



First Universalist Church of Essex

Annual Meeting

May 1, 2022

Annual Meeting Agenda

- 1) Welcome – Ken Swanson
- 2) Building Committee presentation - Alex
- 3) Purpose of Meeting:
 - a) Review past year
 - b) Vote on board nominee
 - c) Vote on officers
 - d) Vote on fund trustees
 - e) Review Finances and approve the 2022/2023 Budget
 - f) Address any questions that may arise
- 4) Vote in a new trustee:
 - a) Lacey Cominsky
- 5) Motion to approve candidate(s)
 - a) Ken Swanson, Moderator
 - b) Neil Bassom, Treasurer
 - c) Becky Axlerod, Secretary
- 6) Vote in Trust trustees
 - a) Jen Sauriol
 - b) Spencer Amesbury
- 7) Financial update – Neil Bassom
 - a) Budget highlights and changes
 - b) The annual Report was sent to the congregation in a church service email.
 - c) Reserve Funds Overview
- 8) Questions
- 9) Minister's closing

Moderator Report

This past year has been a year of introspection and resiliency. When we met at our Board Retreat in September, the Board of Trustees began the process of setting several goals based the following questions:

1. How is each congregant doing and what are their needs from the church?
2. What goals do we need to set for Eva to meet the needs of the congregation?
3. What is needed to safely get services back inside the church for services?

These were not easy questions to answer, but we knew they were answerable nonetheless with the right information. To get this information, we sought out feedback from as many congregants that we could reach. Most of that feedback was prompted by asking questions surrounding topics such as zoom, church groups, social justice groups, and adult RE. We did not ask about every aspect of the church including the minister, but unprompted comments were volunteered in conversations. Our primary objective was to make sure our actions were based on real concerns. We followed this up with a Congregational Meeting which allowed those attending, both in person and via zoom, to ask questions and make comments. Through both efforts we were provided ample information to give us insight into what the congregation was looking for.

Much of this insight surrounded desired church gatherings such as Spiritual Parenting, Music, Retreats, and Chalice groups. While desirable, the pandemic continued to make them unsafe to hold in the church. Areas that we were able to work on were those involving the service and minister. Eva was given feedback on both areas, and she accepted it with a positive manner. We communicated goals for her based on this information.

In December, several issues arose that highlighted the importance of how the minister's pastoral relationship with the congregation plays in church unity. It became apparent that some of the members of the church were having a strained relationship with Eva. It is our opinion that our minister needs to try and form a close relationship to each congregant, one that is more than what attending a Sunday service can bring. It has been our belief as a congregation, that pastoral care, during sickness and in health, is critical to church happiness and prosperity. These relationships are what make a group connected with a common thread (the minister), versus a group with a bunch of individual separate connections. We are currently working with Eva to develop a plan to build these relationships. We also recognize that the pandemic did not help with this effort.

The one question that always kept us busy during this year was how to operate a church during the pandemic. This was always a moving target that needed re-evaluation constantly. With the great advice received from the Health and Safety Committee, we have been aided in making sense of what is the most important information needed to base our decisions on. Many of the restrictions we put in place were based on what is needed for those possibly immunocompromised, rather than for the general population of the church.

Making services happen was made possible by the hard work of Eva and Alex. Eva organized the services on Zoom, then in the side yard, and finally inside the sanctuary. Alex handled all the work in getting video and audio working inside and out. I think everyone who has attended a

service inside the church understands the length that he has gone to make sure everyone is linked into the church and can hear everything. Having this capability has really enhanced the audience we can reach. It should also be noted that all our Zoom Hosts made this possible as well. They include Bethany, Lyn, Neil, May, Jenn, Jenny, Amy, and Liz.

We would also like to recognize the importance of all the staff that often work behind the scenes to make this church operate. Eva, Alison, Molly, Shawn, Alexandra, and Laurel have often gone far and beyond to be flexible and creative to accomplish their jobs in these unordinary times. Along with all the volunteers that have stepped up to help, they have made it possible for our church community to thrive.

I feel the highlight of this year though, is all the improvements the Building Committee has been able to accomplish. This list is too long to list here, but I will refer you to the link listed below that will show you all the work that was accomplished. While there were many hands involved in getting things done, I would like to recognize all the members of the committee which include Will Holton, Alex Marks, John Browne, Linda Goddard, Roger Pierce, Spencer Amesbury, and Neil Bassom. They have truly done some amazing work.

