

Living Our Mission with Resilience During the Pandemic
The Community Church of Chapel Hill, Unitarian Universalist
March 12, 2020 – March 14, 2021

Each ministry, team, and group in our church was invited to send a paragraph describing their activities, accomplishments, and how they lived our mission during the pandemic.

AUCTION

Each year, we support and care for each other by sharing our talents and treasures through the Fall Auction. While this is our church's largest annual FUNdraiser outside of the pledge drive, its main function is to help build community by bringing us together via services and activities that take place throughout the year. The funds that are raised annually contribute to the overall operating budget and, in some years, to special needs, e. g. the \$4000+ from the 2020 Fall Auction that was allocated to help Close the Gap on our current construction project. Last year's Fall Auction was the first to be held entirely online. It was still a grand success in terms of participation with 131 individuals contributing as donors, buyers, or both. Building community connections has continued through the safe exchange of purchased items, many of which were hand-made by the donors; virtual cooking lessons, games sessions, and music lessons; online delivery of knowledge-based services; some in-person events that will bring people together in May through September; and many other services and shared activities.

**BUILDINGS &
GROUNDS**

Buildings & Grounds has had the rare good fortune, during the pandemic, to be required to continue to serve our congregation in person - just carefully masked and distanced. We have continued our monthly First Monday maintenance WorkPARTYs (bag lunches though, no trips to Breadmans!), we have continued to respond to alarms and urgent maintenance issues 24/7, we have weeded, mulched and weeded some more. We have even made progress on our 2020/21 Maintenance Reserve list, executing a major repair on the Sanctuary roofs to finally end (fingers crossed!) a years' long battle with pesky roof leaks. Currently we are preparing the Jones kitchen for a long overdue coat of fresh paint. And finally, we have been guiding integration activities with the new Jones Building addition construction project, preparing to incorporate the new spaces in our regular facility operation and maintenance processes sometime later this spring. These on-site B&G activities have been a rare bright spot of actual in-person congregational activity, away from the Zooming and teleconferencing of our daily pandemic lives. So - when we all return at last, our Church Home will be ready and waiting for us, better than ever!

**BUILDING
PROJECT
TASK FORCE**

When the pandemic hit, the Building Project Task Force was on the verge of launching construction. Dilemma: Should we forge on in the face of unknown economic and personal challenges ahead, or should we put the project on hold? The Board supported our plan for proceeding with the project while protecting the church's future operating budget from the burden of long-term debt. Focus group discussions over the summer showed an enthusiastic response to a possible fourth-year pledge in order to close the funding gap. Frequent photo and video updates have met with excited anticipation for the future, when we'll be able to gather and welcome each other to our wonderful spaces for continuing our mission. The weekly progress of the building construction symbolizes the can-do spirit and commitment of our church leaders and community members!

**CAMPUS
MINISTRY**

Our Campus Fellowship continued to meet online weekly from the beginning of the pandemic going forward, including throughout the summer. In the fall, the fellowship met in the Arboretum twice a month for distanced, masked meetings. Inspired by the protests in the spring and summer the group decided to start a monthly Racial Justice Initiative which has been co-lead by the whole group using the UUA curriculum: Building the World We Dream About. The Fellowship was able to lead the annual Campus Fellowship Service in February. The fellowship through creative means has been able to continue many of its beloved traditions like dinners and Friendsgiving. Seven regular members plus Marion Hirsch participated. Leaders are Jenny Nelson and Alex Greene.

**CARING
MINISTRY**

During the past year, the Caring Ministry has reached out to the church community through telephone calls, caring cards, Zoom sessions, food delivery and pastoral visits when possible. Caring Ministry members also made the largest volume of calls of any ministry during the all-church calling projects in the spring and fall of 2020. Additionally, Caring Ministry members served as hosts of breakout rooms during the weekly Virtual Coffee Hour as a way of extending care to our community. As the year progresses and pandemic concerns lessen, the ministry will be able to resume pastoral visits and caring quilt deliveries.

Our goal for the pandemic was to offer Consistent, Familiar, Engaging, Warm, Inclusive Programs, while focusing on families together.

