

# UU Church of Columbia, MO

## 2025-2026 Annual Report



# Highlights of Our Year

What a full and exciting year we have had at the UU Church of Columbia! We started the year with deep and widely engage conversations about mutual aid, celebrated our **75th Anniversary** in January, and spent time in the Spring learning about Diverse Economies & Deep Mapping with our **visiting scholar Rev. Jordinn Nelson Long**. We completed an internship as a teaching congregation to **Monica Clark-Robinson** and will ordain her later this month. And we grew in revitalized and energetic lay leadership. Many of the following reports come from our many ministry teams, along with additions from me....

Our **Worship Attendance** remained high, averaging 112 per Sunday. Noticing frequent high attendance, the **Worship Associates Team** has begun to explore potential strategies to address crowding in the sanctuary. They will continue those explorations through the summer and into the fall.

The **Membership Team** would like to report that approximately **23 new members** joined our congregation in 2025. We had **14 newcomers** attend the most recent retreat. We are full of joy that our congregation continues to attract new members and supports our community. Additionally, in the summer of 2025, the church began piloting a buddy system (now called "**Welcome Weavers**") to introduce and connect guests to the church, facilitated through a subcommittee of the Membership Team. Subcommittee members contacted those who had checked a box on the Visitor Connect Form so as to meet with them in person and help them become acquainted with the church on a more personal level. After receiving feedback about the pilot, the program took a break over the winter holidays. We are slowly rolling out this program and will be asking for church members beyond the Membership Team to volunteer if they wish to be paired with newcomers.

A new **Care Team** and **Pastoral Visitors Team** launched in the fall with high energy and really revitalized the entire congregation's habits of care for one another. Many successful meal trains were filled, the pastoral visitors kept us connected to some of our elders and isolated members, and the Care Team held several deeply connective special events: a **Friendsgiving Meal** around Thanksgiving, **Holiday Baskets** for anyone who could use a little good cheer, and an **Octogenarian + Luncheon** in the Spring, which was attended by more than 20 of our 80+ elders.

Our many Small Groups thrived, including our **Chalice Circles** small group ministry program, which was proud this year to offer **10 groups, serving 81 UU Churchers**. This was a record high for chalice circle enrollment, with more than 30% of UU

Churchers involved in a chalice circle. These groups continue to be a touchstone for the deep connection of our community. Additionally, a new **Philosophy Club** launched to discuss big questions together the fourth Sunday of the month. The new **LGBTQ+ Collective** built up steam and also began a **penpal program with incarcerated LGBTQ individuals** at Fulton State hospital. Thanks to **April Rodeghero** for her coordination of that effort.

In addition to the absolutely central offerings of our **Meditation** and **Forum** groups on Sunday mornings, a series of workshops with visiting scholar **Jordinn Nelson Long** made up the bulk of our remaining **Adult RE offerings** this year. She led us in workshops on diverse economies and alternatives to capitalism, understanding the value of mutual aid, and strategies for deep mapping. We look forward to her return in the fall for an All Congregation Retreat. We also held an important workshop with **Dr. Nancy Ellis-Ordway** on the "Weight of Injustice," working to advance our congregation's understanding of weight bias and body liberation.

On the **Stewardship** front, our **Annual Giving Team** is pleased to report that we met our annual giving goal for the second year in a row, increasing giving by more than 6%! The **Planned Giving Work Group** continued its work toward adding 25% of UUCC members and friends to the Water Bearers Society – a community of individuals who have committed resources through their estate planning to support the church's long-term mission. We were delighted to welcome a total of 22 households by our 75th Anniversary celebration in January. We are, however, in need of some new recruits for our stewardship efforts! We especially need new volunteers for the annual giving group and for a new Fun(d)raising Team.

We all benefitted immensely from the musical guidance of the gifted **Violet Vonder Haar** this year as the choir grew and we received the musical gifts of guest artists and our talented UU Churchers alike. Violet's **Sacred Song Circle** program, launched over the summer and continued into the fall, was co-sponsored by UUCC and Compass Music and was a roaring success with more than 100 folks signed up on the mailing list, and 40-50 singers at many of the events. More than that, the singing circles are profoundly grounding, connecting, and joyful in a time when we need those things! We also overhauled our Sound System with the help of **Phylshawn Johnson & Larry Lile**, and got a new digital sound board up and running with much higher capacity.