Ken Swanson, Moderator

Building Committee Report

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Y4Scs6x0Rh4VcN48kdg7olfZVf3sBBk9/view?usp=sharing>

Minister's Annual Report 2021-22

The amazing and good news is that we are now worshiping in our building again. And even more amazing, is that we have been able to maintain our Zoom presence as well. This is no small task for a small church, but it is a strong testimony to the love for one another we have. Along with this, we have a remarkably restored building. So many huge challenges were faced in the past year, and the work done sets us up so well for our future ministry in this place. Perhaps the most joyful of all, has been the return of the children (and, of course, their parents) this spring. This has filled our Sundays with laughter and smiles and youthful energy.

This past year was one of the most challenging years of my ministry. While it seemed that the previous year, being all on Zoom was hard. It felt even harder to attempt to resume being together physically in community. Everyone loves this community so much, and the pandemic has left us all raw, and just overflowing with grief and upset. It's been hard to navigate the strong opinions that people have about how to handle things and what is appropriate or fair or best. One of the biggest challenges of a community of independent thinkers, is to create cohesion and trust. I urge us all to engage with creative inquiry, when we feel a surge of outrage, indignation, or something is an affront to our understanding of the church community. Gentle questions, deep listening, patience all lead to a deeper and richer community. We can all work to remember that it is natural that there would be a sense of grief and loss about what we used to be able to do but can no longer do, that could certainly lead to a sense that something isn't right. I know I am processing as fast as I can all that has been lost, and our changing vision of the future. The ministers of our movement are in great grief right now, along with our lay leaders. I'm not sure there is anything we can do to take that emotional burden off our leaders, volunteer or professional. But I have felt that speaking about it, and just weaving talk about emotions into our worship services, will help us through. We have been through so much. And we have much to be proud of. Let us be as gentle and kind to each other as we can.

On Sunday mornings, the space is filling again, and we have maintained a successful RE program. We have a beautiful space that is well maintained—and just awaits some decoration and a few projects. We have people who have come week after week, to sustain our programs and help build us up. It feels like we lost so much during Covid, but we still have a reason to be here in Essex. And the more we remember our mission, the more we will thrive.

Worship: This year we worshiped in so many different ways and places! We began last summer with services outside, along with a basic Zoom feed. Alex Marks listened to my hope to create a hybrid worship experience and has persisted the entire year. Summer services offered challenges of sun and mosquitos, wind, and rain, and lots of carrying things in and out. And yet it was a joy to be in person. Mid-fall, anticipating cold weather, the building was equipped with a large screen so we could see the Zoom participants, and a new sound system, so that sound could run both ways. There have been hiccups, but with laughter, patience and persistence, worship has continued to be both in-church and on Zoom for the whole year. We had a surge in covid numbers this winter, and most of us switched back to Zoom. But there was a group that preferred being in the building, and so we have learned that we can be building-centered, or Zoom-centered, but still have a good hybrid experience. Our Worship Associates this year are Lindle Willnow, Linda Goddard, Sean Moynihan, Becky Axelrod, and Jenney Harkness They have

done such an outstanding job helping to create meaningful and rich moments for our worship services Sunday after Sunday. And they have helped to hold things together on my Sundays off. I feel very lucky to be working with them. If you would like to join this team, we would love to have you.

Along beside them have been our Zoom Hosts, who have helped erect what I have come to think of as the “Zoom Tent” each Sunday. We could not have created our hybrid worship without a space in the cyberworld, and each Sunday they have been willing to show up and make sure everything goes smoothly for this second full year. What a team! Bethany Swanson, Lyn Towne-Smith, Jenn Sauriol, Mary Carlin and Neil Bassom. Thank you, thank you.

Music has returned in all sorts of ways over the year. Our Choir Director, Alexandra Kerby, has stepped up to help with coordinating musicians along with running the choir. So she is now our Music Director. She has been wonderful, working with the choir on Zoom, outside (even in the cold), on a rocking boat and in our building with masks. She continues to find fun and creative ways to get us singing together. Our band has struggled with schedules and restrictions this year, but we created a love song for the North Shore UU Thanksgiving service! And various members have added a song or tune from time to time. Great music! Lastly, our services have been so rich by the Musical Meditations we have had from members of the community. Thank you to Julie Cleveland, John Browne, Fran Pierce, Tom Duff, Roger Pierce, Alexandra Kerby. It felt so nice to settle into a peaceful place, soothed by your music.

This year in worship, we have added a “Share-the-Plate” collection. Ken and I both loved the idea. Working with Finance Com, Worship Com, we set up a plan and Liz Raycroft has agreed to steer us.

