

**Annual Report for 2016-2017 Church Year**  
**Rev. Thom Belote & Steve Warshaw, Board President**

Our minister, Rev. Thom Belote, led 35 services during the 2016-2017 church year. Two services were led by Glenn Mehrbach, Music Director, and four services were led by Marion Hirsch, Director of Religious Education. Minister Emeritus Rev. Charlie Kast led one service and two services were led by guest ministers: Rev. Jim Magaw and Rev. Holly Lux-Sullivan. Seven services were led by lay members of the congregation; each of those services was led by a graduate of Rev. Thom's Preaching Practicum class. The worship ministry included two youth who were Sara Insch Leadership Associates. Members of the worship ministry served as Worship Associates for all services, constructed an altar for the Day of Remembrance service, and organized the Greening.

The Music Team contributed moving, beautiful, and thematically-relevant music to all services and was featured in two all-music services held during the church year: Benjamin Britten's A Ceremony of Carols and Leonard Bernstein's Mass. Musicians during the year included the Choir, the Community Church Singers, the Children's Choir, the house band, and a broad variety of soloists and musicians in the congregation. The music ministry held a successful Gala in February with the theme of ConfUUoco: Playing with Fire. The funds earned from the Gala were used to produce a CD of the music of Community Church that will be available for sale during the next church year. The music ministry honored long-time choir member and actor Harvey Sage with a plaque dedicated to him. The Music Team works to include our multi-generational and diverse community, to be a community of care and compassion, and to utilize music for justice and activism.

The Membership Team and Membership Director Rachel Rose created a welcoming environment on Sunday morning by providing Greeters for all services and by training Welcoming Associates. A new welcoming banner and new name tag rack were added to the Commons area that had been redesigned and decorated the previous year. New members to the church were welcomed with two new member receptions and a newly updated "Connections in a Nutshell" document. 55 New Members signed the membership book during the church year.

Our Covenant Group program supported and improved programs that fostered fellowship and connection, warmly welcomed new people, and helped to develop congregational leadership. 110 people participated in Covenant Groups. They were supported by a strengthened orientation session and a revamped leader training. Tweaks were made to the program, including adding an extra session at the beginning of the year and an ice cream social at the end of the year.

Our Children's Ministry had a successful year in many areas including strengthening the pre-k program, introducing new procedures for integrating new families and starting a Nifty Gifty holiday gift program. Additionally, the Children's Ministry continued strong programs including Our Whole Lives Sexuality Education, Special bUUddies, Shelter Neck Family Retreat, family dinners and engaging Sunday morning programs.

The Youth Ministry program had a strong year offering a wide diversity of programs and activities including middle school religious education, middle school youth group, high school youth group, Coming of Age, Our Whole Lives, Shelter Neck retreats, the New Orleans spring break social justice/service trip, a large class of Inch Fellows, and family dinners. New initiatives this year included holding a lock-in for high schoolers, piloting a Bridging Class for high school seniors, and sending an especially large contingent of youth to this year's General Assembly.

Our Campus Ministry program had a banner year. With more than 20 participants and an average attendance of more than a dozen college students, we can boast of one of the largest and most active UU campus ministry programs in the country. The Campus Ministry led a service in the winter, held a retreat at Shelter Neck, and sent a number of members to an anti-racism training with Organizing Against Racism.

The Spiritual Exploration for Adults (SEA) program served more than 200 people in our congregation during this church year. They broadened participation by offering courses at times other than Thursday night including Wednesday evenings and Sunday afternoons. The SEA Program continues to develop programming that meets the need for communal connections and spiritual development. Lasting, supportive friendships have been realized through SEA programming, new church members become part of a loving community and expand their awareness of the possible connections realized via vibrant adult religious education experience at Community Church. Along with Covenant Groups, SEA is often one of the first places for connection for visitors and new members. SEA realized a long held goal by sending a member of the committee to the Unitarian Universalist Association General Assembly.

In 2016-2017 our Share the Plate program raised \$36,411 to support our partners in the community.

The Community Service Ministry (CSM) facilitated involvement in numerous organizations in our community. In the past year they collected over 300lbs of food for TABLE through a Bountiful Bag drive, worked with our partner churches on our 21st Habitat for Humanity build, distributed 168 school backpacks to kids in Orange and Chatham counties, and participated in preparing and serving lunch and dinner meals at the IFC homeless shelter.

The Peace & Justice Committee (P+J), besides promoting a host of activities in the community, provided support to a local organization called Movement to End Islamophobia and Racism (MERI) and helped to host Palestinian scientist and activist Mazin Qumsiyeh.

The Standing on the Side of Love (SOSL) team led our participation in the Pride March in Durham, the annual Historic Thousands on Jones Street assembly in February, and cosponsored two benefit concerts, one for Syrian refugees and another with Brother Sun. Standing on the Side of Love also arranged for two buses to transport members of the congregation and wider community to Washington D.C. for the Women's March on January 21.

