



Minister's Annual Report

Rev. Oscar Sinclair

Narrative

Overview

This spring marks the 200th anniversary Rev. William Ellery Channing's "Baltimore Sermon," generally considered the beginning of institutional Unitarianism in the United States. Channing preached his sermon (officially titled "Unitarian Christianity") at the installation and ordination of Rev. Jared Sparks, the first minister of my home congregation in Baltimore. There is a certain poetry, then, in beginning this report with the service of Ordination and Installation held last June. Ordinations and Installations are rare events in the lives of both ministers and congregations, and it was an honor to share that day with the Unitarian Church of Lincoln.

In the year since, we've built on much of the groundwork we laid in our first year together, introducing new styles of worship, improving our personnel practices, building partnerships in the community, and growing towards the vision of this congregation: that we will be "a loving community uniting reason with spiritual exploration to transform ourselves and the world."

Worship

This has been a year of innovation in worship. Last September we launched a monthly 'Third Thursday' worship series, using contemporary music and different styles of worship than we use on Sunday morning. These services have been successful, and we will continue with them in the 2019-20 church year.

The Third Thursday services, like our Sunday morning services, use the Soul Matters themes we adopted in the fall of 2017. Each month follows a single theme, from Sanctuary (October) to Journey (March), to Beauty (June). This allows worship leaders to develop related services from week to week, and to be in conversation with each other and themselves over each month.

Most of the Unitarian Universalist congregations in our area use Soul Matters, which helps to facilitate connections between congregations. We've had several pulpit exchanges this spring, as well as guest preachers from nearby congregations.

A review of attendance patterns this spring strongly suggested that we are near capacity with a single service on Sunday morning. The Program Council has appointed a task force to explore how we would add a second service. Our goal is to bring a proposal to the congregation at the Winter Congregational Meeting, for implementation in January 2020.

Administration

The Personnel Committee and I have spent significant time this year updating and consolidating our personnel files. All staff members have updated job descriptions and employment agreements, using a common format. We developed a sabbatical policy for non-ministerial staff, and implemented it this spring with our Director of Religious Growth and Learning, Chelsea Krafka. This spring we put together a major revision of our personnel policies, to reflect current best practices in church employment.



Our staff team continues to use and implement new parts of Realm, the church database software we introduced a year ago. Realm has maintained all the functionality of our previous database, but has additional tools that we are just beginning to implement. It allows all of us access to information remotely: members can check your pledge balance from home, and I can record confidential notes following hospital visits.

Staffing and administration is one of the most complicated tasks in any church, and it has been a joy this year to work with our Personnel Committee: Kay Hoff, Mary Ann Meisner, and Karen Dienstbier. We took on an ambitious set of goals over the year, and through their dedication achieved them.

Partnership and Public Witness

Three years ago membership of the Unitarian Church of Lincoln had a big idea: “For the next three to five years, we pledge our talents, resources and building to partner to meet needs in the Lincoln community, protect our environment and promote peace and social justice.”¹

True partnership takes time and trust to build, and in the two years since you called me, I have focused on building relationships with local and national organizations. These range from direct advocacy, testifying with Planned Parenthood at the Nebraska Legislature; to support work, traveling to Nevada to support No Mas Muertes; to simple relationship building with other faith communities and clergy in Lincoln.

This work is cumulative. By building authentic relationships with other houses of faith and organizations in Lincoln, we are better positioned to work in partnership on a variety of topics. To further build on these relationships, I have agreed to join the board of the Faith Coalition of Lancaster County in the coming year.

Looking Forward

I am looking forward to continuing our ministry together in the 2019-2020 congregational year. In the coming year I hope to continue building relationships with our partners, as well as focusing (along with other staff members and lay leaders) on how we structure our outreach and communication with the broader community of Lincoln. By adding a second service, we will build capacity for future growth. Our vision is ambitious. To truly ‘transform ourselves and the world’ we have to be willing to show up, and to tell the world what we have found in this community.

This congregation has been served tremendously, in ways both seen and unseen, by your lay and staff leadership in the last year. Outgoing board members Linda Brown, Mark Schiffler, and Rich Little have been steady, wise voices who will be missed in board meetings next year—even as we look forward to the gifts new board members bring!

Lastly, it is an honor to serve with the staff team at the Unitarian Church of Lincoln. Jean Helms, Chelsea Krafka, Bob Fuson, Judy Hart, and Christina Strong: Thank you.

¹ Minutes of Spring 2016 Congregational Meeting



Timeline of Major Projects

June

- Ordained June 17, 2018.
- General Assembly

August

- Began "Third Thursday" worship services
- Rev. Kimberley Debus led weekend long visioning workshop for music program
- Vigil for Carey Dean Moore
- Joined Faith Floods the Desert action in support of No Mas Muertes in Arizona

September

- Staff Retreat
- Reformed Adult Programs Committee Launches

October

- Prairie Star UUMA chapter retreat
- Appeared on "Invisible Worlds" podcast
- Developed Sabbatical Policy

November

- Tree of Life Vigil
- Began Transitions Coaching work

December

- Hired Dr. Bob Fuson as permanent Music Director
- Joint Solstice Service with Order of the Red Grail

January

- Staff completed revisions of Safety Policy
- Chelsea Krafka began sabbatical
- Hosted ADL Event
- Board of Trustees Visioning Retreat
- Led Transitions workshop for First Unitarian Church of Omaha

February

- Led Worship Associates Retreat
- Pulpit Exchange with Rev. Aaron Stockwell
- Led Transitions workshop for Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Lawrence, KS

March

- Job Descriptions and Employments Agreements updated
- Lobbied at legislature on behalf of LB501 and LB627
- Attended first anniversary March for Our Lives
- Began prison visits at request of Nebraska ACLU

April

- Attended MidAmerica Regional UUA conference
- Completed revisions to Personnel Policies
- Began work on Task Force to consider adding a second service
- Attended Academy of Spiritual Formation Five Day Retreat



Unitarian Church
6300 A Street, Lincoln NE

Minister's Report 2018-19

May

- Pulpit Exchange with Rev. Jonalu Johnstone

Projects for Next Church Year

- Add Second Service
- Prioritize communications and outreach to the Lincoln community.
- Continue to strengthen ties with area nonprofits and religious institutions.
- Work with Board and lay leadership to strengthen congregational knowledge and ownership of UCL's Vision.