

2019-2020 President's Report

The Unitarian Church of Edmonton is a congregation openly and honestly searching, learning, connecting, and serving.

That is UCE's vision statement; it is what we as a community aspire to. Over this past year, it has also been what we've demonstrated time and again. This has been an extraordinary year in many ways.

Searching

We bid farewell to our minister of 22 years, Brian Kiely, at the end of January. This has put a focus on "searching". We have submitted our application for an interim minister for the next two years, and are just awaiting candidate applications (the first round is scheduled for May 4). For the longer term, however, we will next need to search within ourselves and our community to decide what we want ministry to look like at UCE. This will take open and honest conversations, and we're good at those. While I expect there will be the turmoil and tension that always comes with change, I believe that, on the whole, this will be an exciting and invigorating time for us.

Learning

We have done a lot of learning this year. We have learned how resilient and creative we are, as evidenced by the fantastic services offered since Brian's retirement. We have learned (or perhaps just been reminded) that we have thoughtful, talented children and youth at UCE. To show our appreciation of them, we have welcomed them into all services, attended the great services they plan, and supported their fundraising efforts. We have learned more about each other through conversations at book club, Religion on Tap, walking group, a creative writing circle, community questions, committee meetings, choir practices, coffee hour and many other events. We also improved how we can learn, with a reorganization of the Freeman Patrick Memorial Library at UCE.

As a board, we have learned that we need to rethink how things gets done at UCE. We know that people want to help. However, we also know that the way people volunteer is changing and serving on committees is not appealing to most. Given that, the board has been reviewing the activities that happen at UCE, the policies that support them, and new ways of having people meaningfully contribute.

Connecting

Connecting has always been a strength at UCE, and this year showed that more than ever. We welcomed new members and new babies, celebrating the extension of generational connections to the church. We connected over wonderful food at potlucks and soup Sundays. We mourned the passing of long-time members together. We connected with Westwood to host neighbouring UUs at the Western Fall Regional Gathering in October. We also continued posting our weekly services on YouTube and SoundCloud and maintained a strong social media presence to connect with those who can't attend in person.

Now, as we navigate life in a time of pandemic, the importance of connection is heightened. Our determination to stay connected was demonstrated through our quick transition to online services and coffee hours, a phone tree to offer a personal touch and connect to those without computer access, and countless acts of kindness between members and friends.

Serving

I believe the foundational strength of UCE comes from a shared dedication to service, both to each other and to the wider community. Even with the amount of change we are experiencing this year, our collective drive to serve has not faltered. Within our walls, volunteers continued to greet Sunday service attendees, make coffee, ensure we had sound, usher, and cook and serve at luncheons, potlucks and Brian's farewell. We hosted labyrinth walks, a murder mystery, and special holiday parties and services.

We reached beyond our walls by taking donations for Homeless Connect and the Bissell Centre, being a Food Bank distribution spot, supporting the SMILE sidewalk parties and blanket drive, participating in Habitat for Humanity builds, featuring local artists' works in our sanctuary, and sharing a portion of our abundance with a different charity each month.

Thank you

This is a tremendous amount of activity for one year – and I'm sure I've missed things! It is clear that thanks are in order to the many, many people who made all of this happen. While some work is "front and centre" and some happens quietly behind the scenes, it is all essential to making UCE the wonderful community it is.

I hope each of you has found a way to contribute that is meaningful to you, and that you know your work is valued. Sometimes volunteering is like being a utility company – you never hear anything as long as the water comes out when the tap is turned on. Please know, your work is important to the life of UCE, and it is appreciated. As a board, it was a tremendous comfort to know what skilled, generous companions we had as we travelled these uncharted routes together.

With gratitude,
Karen