A new initiative composed of members of CSM, P+J, SOSL, and others in the congregation formed in the spring. The Sanctuary and Refugee Support Ministry provides ways for members

of the congregation to get involved in direct service to and relationship building with refugees and immigrants and also is exploring what is necessary for our congregation to become a Sanctuary Church.

The Church, in support of the Strategic Plan objective to provide a “meaningful way to memorialize members’ lives and connect legacy to church,” offers members a process to contribute through estate and other end-of-life gifts. This process occurs under the guidance of the Endowment Committee. This year information regarding the Endowment Fund and how to contribute were updated on our C3HUU webpage and added to the newly created Meditation Corner in the Commons. During this time period, the Endowment Fund received notification of a gift of over \$4000 from estate settlement and memorial gifts. All Endowment Committee members made commitments to C3HUU in their estate planning! The Endowment also provided seed money to establish a mechanism by which congregants could develop the ability to engage in dialogue on difficult issues, both within the church and in the broader community. An initial grant in 2015-16 from the Endowment Fund to support training for a select number of congregants to facilitate small group discussions as part of the Sanctuary for Dialogue Ministry became the seed for training a broader group of congregants who facilitated several discussions on “difficult issues” during 2016-17.

The Buildings and Grounds Team cited its biggest accomplishment for last year as achieving a stable membership of committee members who now know how to do many of the routine C3HUU campus maintenance tasks and who enjoy the fellowship of doing it together. Monthly WorkPARTYs consist of a few hours of work followed by lunch at Breadmens or other similar venue. This combination of manual labor followed by a shared meal seems to appeal to a group of UU's who prefer a format different from the usual discussion-only format for committee meetings. This effort has allowed the team to make more progress than in the past on the Strategic Plan objective of having a building and grounds that “support our programs and activities by being clean, accessible, responsibly maintained and adequate in size.” Two of the Church’s Eagle Scouts built improvements at Memorial Rock amphitheater. One built a new platform, and the other built several new benches. We also purchased a new portable sound system for services at Memorial Rock. These projects supported the Strategic Plan objective regarding sacred grounds to provide a “meaningful way to memorialize members’ lives and connect legacy to church.”

Environmental stewardship is the primary focus of the ECO team, in service of the Strategic Plan objective: "We strive for environmental sustainability and stewardship in our church, in our individual lives, and in the wider world." ECO worked particularly to engage with the “wider world,” by initiating and holding the first ever Environmental Collaboratory for NC UUs last fall; and by initiating and co-hosting a Multi-Faith Earth Vigil with 6 local faith groups in January. "They also continued their efforts to increase awareness and provide opportunities for better care for the earth within our church, for example, by publicizing environmentally friendly practices and by composting at most church events."

During the past year the key achievement for the Communications Committee was to enhance the communication features of the Commons. It worked with the Commons Committee to install and develop two large screens, one featuring slides for upcoming events and one highlighting

past church activities, committees, etc., that reflect the Church's mission. This project also included developing slides for and providing ongoing budget funds for the screens. The screens helped accomplish three objectives in the Strategic Plan: "Improve communication within congregation about church activities, improve communication within the congregation about service and justice activities and opportunities and opportunities for learning, action and volunteerism, and support programs that foster fellowship." A second accomplishment was to enhance church Internet communications by managing the church's private Facebook group and public Facebook page on an ongoing basis. This, plus compiling a report on the usability of the Church's website and doing a review of it by section to make it more current and accurate, served to support the three Strategic Plan objectives above plus a fourth one:

- "Implement coordinated program of public communication and promotion of CCHUUU and Unitarian Universalism."

In the past year the church embarked on a project, originally named Our Space Our Future, and more recently renamed Building on Our Legacy, addressing the following objectives of the Strategic Plan, to maintain, improve, and expand our physical plant and grounds by "undertaking a capital campaign for facility renovation and expansion, and adding additional space for Religious Education Programs and church groups." Building on Our Legacy was overseen by four component task force groups of the Building Project Team: Capital Campaign, Communication, Construction and Finance.

The Capital Campaign Task Force led both the Annual Pledge Drive and the planning for the Capital Campaign. The 2017 Annual Pledge Drive originally was to be held concurrently with the Capital Campaign, but a Financial Feasibility Study showed that we should postpone the Capital Campaign until next year. Because of success with the cottage meeting model for the 2016 Annual Pledge Drive, the CCTF decided to use this model again. The key message throughout the campaign was that *we know you will be as generous as you can be*. As of May 11, 2017, 269 households pledged a total of \$483,644, which is \$7,464 ahead of where we finished last year in August 2016. Of the 269 households that pledged:

- 107 increased their pledge (40%)
- 97 maintained their pledge (36%)
- 34 decreased their pledge (13%)
- 31 were new pledges (11%)

The generosity message works well for our congregation. Assuring members that we know that they will be as generous as possible has produced an increase in pledging of more than \$50,000 over the past two years. The cottage meeting model has been successful as a social event for members, associates, and newcomers to get to know each other better. More importantly, these meetings stimulate people to really think about what our church means to them and provides an opportunity for them to hear what the church means to others which, in turn, helps them hear the message about being generous in their giving because of the role that the church plays in their lives, this community, and the wider world.

