Board of Trustees Report-April 2017

Pastor Jacqueline Duhart

Worship & Learning Theme for April is **Grace.**

Quote, **“I do not at all understand the mystery of Grace – only that it meets us where we are but does not leave us there.” Anne Lamott**

This month I have felt the weight of my call as it is shaped by interim/developmental ministry. The aspects of my ministry that lean into collaboration, consultation, monitoring and mentoring have shown up deep and wide. I apologize for not following through on my commitment to produce a series of articles addressing interim/developmental ministry. The demands to write, endorse and or co-author are high. April’s report is late and I am sorry. Thank you for your Grace.

Faith In Action:

The Faith In Action Justice Council is making a noticeable difference in how our Faith In Action teams are interfacing with each other. Overall, there is more visibility of the teams and clearer pathways for how members, friends and allies can engage. With care and respect the Justice Council steering committee is reaching out to our Journey Toward Wholeness Transformation team and offering their guidance around First Sunday programming. This quality of intentional outreach is required to dissolve the silos that we tend to operate within.

One indication of the transformational shift with our Faith In Action teams is seen in the success of our Auction. It was a brilliant idea to have a portion of the Auction proceeds go to our faith in action ministries. I believe that having $$ support will enhance the excitement and motivation for the work of the teams and require the teams to collaborate and coordinate with each other in a new way. Members, friends and allies who supported the auction may literally feel a buy in to our faith in action. Organizing the Auction in this way illuminates the Faith In Action ministries and their connections to our mission, vision and ends. For this I am deeply grateful. There are still miles to go to truly integrate the work of all the teams. Earth Justice Faith In Action Team (EJA) offers ongoing challenges. EJA embodies a mild irritating resistance to collaboration, a essential ingredient of our shared miinstry.

There is a need to address the conflict that some have around “justice work” and “spirituality”. This issue re-surfaced during the Men’s retreat. I have been in conversation with several of our male identified folk who raised this concern. I have offered to meet with them. No one has taken me up on my offer. Stay tuned.

The Beloved Conversations series ended Sunday, April 23. I was in San Juan Bautista on clergy retreat and therefore I did not attend the final session. I sent a personal letter to thank the facilitators and participants, to bless the work that each and all did in the group and bless what will result from their participation in the larger congregation. My letter also suggested next steps for the participants.

The Beloved Conversations curriculum offers an opportunity to hear from a community panel. I attended this session and what a blessing it was. The panel participants (all panel participants are members of the global majority) were Darrius Young a community activist from the Ella Baker Center for Human Rights, TyLicia Hooker, the Executive Director for Boost West Oakland and Rev. B.K. Woodson, the Director of the Emerging Leader’s Program at Allen Temple. The questions that the panel spoke to are listed at the end of my report. These questions may be useful for Board members to address as part of a multi-cultural exercise and/or at our next retreat. Please make a special effort to share your gratitude to Noemi De Guzman, Rev. Mary Foran and Mark David Watanabe the facilitators for Beloved Conversations.

Pastoral Care – Pastoral Associates (PA)

Pastoral care needs are once again high. Such is the ebb and flow of life; from vibrant health to death. Our Pastoral Care team has a new member Jennifer Fernandez; a PhD student at Cal. Jennifer will join Michelle Ma in the role of Chaplain. The Pastoral Care team meets monthly, the second Thursday evening. Currently Jennifer has a class at this time. When Jennifer is able to regularly attend the team meetings I will stop attending the monthly meetings. My plan is to regularly meet with the two Chaplains. This will free up my schedule from an evening meeting. YAHOOOO!!!! I am also aware that the team defers to me when I am in the meetings. I want to facilitate the team looking to the Chaplains for spiritual leadership and direction and taking advantage of my skills as an consultant.

Judith Hunt who serves as the chair of the PA team is scheduled to have hand surgery May 19th and consequently will be out for a couple of months. Like me, I suspect you are aware that members, friends and allies of First Unitarian Church of Oakland are aging. The need to have a Chaplain dedicated to visitation and addressing the complications of living into our dying needs to be a high priority. I hope we can have a paid chaplain in the fall of 2017.

