

UU Church of Columbia, MO



2023-2024 Annual Report



Highlights of Our Year

At our last annual meeting we celebrated the completion of our major capital improvements project enhancing the accessibility of our building. In the fall, we began fully living into our newly beautified and accessible space, and it has been a year of re-orienting, re-connecting, and re-energizing volunteers at UUCC.

We were incredibly proud in December to **complete an internship as a teaching congregation** with the happy and successful conclusion of service by **Intern Minister George Grimm-Howell**, who has now been fellowshiped AND called to serve a congregation in Hendersonville, NC! What a joy it will be to co-ordain him with the First UU Church of St. Louis in June!

Our Religious Education program is thriving, with nearly **90 children and youth enrolled** and a stunning amount of volunteer support in addition to the creative and spiritually grounded leadership of Jamila Batchelder. Jamila estimates that about **50 adult volunteers** keep our program running over the course of the year.

This year, we particularly **celebrate our Coming of Age youth** who went through a year of deep reflection and shared their belief statements with us earlier this month with courage, intelligence, and panache! We also thank our **Our Whole Lives (OWL) Sexuality education** teachers for offering the curricula to two different age groups. We will be hosting an **OWL teacher training for the region** and training multiple additional volunteers from the church later this month.

An enormous congratulations is due to our high school youth, youth advisors, and particularly DRE Jamila Batchelder who worked extremely hard to **plan a Regional Youth Conference experience for the MidAmerica Region of the UUA**. We had **more than 50 guests from 6 congregations across the region** who were delighted and impressed by our teens' amazing offerings of worship, workshops, and fun. This was the first Youth Con in our region in over 5 years due to the Covid pandemic, and it was a roaring success. **Thank you also to the 24 adult volunteers** from our congregation who helped make it happen!

We all benefitted immensely from the musical guidance of the gifted Violet Vonder Haar this year as the choir grew, our youth musicians were coaxed into performing, our band thrived, and we enjoyed several special musical guests. Violet also put

together a lovely variety show evening highlighting the talents of our congregation and **building community around music**. Congratulations are also in order to Violet for being named in Columbia Business Magazine's 20 under 40 this year!

This year also saw a lot of behind the scenes **administrative work** as we set about auditing and streamlining our financial systems. We also modernized some of our communications strategies and trained our staff more deeply in the use of our membership database to smooth out membership coordination processes. I am so grateful for the prodigious organization skills of Administrator April Rodeghero.

Our **grounds team grew and thrived this year** under the collaborative leadership of Carol Arnold, together deepening our stewardship of the land we share.

One of the biggest happenings of the year unfolded in January when sub-zero temperatures caused a pipe break and flood in our lower level. Undying thanks are owed to our **Facilities Team members**, especially Kevin Fritsche and Kevin McKiernan, who responded to the emergency and then did months of restoration work. Thanks also to **Jamila and RE Volunteers** for shifting programs for untold weeks while we got the classrooms back to working order. The silver-lining of this really unfortunate accident is a beautiful refresh of classroom paint, cabinets, and countertops and a total remodel of the lower level kitchen - updates facilitated by our insurance coverage to repair the damage, but which we couldn't afford in our prior accessibility renovation.

Our Stewardship Team had an eventful year with the launch of the **Water Bearers Society planned giving program** and a robust annual giving campaign that generated **an overall increase in pledged giving over the past year**. The importance of these teams' work cannot be overstated as we continue to live into economic conditions that are very difficult for congregations across the country. I am so proud of the way our people step up to fund our essential work!

We held a series of **Climate Resilience Skill-Up Workshops** and **Inclusive Gaming Gatherings** to engage folks with our values in fun new programmatic ways, and the workshops have evolved into a standing ministry team exploring the idea of congregational life as a site of climate resilience.

Our **Chalice Circle small group ministry** program thrived with **66 participants in 8 groups** deepening their connection to one another.

As we began to more seriously contemplate safety and community care, we held a well-attended CPR and AED training and got **15 UU Churchers certified in CPR and AED** use.

Our **Social Action Team** celebrated the dedication of an African American History Trail marker that they sponsored on behalf of the congregation.

Amid crisis in Israel and Palestine, our **UUs for Justice in the Middle East Team** welcomed the burgeoning leadership of UUCG teen **Lila Ordway**, and together they planned and executed a beautiful fundraiser for relief work for the children of Gaza. As well as raising more than **\$5,000** in aid, they facilitated profound interfaith connections with our Muslim neighbors.

We engaged as a congregation in a whole host of **Reproductive Justice** work this year. Over the summer we became a distribution site for the Free Emergency Contraception project for the Missouri Family Health Council and hosted multiple Emergency Contraception kit-building events including one by our teens. My lawsuit against the state's abortion ban made slow progress forward, and, most impactfully, we got engaged with the Missourians for Constitutional Freedom's efforts to get **reproductive healthcare access on the ballot** this fall. We hosted an incredible launch event in February for the ballot initiative and had a significant number of church members out collecting signatures. In the end, the coalition turned in **DOUBLE** the number of required signatures to the Secretary of State on May 6.

We are proud of our many community partnerships, including donating space to the **Missouri Organizing and Voter Engagement Coalition** and nurturing our relationship with the **CoMO Mobile Aid Collective**, which provides direct aid to those living on the streets with a mobile soup kitchen, med clinic, and survival gear distribution to encampments in the area. We are now regularly donating our facility for meal prep and other projects like a Stop-the-Bleed training this spring. We also continue our monthly meals with **Loaves and Fishes**.

A significant event in our community partnerships this year was our board's decision to **act as a fiscal sponsor for the Boone County Community Bail Fund** so that they could resume operations in their effort to support those incarcerated with non-violent charges and unaffordable bail and to work toward ending the unjust practice of cash bail in our community.

On a personal note, I wish to thank the congregation sincerely for their support of my educational and vocational endeavors this year as I **completed my Doctor of**

Ministry Degree and was invited to deliver the **Sunday Sermon at the UUA General Assembly** this summer. These are proud achievements for me, but I consider both to be deeply rooted in the shared work of our beautiful community. **Serving with you continues to be my greatest delight and pride.**

In Memoriam

With great love, we remember the UUCC members we lost over the last year:

Fran Reynolds (1933-2023)

Dennis Murphy (1948-2023)

Joann Vest (1938-2023)

Allen Hjelmfelt (1937-2023)

Joan Eisenstark (1937-2023)

Qhyrrae Michaelieu (1961-2023)

Gratitude

Let us give thanks for our incredible staff: 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.

The volunteers that make this church run are too numerous to name all of them individually, but I also hope that we can each make time to give thanks weekly to volunteers who provide us with music, make and clean up our coffee, teach our kids, tend our land, maintain our building, 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.

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

In Faith, the Rev. Dr. Molly Housh Gordon