



Report of the President of the Board of Trustees, 2019–2020

Wow, what a year! A year of change, challenge, and opportunities galore! That was the opening line from my report last year and it is equally true this year.

In August, we welcomed our Interim Minister, the Rev. Connie Grant, as we transitioned out of our period of lay-led ministry. Just as we were getting used to having a minister in the pulpit again, we found ourselves experiencing a whole new form of worship due to the COVID19 pandemic – online streaming via YouTube. Thank you, Rev. Connie, Ellen Gozion, Kris Rust, and all the staff and volunteers who have helped to keep us spiritually together even when we are physically apart.

I want to thank Rev. Grant, the church staff, and the entire Board for their leadership, calm, and resolve during this very challenging time. We have prioritized the health and well-being of our community above all else. We responded quickly to the viral threat by closing the church to all groups, thereby protecting our members, friends, visitors and staff. We will use sound judgment, science, and health policy as we make decisions on how and when to re-open our church building.

The Board is also committed to continuing full compensation for all staff. We thank the finance team for their quick and decisive actions by applying for and receiving a small loan through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act. All funds from this loan that are used to pay our staff salaries and utility bills during May and June will be forgiven. This funding does not replace the need for those congregants who can do so to continue making their pledge payments. Rental income is currently non-existent, and some congregants may be unable to pay their pledges because of temporary or even long-term unemployment. This loan will help us meet our commitment to continue staff compensation.

One of the final items of business for the 2019–2020 Board of Trustees was to assemble a New Minister Search Committee. Many of you attended the Zoom meeting in March when our UUA Transitions Coach outlined the process by which UU congregations search for a new settled minister. Due to the confidential nature of the search process, each congregation relies on the discretion, integrity, and Judgement of their search committee.

To assemble this team, the Board solicited nominations from every congregant. Ultimately, we received 529 nominations from 170 congregants. Those receiving overwhelming congregational trust and support were asked to serve. Today, at our Annual Meeting, we will cast our ballots to formally endorse the selection of these volunteers. Over the next year, we should all give them our support and trust. I am confident that at our next Annual Meeting we will be introducing our new minister.

After three years of service on the Board of Trustees and two as Board President, it's time for me to rotate off the Board. I was reflecting on this church year and decided to review our strategic plan (available on our web site). We had set two overarching goals for ourselves: 1)

Create a strong sense of belonging for all who enter our doors and 2) Explore paths to the formation of long-lasting and meaningful First Unitarian–Community partnerships. These are aspirational goals and though I believe we have made progress, we will never be able to check off some box and say “Done!”.

Still, we have made substantial progress on both fronts. We have strengthened our connections to the wider community through our efforts with Habitat for Humanity, by providing meals to the men’s shelter through the East End Cooperative Ministry, and even by singing together as our UU Singers join voices with other community choirs.

We have also fostered a sense of belonging in numerous ways, including the Religious Education department’s initiation of a weekly family-friendly social hour.



One specific objective we set to foster a greater sense of belonging was to upgrade our exterior signage. This is one box we can check off. Done! The old signs were removed and the new sign was installed in March 2020. The new sign is stunning and easy to read even at a distance. It reads as follows “First Unitarian Church, a Unitarian Universalist Congregation, Est. 1820”.

Our congregation was established in 1820, making this our 200th year. I was looking forward to the spring picnic this year, with our new sign and renewed commitment to fostering UU values for this year and even the next 200 years. It seems unlikely that we will be together in person to celebrate flower communion and enjoy a picnic together.

While our circumstances are very different this spring, our commitment to one another and to the inherent worth and dignity of all people remains unchanged. Our community is strong and we will get through this together.

Respectfully submitted,

Handwritten signature of Martin Schmidt in black ink.

Martin Schmidt
President, Board of Trustees
2019–2020

