

Reports on the Ministries of the Congregation - JRUUC Annual Meeting 2024

Report from the Minister

Dear Ones, writing a report on the ministries of the congregation when I've been away for four months is a challenge! I trust that you'll read the reports that follow mine, written by our staff and congregational leaders for our ministry teams, and witness the time and energy put in by so many people in service of the JRUUC mission. My writing is on gratitude.

I'm grateful that I serve a congregation who understands the importance of giving their minister time for study, reflection, rest, and renewal, and who has functioned well during an extended leave. I'm grateful to return to people who are happy to see me back, eager to reconnect, curious about what I learned while I was away, and ready to integrate me back into the ministries you have been engaging.

I'm especially thankful for Deb Myrbo, our Board President, for her energy and dedication over this year. Deb has provided grounded and healthy leadership for our Board, and offered them and me many opportunities to move into increasingly collaborative work. During my sabbatical, Deb was available to offer guidance to staff and ministry teams, and found herself fielding questions and concerns from the congregation at large. And when I returned, she made herself available to debrief the state of the congregation with me, and worked to help me reconnect. She did all this with a beautiful blend of grace and competence that is rarely found.

I'm thankful for the rest of the members of our Board of Trustees, who worked hard in my absence to create a proposed budget to present to you, and to make space for my input on that budget during a very short time period at the beginning of this month; who have accomplished an extraordinary number of things, as you can see in their report; and who is still working to complete an overdue minister's evaluation by the end of this church year.

I'm grateful to the many of you who serve on the various ministry teams, bringing your time and talent to the work of this congregation, whether you're a team leader or a participant in any of our shared ministries. None of our teams have slowed their momentum in offering engaging worship, opportunities for spiritual growth, welcome to new and returning members and friends, opportunities to work toward peace and justice, care of our building and grounds, care for each other, and chances for everyone to contribute to the health and momentum of our beloved community.

I'm grateful for our affiliated community minister, the Rev. Bowie Kling-Garcia, for their leadership in worship and for their stepping into providing pastoral care for Brian Gehring and his family, and for Kelly Kearns and Tom McClintock. And I'm grateful for Jeanette Clawson and Heike Saynish for coordinating your care for Brian and Kelly and Tom, and for everyone who offered your care.

Finally, I'm grateful for every one of you who have participated in the life of this congregation this year, whether I have mentioned you specifically or not. You all are the James Reeb Congregation, and I'm as pleased and honored to serve you as I was when I began our shared ministry.

In faith and love, Rev. Karen Armina

Report on Worship and Music

From Rachel Avery, Worship and Music Team Chair:

This year has brought a great diversity in our worship services. We have celebrated our touchstone sacred annual traditions like Water Communion, Winter Solstice, the Burning Bowl, and Flower Communion. We explored monthly themes (supported by worship resources from Soul Matters) that reflected the proposed changes to Article 2 of our UUA Bylaws, including Liberating Love, Transformation, Generosity, and Interdependence. Thanks to excellent preparation by Rev. Karen and working with the Worship Team, during the sabbatical period we had the opportunity to hear from guest speakers: members of our own congregation (many of whom had been part of the Shared Pulpit course at JRUUC), UU ministers, and other special guests with expertise in everything from social justice to poetry. We hope that these experiences have helped you feel more connected to the broader UU community and the wider world, sparked your curiosity, and provided food for thought.

As a group, the Worship Team has also appreciated the support and collaboration with our RE director, Genevieve, and our music director, Jennifer, as we work together to create worship services that are accessible to everyone, engaging, and, depending on the week, provide inspiration, comfort, joy, wisdom, and challenge. During the sabbatical period, the worship associates had a bigger role to play in keeping everything running smoothly each Sunday, and all the preparation paid off. The Worship Team would also like to thank all of you who have participated in worship online or in person, have helped set up chairs, or supported worship in other ways. And, a special thank you to our Tech Wizards who run our audio and Zoom each week: Mike Stimson, Tom McClintock, Pete Haney, and Bret Buchanan. Running tech is a difficult job, and we can't thank you enough for making multiplatform worship happen each week! In the coming year, we hope to train more volunteers in this important work!

