

# UU Church of Columbia, MO



## 2024-2025 Annual Report



## Highlights of Our Year

It has been a difficult year in our nation, and yet it has also been a time of galvanized moral clarity for our UU community. We are well aware how important it is in this moment to build resilient community centered on love and justice. There is a promise - a commitment to nurturing possibility - at the center of our faith, and we are doing our best to live it out in this moment of duress.

We started the program year with a bustle of re-awakened volunteer energy and a **Connections Fair** to engage the congregation with the various volunteer and program opportunities at UUCC. Each team hosted a table with finger foods, and a roaring good time was had by all. Many of our ministry teams were able to recruit additional members, participants, and volunteers, and our people reported feeling more connected with the work of the church. A **special thanks to Patty Daus** for her amazing coordinating efforts on this event!

The Membership Team spent a great deal of time this year overhauling our New Member class process to focus more on connection and spiritual engagement, and hosted their first New UU retreat in January with 21 prospective members in attendance! We have gained **19 new members** in the church year now concluding.

We launched our worship year of "Creating a Culture of Care" and saw worship attendance grow steadily over the course of year, with a significant and sustained attendance bump after November's election that continues even now. In the fall our worship attendance was averaging around 90 per Sunday. **This spring, our worship attendance average is 120 people, which represents a 25% growth over the course of the year!** We are certainly feeling this lively energy in the sanctuary and may consider experimenting in the fall with an additional worship opportunity.

Our **Forum Group** and **Meditation Group** have rounded out our Sunday offerings with essential offerings to awaken the mind and center the spirit. There is something for everyone on Sunday morning at UUCC.

Our resumed **First Sunday Potluck** tradition also picked up steam this year, and we've had some wonderful meals, ably led by **Connie Ordway** coordinating and many volunteers in the kitchen. A change to the table layout made it easier to connect with one another, and we can feel the effects in our sense of community. THANK YOU to these volunteers.

On a less positive note, **we have struggled to consistently have volunteer support for setting up and cleaning up coffee on Sundays**, with the latter half of the task - cleaning up - being the biggest struggle. We will need to attend to this as a community if we are to continue offering weekly hospitality.

Our **Chalice Circle small group ministry** program met with wonderful curricula relating to our worship themes and created by a team of volunteers, and this year the program served **60 participants in 8 groups** deepening their connection to one another. Of those groups, two meet on Zoom and six in person at various locations to ensure options work for as many as possible.

**Our Religious Education program is also 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. I will note that the need to have volunteers sign up ahead of time for their teaching days has been a struggle to fulfill this year, and there may be some conversations ahead of us about what structures will work best for our staff and volunteers alike as we continue to nurture this thriving program.

Jamila also launched an alternate Sunday School space for those for whom the regular Sunday School programming doesn't work well for due to access needs. The old meeting room/music office is now called "**The Snuggery**" and is set up as a cozy space for solo work or quiet play.

This year with Jamila's leadership and 8 deeply committed and well-trained volunteer teachers, we offered **3 different age cohorts** of our **Our Whole Lives (OWL) Sexuality Education Program**, serving more than 30 kids from our congregation and beyond.

We all benefitted immensely from the musical guidance of the gifted **Violet Vonder Haar** this year as the choir grew, we held meaningful singing circles after the election, and we received the musical gifts of guest artists and our talented UU Churchers alike.

A huge thanks to **April Rodeghero**, who has been helping to coordinate a wide array of building and grounds projects this year with our **Building Team** and **Grounds Team**. Together, these folks finished the downstairs post-flood kitchen remodel and classroom repairs, and also worked hard on projects you will see coming to full fruition in the coming months, including: replacing appliances and flooring in the main kitchen, repaving the parking lot, and building an **accessible, natural play area**

for our kiddos on the easternmost part of the property. Our building and grounds both are looking particularly beautiful and well cared for! Special thanks to **Kevin Fritsche** on Building and **Carol Arnold** on Grounds for a particularly large amount of work coordinating our wonderful volunteers!

In addition to our beautiful physical appearance, we launched a **beautiful new website design** this year, after **Steve Scott** spent many dozens of hours redesigning the site and gives us something beautiful, functional, and accessible for a digital presence. Thank you Steve!