The Children’s Ministry Team offered Family Worship every week since the pandemic in two formats. One recorded so families could watch at any time and one live worship at 10 AM Sunday morning on Zoom where families could join together, worship, share joys and sorrows and answer a weekly discussion question. The Family Worship has incorporated many special guests from the congregation, family singing, lighting the chalice, and pictures and videos from families, children, and youth. We have also collaborated with Rev. Thom and Glenn on multigenerational services including Blessing of the Animals, Water Service and the Pageant.

**CHILDREN’S
MINISTRY
TEAM**

Every Saturday afternoon at 4:00 during the pandemic, we have offered a Family Fun Event which has included games, Minecraft, Show and Tell, Maker Days, and special guests including Danny Gotham, Donna Washington and Scott Provan. This summer we organized an Antiracist Picture Book Club where children proposed books with authors, illustrators and characters of color and then we read the books aloud and discussed them. This fall and spring we have offered kits to families with in person pick-up and tours of the building which have helped us keep connected to the children. We have offered drop-in social groups for parents on Zoom. In December we offered a distanced in-person Solstice Lantern Walk for families which was attended by 50 people. We collaborated with the Welcoming Ministry on the Hot Cocoa and Wheels event. The most successful and heart-warming event was this year’s Special bUddy program which culminated in an online Friendship Forum which included 17 pairs of children and adult friends.

**COMMUNITY
CLICKERS**

The Community Clickers met throughout the lockdown year, either using Zoom or meeting in person in the courtyard. They continued to create products that were donated, including hats for UNC babies, shawls for Hospice patients, and scarves for the Homestart Christmas project. Pictures of the 2020 donations can be found on the church Clickers webpage in the 2020 project folder. Hopefully we helped fill the void during the lockdown by having miscellaneous projects for folks to work on during their past and continued isolation. We also provided personal contact and support to each other as we continued to hold our monthly meetings.

**COVENANT
GROUPS**

Four Covenant Groups met during this year, led by Dave Klibanow, Joanne Wood, Marion Hirsch, and Rev. Thom. Topics have been relevant to the spiritual challenges of the pandemic. Covenant Groups continued to meet over the summer in response to the needs presented by the pandemic.

ECO

The ECO Committee continued to meet monthly, transitioning to Zoom for the April to December meetings. Before the shut-down, we participated in the Community Day of Service by cleaning up and removing invasive plants from the former Jones Park adjacent to the church grounds. During the pandemic we continued to communicate news and information to church members through the monthly newsletter and weekly announcements. For Earth Day, we partnered with other church groups on a letter writing campaign to our U. S. Representatives to reduce HFC's, a specific type of greenhouse gas. We supported the work of the Sacred Gardener's group to transition the plantings in front of the church to native plants.

**IMMIGRANT
JUSTICE
INITIATIVE**

During the Time of Covid, the Immigrant Justice Initiative (IJI) has been busy. In total, we have offered housing to nine individuals, 6 asylum seeking immigrants and 3 refugees. In the last year, we helped our first asylum seeker begin her transition to independent living, welcomed a family of 4 asylum seekers (including 2 young children) to the Manse, and we opened our doors to a former sanctuary seeking woman who won her case but needed housing to prepare for financial independence. We helped 3 of our guests get their work permits. We also facilitated English skills development through individual and class instruction, linked our guests to numerous food supports and organized an ever-growing community of volunteers to deliver the food and provide transportation to shopping, employment opportunities, and other necessities. Our team extends beyond the Community Church and includes individuals from Kehillah, which has been our partner since the beginning of this work, and from Eno River UU Fellowship.

We've also accompanied our guests by amplifying their voices and talents. A special committee was formed to help one of our guests establish her cottage industry of hand-crafted items. Our asylum seeking family told the powerful story of their journey in a video that we produced as part of our successful Share the Plate. The video gave the family a platform to educate us about the difficult decision to immigrate and their hard journey to North Carolina. In addition to the Community Church, the video has been shown to several churches in the Triangle to educate those congregations about the immigrant experiences of a specific family, to start conversations about shared interests, and to identify opportunities to collaborate for greater impact. We also began a regular newsletter to keep our congregation and other friends of the IJI informed of our work. In sum, as we accompanied our guests on their road to independence we realized that our IJI work was keeping us engaged with one another, and was, in fact, a gift to us: giving us focus, purpose, and much joy during difficult, potentially isolating days.

