effects. Brava to the team and our generous congregation. We need to continue to raise our giving by another \$35,000 over the next two years to avoid eventual budget cuts, but we believe that outcome is well within reach.

Our **Membership Team** also saw a major overhaul this year after dwindling to two dedicated members. We now have a robust team of six attending carefully to every aspect of greeting and welcoming visitors and shepherding them through the new member process. They are refining processes for tracking and communicating with visitors and ensuring that new members get connected to the life of the church. After a small decline over the last two years, our membership numbers are back up with a new batch of members - at 250 members, we are holding steady while many of our fellow congregations endure decline.

We were proud to participate in hosting **Room at the Inn** emergency shelter once more with two different hosting shifts in December and February, and our **Social Action Team** raised more than \$15,000 for 16 Faith-to-Action recipients, with more collections to come across the summer months.

We were overjoyed to resume **coffee hour** this spring and begin our return to fellowship events as we reconnect to one another in this period of emergence. Look out for a focus in the coming year on **connection, healing, and solidarity** as we ride what I am experiencing as a wave of new momentum in our shared life! With **vibrant Sunday school Attendance**, new energy in our **Music Program**, a steady stream of visitors connecting to our **social justice witness**, and interest in our **hybrid ministries**, the future of our congregation appears very bright indeed.

From Jamila Batchelder, Director of Religious Education

We spent the fall rebuilding our Religious Education community with "R.E. at the Park!", with focus on play and relationship=building, as well as stories and activities highlighting the centrality of community to our faith. We eventually transitioned back to our age-based, curriculum-centered classes. We created new curriculum for our Coming of Age program, as well as our Adams Family Class Star Trek curriculum, both of which were big successes. Both attendance and volunteer support were strong (with average attendance, including children and teachers, of approximately 50 people downstairs every Sunday, and over 50 different adult volunteers over the course of the year). However some of the most important work of the year ahead will be in bringing in new volunteers into this important ministry of our church so as not to overburden our devoted volunteers.

We offered two OWL sexuality programs this year: Our high school aged program, and for the first time, a complete K-2nd grade program. There was amazing volunteer energy and congregation enthusiasm for this important aspect of our RE work. We

look to continue to train new OWL instructors so that the program can continue to expand.

Our high school youth program bounced back after a challenging time remotely during the pandemic. The youth were particularly excited to work on social justice projects, particularly around anti-racism/8th principle and disability justice. Our priority for the youth is to find more opportunities for them to channel and grow this energy for justice work, as well as to continue our important work of providing a safe and supportive environment in which they can build friendships, find spiritual sustenance, and continue to grow into the amazing young people they are.

This year, I sensed a particular joy in the time children spent in the sanctuary, both for children and adults alike. Children seemed to really value the return to the traditions of our liturgy, and engaged more fully in our intergenerational services than I have ever seen them. I look forward to finding new ways to involve children in our worship life in the sanctuary in the year ahead.

We took tentative steps toward resuming social gatherings, as well all struggled with finding the line between covid safety and our need for fellowship. We had a Lego Party and a Bingo and Ice Cream Social Party outdoors in the summer, attended by approximately 40 people. Later in the year, we were able to have two major intergenerational events indoors: the Valentine's Day Dance and the Easter Brunch. Both had attendance of approximately 70 people, and were a lot of fun for all involved.

For the year ahead, community building remains central as we continue to move forward after our year apart. We hope to create more opportunities for fellowship, both for children and parents, as well as create more physical spaces that are conducive to fellowship (i.e. a playground!). I am particularly interested in finding opportunities to build intergenerational connection, and in finding ways for us to do justice and service work in an intergenerational way.

In short, it has been a really wonderful year in R.E.! And we head into the new year with a lot of love, energy, and joy to explore new possibilities for connection, service, and spiritual growth.

From Violet Vonder Haar, Director of Music Ministry

I have played many roles and worn many hats as a musician, yet I never envisioned that becoming a music director at a church would be one of them. From where I stand now, however, it makes perfect sense. I am so honored and grateful to have found a home with you at UU and have enjoyed the opportunity to stretch my musical and leadership skills in this position.

Accepting the role as the Director of Music Ministry in the middle of a pandemic has required patience, flexibility, acceptance and surrender to what is. In spite of the challenges of this year, we were able to slowly build the music program back and dream into what we want it to become. The year started off with some incredible performances from local community musicians, we have been able to hear from talented members of the congregation and have slowly begun building back our choir program.

So many of us are standing on the threshold of what “could be” and dreaming of what “will be”. My dream for the music program at UU is to continue to find ways to open and heal our hearts through the power of music. For some that may mean joining the choir, attending a music workshop, or simply singing hymns and enjoying the variety of musical performances on Sunday morning. I have many dreams of what “could be” and cannot wait to make them happen. Stay tuned for upcoming opportunities to enjoy and make music at UU.

From Suzanne Clark, Administrator

In the administrative office it has been a year of change. We changed our database of members to a new company, that has a system to allow online payments and automatically credit them to your account. It also will automatically keep an online directory of members, so that when we get that up and running we don't have to find ALL the places your email, phone number or address is when you need to change it. Changing the database has not been easy, although the database is simple enough to use. It does have a learning curve as you will know as some of you received very strange 2021 statements!

We also changed our accounting system to a local bookkeeper who creates the kind of reports that are typical for a business. The purpose, besides making accounting simpler and up to date, is to make the reports more easily understood by the board of trustees, your representatives when they review the financial status and business of the church.

Local businesses seem to be our direction, as we switched our payroll system to a Columbia payroll company. Not only are we keeping our expenses here, helping our community members, the local company is less expensive than the larger company online.

As the church reopens, the calendar is getting busier so please remember to check your church space needs with the office. We want to see you here, and when you are here we want you to have a space!

Gratitude

Let us give thanks for our incredible staff: Suzanne Clark, Jamila Batchelder, Violet Vonder Haar, Phylshawn Johnson, April Rodeghero, and all our nursery caregivers. Their work has made ours possible this year in so many ways, and the gifts they bring to our community are innumerable. Their flexibility and good-will in an extremely difficult time deserve particular note.

The volunteers that make this church run are too numerous to name all of them individually, but I hope that we can each make time to give thanks weekly to volunteers who provide us with music, teach our kids, lead our youth, teach us, lead our chalice circles, run our small groups and activities, usher and greet on Sunday, organize our committees and classes and programs, provide compassionate care to one another and more.

This year we must particularly lift up the work of Larry Lile who made almost all of the tech improvements necessary to Livestream our services and . We also share gratitude for Jeff Ordway who set up and struck the set and sound equipment for almost every single one of our outdoor worship services. We also celebrate the work of the Worship Associates who learned at least three different new ways to lead worship and the Covid Task Force, which gave us wise counsel through numerous transitions in circumstances and precautions!

It is with deep gratitude, love, and respect that I submit this report to you.

In Faith, Rev. Molly Housh Gordon