**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. We have had a particularly successful year in our Youth Group navigating a

transitional time after graduating a large number of seniors last year. It is always exciting watching new generations of youth step up to lead. We also continue to be so proud of our **Our Whole Lives** sexuality education program, which was offered to our K-2 graders this spring by the fabulous teaching duo of **James Gordon & Mallory Donohue**. Thank you to the intrepid teachers!

Our **Building Team** and **Grounds Team**, supported by Administrator **April Rodeghero**, accomplished a stunning number of projects this year. They: replaced appliances and flooring in the main kitchen, had the parking lot re-paved, built an **accessible, natural play area** for our kiddos on the easternmost part of the property. They also pursued bids to begin essential maintenance on our exterior - replacing the emergency exit ramp to the sanctuary and most importantly replacing our siding, now being affected by dry rot. Our building and grounds both are looking particularly beautiful and well cared for! An extra thanks to **Kevin Fritsche** for his able leadership and also manual labor!

The **Finding a Way Forward Team**, convened to navigate our response after the 2024 election, spearheaded a number of transformational programs and conversations. In the summer they led study and discussion of the **UUA's Common Read *Social Change Now*** by Deepa Iyer to help folks understand their particular roles in social justice ecosystems. In the early fall, they held an **Open Spaces Conversation** about **Mutual Aid**, and then launched several mutual aid sub teams, which met all church-year long to envision and begin practicing material interdependence in our congregation. From these groups emerged **farm tours** and shared work projects, a new **Little Free Pantry** on church grounds, and a first annual **Really Really Free Market** exchange at the church this Spring. Special thanks to **Patty Daus** and **April Rodeghero** for their work on this! I am excited to see how this program continues to grow.

During the 2025-2026 Church Year, the **Sanctuary and Immigrant Justice (SIJ) Team** has continued to stay connected with the two asylum-seeking families UCC has assisted, one from Honduras and the other from Guatemala. We have also connected with other churches and local organizations to explore ways to assist our immigrant neighbors. When people were reluctant to gather to celebrate National Hispanic Heritage Month, we provided SIJ team members to help the local organization COMO Comunidad prepare care packages to be delivered to people's homes. Also, on several occasions we had team members accompany immigrants to court and we are exploring in what other ways we can offer accompaniment to immigrants fearful of going to any place where they might encounter law enforcement or other government officials. Finally, we are very excited to have just launched a **Rapid**

**Response Fund** to be managed by Rev. Molly and Rev. Dottie for UUCC to be able to more quickly respond to urgent financial needs of our immigrant neighbors facing cruel and unjust actions of our government.

Our **UUs for Justice in the Middle East** group raised money for the Palestinian Children's Relief Fund during several successful fundraisers, raised awareness about injustices in the region, and began the very early steps toward a process to invite the congregation to consider pursuing status as an Apartheid Free congregation.

The **Social Action Team** continued to administrate our **Faith to Action** collection program, which has already distributed more than \$14,000 to worthy organizations, as of our budget report 2/3rds through the year. They also kept our **Loaves and Fishes Soup Kitchen** involvement running and mobilized UU Churchers to attend protests together at the Boone County courthouse and at the Capitol in Jefferson City.

Our building was a hub for liberation organizing both among our congregation and far beyond it as we: hosted **Brake Light Clinics** and **Free Stores** held by **Como Comunidad** and the **Tallgrass Collective**, served as the training and turn-in site for the organizers gathering **petition signatures regarding gerrymandering** by the state legislature, hosted a **Trans Day of Visibility** event planned by InTact, hosted a **Know Your Rights** training for Constitutional Observers provided by **COMO Neighborhood Watch**, and hosted countless meetings of **Missouri Organizing and Voter Engagement Collaborative** and their member organizations.

## In Memoriam

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

Tonette Rippeto  
*April 26, 1968 – Aug. 22, 2025*

Carla Anderson  
*November 26, 1930 – September 4, 2025*

Nancy Holloway  
*October 20, 1942 – November 29, 2025*

# Gratitude

Let us give thanks for our incredible staff: Jamila Batchelder, Violet Vonder Haar, Phylshawn Johnson, April Rodeghero, all our nursery caregivers, and this year our intern minister Monica Clark-Robinson. 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**