Worship

In collaborations with our newly formed Worship Team and our Worship Associates we are busy planning for summer worship. Part of our planning is to have experienced lay leaders and ordained clergy offer worship; with ordained clergy in August and September. Middle August and September are the months when people begin to research and search for a church/spiritual community. We want to do our best to maintain our high quality worship during these months. Our Committee on Shared Ministry is in the process of collecting their surveys on worship. I look forward to learning what “WE” have to share. Please thank the Committee on Shared Ministry for their work.

We have one more opportunity in this program church year for a pulpit share. May 7th Rev. Sonya Sukalaski, Parish Minister of the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Tuolumne County will be our guest preacher. She will partner with our Journey Toward Wholeness Transformation team to respond to Black Lives of Unitarian Universalism call for congregations to stop business as usual and have a teach-in around white supremacy. Sunday, May 7th I will be the guest preacher at the UU Fellowship of Tuolumne County speaking on forgiveness.

For program year 2017 to 2018, Rev. Sheri and I are tossing around the idea of having one time per month when we have only one service. This would serve several purposes: 1) give us a chance to see ourselves as one congregation. 2) rest resources…it is labor intensive to have 2 worship services. 3) gather information for the next settled minister as to how one service could work.

We are in desperate need of ushers and greeters. We need to find someone to take up our slide ministry. At the end of August it appears that Gil Dacumos, usher extraordinaire will move to Alabama. Michelle Ma, who has been Slide Maven for to many years to count, is ready to let go of her ministry producing slides for Sunday morning.

Open season for Covenant groups has been very positive. In conversation with Rev. Sheri it seems more appropriate for the person in my role (Parish Minister) to accompany Covenant Groups. Meeting with them on a monthly basis gives the minister an opportunity to minister to each of the covenant group conveners and check in with them about pastoral care needs in their respective groups.

Administration

What is going on…change, change and more change. Rev. Peter Morales, former President of our Unitarian Universalist Association resigned under the thunder cloud of racism and oppressive hiring practices/polices.This resignation was followed by the unexpected leave taking of other key administrative staff. Here at First Unitarian Church of Oakland we had one resignation under less than optimal circumstances and one person to say fair well a bit unexpectedly. Currently we have three open positions; Congregational Administrator, Congregational Book Keeper, and Choir Director. Oh happy day. These are welcomed changes and this is a stressful and holy time. These changes have allowed me to experience the emotional and attitudinal shifts in the congregation and see places where the congregation and Board leadership have moved toward increased health. These are my noticings:

* More communications and clearer communications (recent concern about the possible discontinuation of Chalice Chatter & Sunday morning announcements, managed without any drama)
* More support for each other (men helping men around issues of spirituality/social justice)
* More volunteer support in the church office (post resignation of Church Administrator) and for church events (auction) and rituals (congregants volunteered to produce the program for celebration of life)
* More ease and capacity to give the benefit of the doubt and ask questions in a way that is not blaming (some folks were mysteriously dropped from Chalice Chatter, Michael Fitzhugh and other congregants gently offered explanations/fixes and support)
* Deeper capacity to accept the authority and with respect question the authority of parish minister
* Deeper capacity to accept the spiritual leadership of the Board of Trustees.
* Creative/courageous thinking by members of Board of Trustees on behalf of the mission, vision and ends of First Unitarian Church of Oakland
* Forward thinking and planning of the Board of Trustees.

For all of this I give thanks.

**Beloved Conversation - Panelist Questions/Prompts.**

* Tell a story about how race shapes your work and the community you serve.
* Tell a story about a time you worked in partnership with a predominantly white community. What behaviors or practices on the part of the white group made it difficult to create authentic relationships or successful partnerships? What behaviors or practices contributed to authentic relationships or successful partnerships?
* What advice would you give a congregation like ours about what we can do to show up respectfully, humbly, accountably, and in solidarity with communities of color?
* And, finally, we hope you feel comfortable to share what might be “hard truths,” for it is only then that we can learn and grow.

Hope to see some of you at District Assembly (May 5 & 6 Walnut Creek) and General Assembly (June (21-25 in New Orleans).

In faith & with bright hope,

Pastor Jacqueline