On Friday, March 6, 2020, our last face-to-face meeting, few if any of us who are Lectio meditation regulars even knew what Zoom was. Then we debated whether it was possible to carry-on using this Zoom thing; but shortly thereafter, thanks to our amazing church staff, we were up and soaring.

LECTIO

The dependability of Lectio meetings every Friday noon has been a reassuring constant in a time of unknowing. While each week's content is embodied in the spiritual texts we invoke for meditation, the bonds of trust and caring among Lectio members have grown this past year to the point where it is, in effect, a support group. It has become an increasingly meaningful and powerful experience.

Prior to March 13, 2020, roughly 5 to 9 people were able to come to the church Commons to participate. In this past year our number each Friday has ranged from a low of 9 to a high of 16. And if we have to miss, we still check-in and check-on one another.

**LIVING OUR
COVENANT
WITH
INTENTION**

Over the past year the Living Our Covenant with Intention Ministry has raised awareness of our Covenant by encouraging each ministry and the board to read the Covenant and examine how their ministry lives the Covenant. We co-sponsored and co-facilitated the 29 Day Racial Equity Challenge and the Let's Keep Talking Challenge and started Racial Equity Office Hours. Our ministry developed and held three Panels on Faith with more planned in the future and helped develop and sponsor the upcoming Spiritual Exploration for Adults class on Covenants.

MUSIC TEAM

The Music Team has worked to create a secure environment for our congregational music to carry on in the midst of this pandemic. By bringing our live events to a virtual platform, we continue important community-centered events like our beloved Holiday Pageant, held this past December, and our Music Gala, which will occur April 24th. Our choirs continue to rehearse and perform together, and we have added our weekly Wednesday Vespers to help inspire peace and tranquility during these uncertain times. The Music Team is committed to bringing programs that will uplift us, keep us safe, and build a bridge that continues to connect our homes with our congregation.

**RARE
WOMEN**

Rare Women currently has 40 members, some of whom are very new to The Community Church. During our three different group meetings, we have supported and cared for each other while sharing joys and sorrows and stories from our lives. We have nurtured spiritual growth in our discussions of legacy, awe, death, and resilience. One of our groups has added an opening meditation to its meeting. Increased self-awareness has enabled us to see our strengths and contributions to the world from the past and present and our potential to continue to make a difference well into the future. In many ways, our Zoom discussions have brought us closer as we have navigated the pandemic together. Concerns about housing options as we age led to a temporary spin-off group that addresses different aspects of this topic twice a month and also has over 40 members, including men, younger people, and some participants from outside of our church community. We feel that Rare Women embodies and addresses most, if not all, of the seven Principles of our denomination but most particularly the first three: 1) The inherent worth and dignity of every person; 2) Justice, equity and compassion in human relations; and 3) Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations.

**SANCTUARY
FOR
DIALOGUE**

In 2020 the Sanctuary for Dialogue Ministry was active in living the Church's mission and served our community through various public events we provided. In our efforts to advance the Church's mission, "to nurture spiritual growth, support and care for each other, and effect change through our love for the world" and serve the community, we employed tools we learned from two organizations, Braver Angels and Essential Partners. We helped reduce polarization in NC by partially or totally staffing ten workshops, four debates, three presentations and the first Common Ground Town Hall with elected officials in the country. Closer to home, we supported a dialogue on sexual harassment for an undergraduate UNC business class and held two dialogue series for Community Church - the first on COVID-19, the second on the 2020 election. We also helped facilitate violence prevention discussions around the November 3 election. We are pleased that adapting to a virtual format continues to provide safe, and, remarkably, intimate spaces to reflect on challenging topics.

