

President's Report May 2019

When trying to frame this report, I decided that I wanted to do an overview of the last five years at the Unitarian Church of Lincoln. I wanted to give context for our many successes. All of this change, that I am about to detail, could have been a significant stress to our congregation, but I feel like "We are sailing on"!

The congregation moved to Faith Methodist Church near 33rd and Holdrege for the entire year of 2014 to make way for construction at 6300 A Street. The Rev. Fritz Hudson preached his last sermon of his 16 years ministry in June 2014. He left on a high note, knowing that construction on the 2.5 million dollar expansion and renovation of the church at 6300 A St was well in-progress. The Rev. Dr. Justin Osterman started his year of interim in the fall of 2014 and completed it in the summer of 2015. We appreciated his fine sermons and evening classes on the Bible. However, his ministry was a challenging time for staff and leaders.

We loved moving back into our newly renovated and expanded space at the end of 2014. We embraced reconfigured classrooms, a new office wing, new bathrooms, bigger hallways, better storage, and a choir room. The energy efficient renovation included 96 solar panels, 15 geothermal rods under the parking lot, a new roof, LED lighting, thermal panes, and insulation. We positioned ourselves for Phase Two, the building of a sanctuary to the north, by putting in an elevator shaft during Phase One.

In the fall of 2015, The Rev. Dr. Gretchen Woods arrived to heal us and prepare us to search for a settled minister. She recognized that the congregation had grown to the point where the small church pastoral model was no longer appropriate. She worked mightily to help us move to an alternate mid-size church governance model, where a program council takes on more of the day-to-day work of the church. We worked on a new financial model for a year before agreeing to it. The board and the Lincoln Unitarian Foundation worked on solidifying terms of a working relationship. Gretchen also worked her tail off, providing us with opportunities to experience different styles of ministry. She was preparing us to embrace new ways to think about ministry. In 2016, in her second year of interim ministry, she acted as a resource to the Ministerial Search Team, as they did the work of introducing our church to prospective candidates seeking a position as settled minister.

In May of 2017, The Rev. Charles Stephen, our minister from 1961-1996, died.

In June 2017, we invited Oscar Lewis Sinclair to accept the job of settled minister at the Unitarian Church of Lincoln. We are so grateful that he said, "YES!" Why do we love him? He comes prepared. He tells good stories. He responds to the big news of the day. He constantly

preaches "loving community". He models caring from the pulpit with his use of inclusive language. He pushes our level of multicultural thinking. His is careful not to appropriate other's experience.

In June of 2018, we joyfully ordained and installed Oscar Sinclair. Oscar invited his close minister friends to help in the ceremony. They all came. We felt enfolded by the denomination. About 50 of us followed these ministers to General Assembly in Kansas City in the week after Oscar's ordination.

Now it is May of 2019. I want to talk about more success from these past 5 years. Many of them are financial. First, Administrative Director, Jean Helms and a hired financial consultant worked to make sure our financial process is robust. The work paid off. We passed the financial review performed by HBE, CPA's & Consultants/Wealth Management, Lincoln NE in February of 2018. HBE suggested that the Board adopt a Gift Acceptance Policy. We have done that work. They also suggested that we should develop a formal investment policy. That work needs to be considered between the Board and the Lincoln Unitarian Foundation (LUF) committee.

Since we added the position of vice-treasurer in 2016, treasurer succession is no longer the worry that it once was. Spurred by a workshop offered online from the UUA MidAmerica Region, we decided to form an on-going Stewardship Committee. That group will run the pledge drive in 2019. The group recognizes that just rolling over pledges from one year to the next has an inherent problem of not being adjusted for inflation or for not reflecting increases in financial position. Hmm. What do we do?

In 2015, Judy Cole left a large sum of money to the church in her will. We were able to use \$185,000 of that money to match pledges from members to help pay off the last of the debt from the building renovation. We only have \$35,000 plus interest, left to pay in 2020. How is that for success? This congregation is amazing! In addition to paying for the 2.5 million dollar improvements to our building, we have been able to make our budget with successful pledge campaigns. We continue to hold ourselves accountable for moving staff salaries to mid-point of UUA guidelines, as soon as possible. We are working on increasing benefits. We granted Chelsea Krafka, our Director of Religious Education, a 5-month Sabbatical in 2019 to finish her Master's Degree. She birthed a baby and graduated in May! Good job Chelsea.

The Worship Cluster met with the UUA's Rev. Kimberly Debus in an all-day workshop in August, to consider the future of the music program. The group asked the board to consider increasing the hours of the Music Director position to 20 hours per week and adding a 5-hour per week choir position. The board accepted that proposal, with the idea that we were supporting the

possibility that we could add more worship services. The one-a-month Thursday service was added.

In addition, don't forget. We support the denomination. We pay our fair share to the UUA and the MidAmerica Region.

It turns out that our new space has been attractive to renters. We are proud to host Blue Stem Montessori School. We added a paid audiovisual specialist to support the many Olli class rentals. We considered our big idea of "Partnering" when updating the building use procedures. Now community groups can get free space if sponsored by a church committee. The committee provides a church member to host each of these community uses of our building.

After experiencing the alternative new program council-governance model for a year, in 2018, we accepted the new model of governance and the resultant revised bylaws. The next step has been to review and update board policies specified in the bylaws. Both board and staff have worked on updating financial procedures, building-use procedures, personnel and safety policies, along with others. We have an ultimate goal of posting the most recent accepted version on the church website.

The board focused on questions of strategic vision at its second retreat in January. We reviewed the goals from the 2011-2012 Strategic Plan, and discovered most of them had been accomplished! We talked about the importance of looking at data before making decisions. We support Oscar in the proposal he sent to Program Council to explore the idea of multiple church services in a week. The data he presents suggests that our church may have been filled to capacity for Sunday services ever since we moved to 6300 A Street in the early 1960's! In the future, we would like to embrace Oscar's desire to teach, by supporting a ministerial intern. We want to prepare for Oscar to go on Sabbatical to get his doctorate degree about 2023. We want to get a new sign, and get it paid for before looking too closely at the Facilities Cluster Wish List. We want to grow 3-7% a year, as counted by numbers in the building at each church service. We want to increase staffing. About 2021 might be a good time to think about Phase Two: building the new sanctuary! We will need to develop a statement of needs to guide an architect to provide preliminary building plans.

Finally, we have tried to look at the process one takes in growing our relationship with our spirituality in this church. From the first day, when we enter the doors, what steps do we take that deepen our connection to this loving community? What opportunities enable us to get to know each other, to start being inclusive and caring? How do these relationships empower us to serve the church and go out into the community?

Lastly, I want to say thank you to the presidents of the last five years: Curt Donaldson, Lindsay Bartlett, Reed Maly, and Kristi Wamstad. I have made special "asks" of each of you, and you all came through!

Thank you to our fine Board of Trustees:

Emily Cameron Shattil, vice-president, Trevor Jones,(who finished the last part of Rich Little's term as secretary), Mark Shiffler,(who is finishing his 3rd year), Michael Reinmiller, Kay Hoff, Dan Payzant, Colleen Kadleck, and Denise DeBose. Thank you to ex-official members: Kristi Wamstad, immediate past president, Dorothy Ramsey, treasurer, Theresa Forsman, vice treasurer and Charles Coley, Program Council Chair.

Now I can hear The Rev. Dr Gretchen Woods asking her famous question for retiring church leaders: "What's on your bucket list now?" I am personally thinking that choir might be good! Thank you for inviting me to serve on the board. Linda R. Brown, President of the Board