With regard to the planned Capital Campaign, during 2017 The CCTF met on a regular basis with other Building Task Forces in coordinating the Building Project. Based on the Financial Feasibility Study that the Board of Trustees (BOT) authorized and a resolution that was passed by the BOT on February 6, 2017, the churchwide portion of the Capital Campaign will be conducted concurrently with the 2018 Annual Pledge Drive. The Campaign was given a head start when five households each contributed \$50,000 towards reducing the legacy loan from our prior renovation project.

During the latter part of 2016, the Communications Task Force put together a communications plan to support the work of the Capital Campaign Task Force to launch a building campaign which would provide additional space for religious education (for all ages), community meeting space and the music program. This plan, to be implemented in the latter half of 2017, included tabling in the Jones Building to provide an opportunity for members to look at conceptual drawings, ask questions, make suggestions, and in general begin to engage more thoroughly in the proposed plans to provide much needed accessible meeting space for congregants of all ages; weekly focused discussion groups on twelve elements of the proposed addition to the Jones Building and renovation of existing space; and other meetings, events and activities to educate and engage as many people in the congregation as possible before the capital campaign is launched.

The Construction Task Force worked to obtain conceptual floor plans for new space and renovations that will fully meet the needs of the RE program and provide needed enhancements of meeting spaces for large events and smaller activities, all of which will be fully accessible. They arrived at a plan that is consistent with these goals and with the estimated financial resources expected from the capital campaign. They also listened to feedback from congregation members on various details that can be adjusted in the next design phase, and were beginning to gather ideas from other places of worship that have similar needs and spaces. They expected to have an architectural design proposal ready this winter.

The Finance Task Force set up Capital Campaign bank account and accounting, managed initial pre-construction costs and budgets, and worked with the Church Administrator to apply the \$250,000.00 in debt paydown donations to reduce church debt.

Several Church committees and ministries routinely incorporated leadership development into their regularly held meetings. The Caring Ministry provided training to new members and welcomed Nancy Hudspeth to lead a training on visiting. Rev. Thom Belote led sessions with the Worship Ministry on how to compose calls to worship, prayers, and meditations. A record seven congregants participated in the Preaching Practicum class offered by Rev. Thom Belote, in which they learned how to write a sermon and went on to lead a summer worship service.

The Inch Leadership Program is a project of the Youth Ministry Team and focuses on fostering church leadership among our youth. Last year's Inch Leadership class was the largest class in the history of the program, plus several youth continued from past classes. Youth served on Worship Ministry, Youth Ministry, Children's Ministry and Standing on the Side of Love. The Youth and Young Adult Staff Program is a project of the Children's and Youth Ministry Teams and gives high school youth, college youth and young adults opportunities for paid work in the Religious Education Program, providing needed staff and continuity to those programs. But

equally or even more importantly it provides our young people meaningful opportunities for leadership in Unitarian Universalism as they teach and are role models, and provides positive visibility to young people in the congregation, giving them opportunities to connect with many people in the congregation of all ages. This past year our youth staff included twelve high school and young adults and continues to strengthen. These two programs are responsive to these Strategic Plan goals: “Maintain and increase the integration of our children and youth into the life of the church, support and improve programs that foster fellowship and connection among members, and support and develop leadership in the church.”

Covenant Groups provide an important fellowship and spiritual connection to the congregation. In addition to that important role, Covenant Groups also provide important leadership development for the leaders of covenant groups. Covenant group leaders must be adept facilitators and the deep listening model is excellent training for church leaders. The program also develops self confidence in leaders. Each year we recruit and train new leaders and participating in process is important leadership development. This program is responsive to these Strategic Plan goals: “Support and improve programs that foster fellowship and connection among members, and support and develop leadership in the church.”

The Sanctuary for Dialogue (SfD) team held three dialogues in 2016-17, on: Privacy and Security, the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict, and our first youth dialogue on Free Speech on College Campuses. Participants included 38 adults and six youths. SfD maintained its relationship with Essential Partners (formerly Public Conversations Project) in Boston, who had trained the Church’s dialogue facilitators. In addition, SfD is in the initial stages of working with a second organization, Better Angels, who are doing work similar in a number of ways to that of Essential Partners, but focused on helping participants reach across the red-blue divide in the American culture. SfD also continued to meet regularly to refine its dialogue process and wrestle with how best to take its dialogue tools into the broader community. SfD’s accomplishments align with the Church’s strategic plan goal to “develop and expand our ability to facilitate dialogue on difficult issues, both within the church and the broader community.”