**SIDE WITH
LOVE**

As the pandemic began, we were forced to postpone indefinitely two major March 2020 programs that we had spent much of the previous year planning: The Civil Rights Pilgrimage to Alabama and the Concert for a Cause with Holly Near. Our pilgrimage coordinator, Teri Brooks, put in a lot of effort to arrange for our deposits to be reimbursed. We hope to be able to regroup and make this trip eventually.

In the summer and fall, Dana Lundquist coordinated our participation in UU the Vote. At least 42 of our members wrote postcards (something like 3000, I think) and participated in weekly phone banks to educate voters about their rights.

In February 21, when it looked as though school teachers were going to be forced into the classrooms without any access to Covid vaccinations, we launched a rapid response action, joining the NC Association of Educators in calling on the Governor to move the teachers up on the priority list.

We have also spotlighted justice opportunities for the congregation by posting information from the Poor People's Campaign in the weekly bulletin and hosting a well-attended information session for church members after the coffee hour.

**SPIRITUAL
EXPLORATION
FOR ADULTS**

Spiritual Exploration for Adults offered 16 classes in the fall of 2020 and the spring of 2021. The 29 Day Racial Equity Challenge included 64 participants, including 8 facilitators, making it one of the largest SEA programs in the history of this ministry. A follow-up version of this class attracted another 34 participants. Other noteworthy classes included Parents as Sexuality Educators, Wellspring II, Caste reading and discussion group, Racial Equity movie discussions, and the Preaching Practicum.

**WELCOMING
MINISTRY**

The Welcoming Ministry has lived our mission and served our community by: engaging the congregation in nourishing our spirits and our bodies by creating and publishing the first-ever Community Church cookbook, with a member of our team even driving to people's houses to deliver them; by keeping our congregation connected by helping to reach out on the phone to the entire congregation, one person at a time; by hosting and attending the Virtual Coffee Hour every Sunday; by strengthening - and even growing! - community by hosting outdoor, socially-distant Socials.

**WORSHIP
ASSOCIATES
MINISTRY**

The Worship Associates Ministry met monthly by Zoom over the past year, assisting Rev. Thom with planning worship and serving as Worship Associates for worship services. Members learned the ins and outs of video recording.

This past holiday season, the Worship Associates ministry once again organized our congregation's service project for the single women at Project HomeStart — quilted bags filled with handmade scarves and masks, gloves, socks, Santa chocolate bars, and PJs purchased with funds from the Minister's Discretionary Fund; all assembled with care to avoid possible transmission of Covid. Members of the QUUilters, Clickers, Worship Associates, and others carefully arranged the purchase and assembly of needed items. The making and giving of gifts benefits the giver as well as the recipient, especially during this pandemic, and all involved shared that it meant so much to them to have something they could do to make a small difference in someone else's life. The women and HomeStart director expressed their gratitude to the busy hands and generous hearts in our faith community for remembering them with practical, beautiful gifts during this trying time.

**YOUTH
MINISTRY
TEAM**

The Youth Ministry team continued to meet monthly this year, which was a solace to many of us. We supported Marion and Kat as they hired, trained, and employed the youth staff members who lead the children's Religious Education services and youth group gatherings, which continued through the summer instead of taking the usual hiatus. In late spring, we coordinated a distanced Rising Up celebration to honor the graduating high school seniors and their families, providing snacks and decorations as church members drove through to express congratulations. In the summer we offered the 4th Hogwarts on the Hill mini-camp with participation by 27 campers and 40 youth and adult volunteers. In the late summer, we did a series of calls to church families to check on people's wellbeing. In the fall, we held a Zoom kickoff event for youth and families to resume the "regular" church year. We created a festive Zoom Yule Ball event (the zUUle Ball!) for families the first weekend of January. Several members of the team took part in the first Faith Panel, piloted with the High School Youth Group. And most recently, the Youth Ministry Team hosted its annual auction event, a multigenerational game of Fishbowl.

The staff also wanted us to include our support for them as they planned and executed the Distanced Credo service, ongoing youth groups, and Kat's leadership of the OWL Team in applying for and receiving an endowment grant and for the first time, teaching the Parents and Caregivers as Sexuality Educators class for church families. They did most of the work, but I suppose we are a good cheerleading squad and sounding board for what, when, and how to undertake some of these important projects.