From Jennifer Hedstrom, Music Director:

It has been a joy to serve as the Music Director at JRUUC for the past year (my first full year!) Over the course of the 2023-2024 fiscal year, the Sacred Breath Choir has built a beautiful community of music making. The choir sang at 15 services, including the Annual Winter Solstice Celebration. The Music Service on March 17 challenged the choir to share five pieces in one service and featured many choir members as soloists. This celebration of music lifted everyone's spirits and the service ended with exuberant applause from the congregation. This year, 27 people total participated in choir. Attendance varies depending on schedules and life events of individual choir members, but the choir typically ranges from 15-20 people in rehearsals and at services. The choir welcomed five new members this year and Reeb newcomers often express interest in joining the music ministry. In April and May, we invited guest musicians, Ensemble Shamaali, to accompany the choir on the Palestinian folk song, "Al yadil yadil yadi." The choir learned a lot about Middle Eastern music from this experience and Ensemble Shamaali were impressed by the energy of our choir members! This was an important connection to foster in our community. Beyond choir, Mike Stimson has been hosting informal folk gatherings regularly on Saturdays. Participants are vocal about the fun they have during

these gatherings. The folk group and members of the folk group have occasionally provided musical support at services, including the jubilant Revival service on Sunday October 1. The music ministry will close out the 2023-2024 season by participating in Make Music Madison on June 21. This event will highlight Reeb's love for music and allow us to connect with neighbors and music lovers in the greater Madison area. We are looking forward to being a MMM venue for the first time in JRUUC history!

Report on Religious Education and Family Ministry

From Genevieve McPherson-Shambarger, Director of Religious Education:

This year I have continued my goal to make every service at Reeb truly multigenerational by focusing on ways to make our themes accessible for all ages and to have activities at every service to engage children and youth of any age. My largest struggle continues to be attendance and recruitment of new families. However I am proud to have made deep connections with the families we do have, adapting my programming for our children and youth aged 14 months through high school. Our community meals and fifth Sunday fair style services aimed at building community and creating engaging and multigenerational worship have also been well received. I continue to reach out to other liberal faith communities in our area to build connections and help grow our RE program. It is my hope that through collaboration with our spiritual neighbors and by organizing family activities for our larger community, we can help build our community of children, youth, and their families at James Reeb.

Report on Membership

From Kelly Kearns, Membership Team member:

The Membership Team is responsible for recruitment, orientation and welcoming of new members; managing the visitor experience during Sunday worship; and providing a welcoming environment for all. The Membership Team is Mary Wagner, Kelly Kearns, Elaine Morrison, and starting in July 2024, Deb Myrbo. If anyone who is not yet a member is interested in joining, please talk to one of us.

Greeting members, friends and visitors is an important role in making people feel welcome. We currently have 18 people who have gone through greeter training and are either on a greeting team or act as subs when needed. Anyone interested in being a greeter should contact someone on the membership team. It is a great way to get to know people better.

The Membership Team also coordinates social events. This year we helped coordinate a joint picnic with FUS and Prairie Unitarian. We also hosted our annual games night. Several other events were planned but canceled due to the weather.

When visitors are interested in getting more involved with JRUUC, they fill out a paper or on-line "blue card." These are used to determine their interests and get them on the newsletter list. In the 2023-2024 church year we had 27 visitors fill out cards.

All people who fill out blue cards are invited to the twice-yearly "Exploring Membership" class. In the fall we had 5 people attend. The spring class was canceled as only one couple showed interest.

We have had 6 people join as members in the last year, all of whom have taken on some kind of volunteer role in the congregation. We welcome the following new members to our spiritual family and will support your life and growth in good times and bad: Liz Chapa, Margaret Dahlman-Malzer, Les Gesterland, Sandy Lignon, Ron Malzer, Gwen Pine, and Mary Wichita.

We also know of several past members who have reported they no longer consider themselves members.

Report on Justice Ministries

From Kelly Kearns, Justice Coordinating Team member:

The Justice Ministries work to engage the congregation in justice work by guiding, coordinating, and supporting the congregation's actions, while building relationships of trust in the congregation and community and grounding the justice work of this congregation in our UU values, the mission of JRUUC, and that of the UUA. The Justice Ministry is made up of a Coordinating Team (JCT), various Justice Action Ministries (JAMs) that focus on different topic areas, and Service Ministries.