As we saw volunteer energy come roaring back and membership numbers resuming growth, we have also launched several new programs this year. With leadership and strong interest from our members, we have supported the emergence of a **20s & 30s Young Adult Group**, an **Art GroUUp**, a **Writing for Spiritual Sustenance** Group, the **Milestones** Retirement support group, an **LGBTQ Caucus** group, and a **Finding Our Way Forward** group planning for organizing and solidarity in these times.

After an almost total hiatus, individuals interested in our **Caring Ministries** met together this spring to begin revitalizing our caring ministry teams. A Care Team and a Pastoral Visitors Team, each with about six members, will begin receiving training and planning logistics for their work this summer, with the intention of being fully functional in the fall.

To fund all these new programs and to bring all our staff up to fair compensation levels after several years without cost of living increases, our **Stewardship Team** ran our **biggest Annual Giving Campaign ever**, with a giving total of \$351,000 for our coming fiscal year. This was a \$45,000 or **12% increase over the previous year**, our **highest pledge total ever**, and accomplished by a combination of **18 first time pledges** and **70% of established givers increasing their pledge by 5% or more!**

After the successful launch of the **Water Bearers Society** last year, the Planned Giving group **welcomed 14 households** into the society. These are UCC members and friends who have committed resources in their estate planning to the long-term mission of the church. These members were officially recognized at the **Church's 74th Anniversary celebration** at the end of January. We look forward to reaching our **goal of 25% of UCC households having become members of the Water Bearers Society by our 75th Anniversary**. Also, this past year the Planned Giving group interviewed long term members to **document some of our rich historical legacy**.

The **Sanctuary and Immigrant Justice Team** and UUCC this month will mark four years of offering sponsorship to the Guatemalan family seeking asylum in this country. While lessening our sponsorship assistance with the family, the team will be exploring possible next steps to be in solidarity with our immigrant neighbors during this time of xenophobic cruelty by the administration. The team greatly appreciates the support by the UUCC Congregation of our immigrant justice work.

In February, our new **Finding a Way Forward** group planned and hosted a workshop on spiritually grounded resistance in these times that was attended by around 100 members of our community, including UU Churchers and those from the wider community. The tools gained at this workshop were roundly declared essential for staying in the work for the long haul. The group also hosted a **Deep Listening Workshop** in March for further exploration of building resilient community of solidarity.

The **UUs for Justice in the Middle East** group held a postcard campaign, fundraised, and showed an educational film this year to raise awareness and advocate on behalf of Palestinian life and freedom.

The **Social Action Team** ran another successful year of Loaves and Fishes meals and Faith-To-Action collections, having so far collected **\$16,000 for Faith-to-Action Partners**, with several months of collections still ahead of us.

Our **Honduras Team** made a trip in March to visit our friends in the Cangrejal River Valley of Honduras and had a beautiful trip deepening connections, building latrines, and taking on other projects at the direction of our local foreman, Cito. The team also grieved the tragic loss of two Honduran community members while they were there visiting. We hold the river valley community in our love and share gratitude with the team who nurtures relationships there on behalf of our entire community.

In April, I joined with my Missouri UU ministry colleagues in planning and hosting the first ever **Missouri UU Advocacy Day**, in which 40 UUs from 8 congregations across the state gathered in Jefferson City to connect deeply with one another and advocate for our values with the state legislature. The cross-state connections were deeply meaningful for all involved, and we plan to build on this momentum to grow our shared organizing work as Missouri UUs!



Congratulations to the Board's **Mission/Vision Task Force** for executing a huge project collecting feedback on our mission from cottage meetings throughout the fall and the winter. I hope you will read the team's executive summary report thoroughly!

On a personal note, I am delighted to share with you that I signed a **book contract** in March with the UUA's publishing house, **Skinner House Books, who will be publishing a picture book I wrote** in support of families exploring big questions about mortality and the beauty of our universe with their children. The publishing date will be sometime in the next 18 months, and I look forward to sharing my work with you, and celebrating with you, the inspirers and home of all my writing work!

## In Memoriam

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

Jane Conroy  
*March 28, 1959 - November 24, 2024*

Carl Kardinal  
*March 31, 1935 – Dec. 21, 2024*

We also remember our beloved sabbatical minister, preacher, and philosopher in residence, the Rev. Dr. C.W. Dawson, March 12, 1954 - November 24, 2024.

## 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.

May 14, 2025

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

**In Faith, the Rev. Dr. Molly Housh Gordon**