The Justice Coordinating Team is Kelly Kearns, Eva Wingren, and Rhonda Brodbeck

- We are no longer meeting on a set schedule
- Eva & Kelly both have health challenges; your patience is appreciated!
- Rhonda will continue connecting with folx who fill out a blue card

The Justice Action Ministries (JAMs) recaps:

- Racial JAM (facilitators - Randy Coloni, Jeanette Clawson, Mary Wichita, Ron Malzer)
 - Conducted a survey and encouraged folx to take class Nehemiah's Justified Anger course 'Black History for a New Day'
 - Created a web page with events and resources
 - Created an email distribution list of Reebers interested in racial justice
 - Encouraged attendance to several events (including the Poor People's campaign rally) and participation in UUA Common Read
 - Reviewed Ta-Nahisi Coates' book *Between the World and Me*
 - Planned and facilitated 2 discussion circles on Gaza
- Immigration and Refugee Rights JAM (facilitators - Leila Pine, Pete Haney, Kirsten Johnson)
 - Acts as a liaison to Dane Sanctuary Coalition
 - Created a website
 - Coordinated a service focusing on how congregants have aided local asylum seekers
 - Recruited 12 Reeb congregation members as volunteer drivers to drive asylum seekers to medical and legal appointments, ESL classes, food pantries and other local rides

- Recruited six Reeb families and four others from other Dane Sanctuary Coalition member congregations to provide temporary housing in their guest rooms for 10 asylum seekers from Nicaragua, Cuba and Colombia
- Helped four asylum seekers find short-term work cleaning people's houses, painting houses, doing skilled electrical work, landscaping, and child care
- MOSES (Madison Organizing in Strength, Equity, and Solidarity) JAM (facilitators - Joan Kemble, Elaine Pridgen, Mary Anglim)
 - Acts as a liaison to MOSES and WISDOM
 - Created a web page with opportunities for engagement
 - Assisted Eva with service hosting James Morgan, MOSES organizer
 - Regularly informed congregation of MOSES and WISDOM events to attend
 - Sponsoring a Lunch and Learn event on May 15 featuring a speaker from EXPO (Ex-Incarcerated People Organizing) on the needs of women incarcerated and newly returning to the community.

Non-JAM work recap

- Accomplishments
 - Assisting Prairie Unitarian in monthly lunch packing at River Food Pantry
 - 26 organizations will have received Share the Plate donations from congregants
 - Conducted a training on use of JRUUC administrative systems for JAM leaders. Shared a curated list of tech trainings.
 - Updated Justice Ministry charge and created JAM structure
 - Supported several sermons tied into JAM work
- Monitoring potential new justice efforts, pending capacity
 - Israel/Palestine
 - Reparations/land acknowledgement
- Proposed Learning Agenda
 - SMART goals
 - Spiritually grounded social justice work and partnering effectively with the Worship Team
 - How to evaluate a potential community partner and build a relationship
 - Updated member survey or listening session

Reminders for all members

- Only promote a third party event in the newsletter if at least one JRUUC member/friend is going
- Reach out to Eva/Kelly if you want to discuss how to get JRUUC involved in a justice issue or have other Qs about justice work at JRUUC. We would love to build capacity on the Coordinating Team, especially if we expand JAMs.

Report on Stewardship and Fundraising

From Tom McClintock, Stewardship and Fundraising Team member:

The current Stewardship Team was formed just before the beginning of 2024 and its primary focus from January through mid-May was to conduct a pledge drive to help address an expected budget shortfall and get an accurate estimate of our 2024-25 income from pledged donations. Team members are David Lauth, Tom McClintock, Karol Niemann, (past team member: Eva Wingren). Our goal was to convey the importance of financially supporting our congregation and to get a 100% response from all members.

To that end, we:

- Conducted Stewardship focused board listening sessions
- Met with UUA fundraising consultant, Sharon Dittmar
- Sent out a pledge letter to congregation
- Initiated a one-time-pledge campaign with a \$10k match from anonymous Board members
- Participated in Stewardship Sunday service
- Worked with Treasurer and Office Administrator to identify current members
- Followed up with a congregational email and individual phone calls
- Prepared a Pledge Tally spreadsheet with the help of Danica to help with the budget process

Report on Building Stewardship

From Kelly Kearns, Building Stewardship Team member:

The Building Stewardship Team coordinates maintenance of the building and grounds. Team members include Tom McClintock, Kelly Kearns, and Roger Pearson (on a long sabbatical in England most of the church year). We are always looking for new team members - especially folks good at maintenance and repair work.

During the last church year, these are some of the highlights:

- Changed the fire alarm and phone/internet systems
- Replaced broken garbage disposal
- Changed locks due to a lost key and potential break-in
- Changed office door lock to a combo lock
- Maintained the building and grounds
- Coordinated snow shoveling and lawn mowing by volunteers
- Repaired leaf guards on gutters
- Hosted a spring cleaning day including about 20 people helping out and several Many Hands work days
- Tom is getting estimates to fix the front door that continues to stick

Respectfully submitted,

Rev. Karen Armina- with deep thanks to Rachel Avery, Kelly Kearns, Tom McClintock, Genevieve McPherson-Shambarger, and Jennifer Hedstrom for writing reports on short notice