Special Services:

Christmas Eve services. We had two Christmas Eve services again this year. Fortunately, I had planned the big 5:30pm service to be held outdoors on our lawn, as a Covid spike left many churches floundering. We had an amazing crew that hung lights, brought food and hot beverages, offered music, built a fire and even creating windshields for our candles. A special thanks goes to Tom Duff on the Concertina who led us on all our carols. We had a huge crowd, maybe 80-100 people and despite the bitter cold, a good time was had. Later that evening at 9pm, Lyn and I hosted a Zoom Christmas Eve. It was a quiet and peaceful time that connected us with family from around the world.

Easter services. It was our turn to lead the service at Conomo Point. I had a fun time assembling a participatory service, which Rev. Tim of the Congregational church helped me lead. We had a good turnout, with about 80 people there from all over Essex. And despite some clouds, the sun finally rose. No breakfast was held this year. The 10am Church service was so wonderful. We had the choir singing, children in worship, and held a Child Dedication. The rain even held off until after the egg hunt. (Thank you, Molly and girls, for arranging that!)

Rites of Passage: Child Dedications: Thomas Henry Simmons Gorman and Oliver Munier Marks on Easter Sunday. Memorial Services: Michael Attridge Sept 11, 2021, and Melvin Crockett on Oct 23, 2021

Pastoral Care:

This year, when things were a bit chaotic with worship changing locations so much, I primarily focused on those whose loved one's were dying or had serious medical conditions. Now that the pandemic is easing, I look forward to spending more time together, and getting to know each of you better. With Covid hitting part way through my second year, I feel as though, in some ways, I am still very new here. Invite me over, and I can help weed your garden or dust—and we can just talk and get to know each other better. Our Chalice groups haven't been meeting with all the restrictions. Hopefully in the next year we can revive them, so that we can all begin to get to know our neighbor UU's a bit better—and pastoral care can flow as an extension of those connections.

Programs:

This year, there hasn't been a lot of enthusiasm for more programs on Zoom. But we did have some good Advent meditations this year. I offered a Movie discussion but got no sign-ups. We had a book discussion with the Gloucester UU, about the book: *The Righteous Mind* which was successful. Lenten Meditation series this spring was a joint effort with Salem and Swampscott—but ultimately, we ended early due to minimal attendance. The youth group ran an amazing Halloween party on the lawn, with a fire to gather around. That led to my idea to start a Family Fire Fun night . . . but we really struggled with the weather. We did have one fun one, and perhaps can have another soon. In honor of Earth Day, I propose we start a Green Group, to do activities, programs and help educate/inspire ourselves to be ever-better stewards and companions of mother earth.

Meetings: This year, I have been working on the Health and Safety Committee, the Finance Committee, and the Worship Committee. I also helped with the Nominating Committee and attended the Board meetings.

Larger Community: I have been involved with the Cape Ann Clery Association. I also have been providing leadership for the North Shore UU Ministers Cluster.

Mentoring: You may not know this, but I mentor my colleague from Salem so that in her first ministry, she has someone to turn to for coaching and advice. Also with that formal role, I also have been cheering our Tori on, as she goes through the steps of learning to be a minister.

Staff: I want to say a special thanks to our staff for their hard work and incredible flexibility in figuring out how to create community while in the midst of a pandemic. I mentioned Alexandra in the Music section. Allison and Molly have done wonders nurturing our children and youth. While some churches haven't had RE, we have continued through it all. We said good-bye to Lindsey Duff and have welcomed Sean Walsh to the Assistant Youth Director spot. And we have added Molly (with the help of her girls) to our Custodial position. They have been doing such an excellent job—cleaning up all the construction dust and grime, plus the cobwebs from our year+ away. Laurel, in her role as Administrative Assistant, has continued to keep our calendar straight, figuring out what is Zoom and what is hybrid, along with helping with the Weekly Updates. And she graciously fills in with creating the Orders of Service and more when I am on leave. I said this last year, and I'll say it again, please take the time to write notes or find some way to support our staff. Doing work during the pandemic is challenging. Figuring things out,

even when they are good things, like returning to the building, take thinking and energy. Being attentive to the many feelings and stresses our children and youth feel, take energy and compassion. I am so very grateful to them all for their spirit and joy.

Special Thanks to Art

Each week, I think about how truly thankful I am for the wonderful collegial relationship I have with our Minister Emeritus, Art McDonald. He has truly given us so much energy and love this year, always willing to say “yes” and help out. What a wonderful joy it is to never feel alone. So, thank you Art. Our church community is doing really well, despite all the challenges. Worship is growing in energy and spirit. And the Pledge Drive was superb. I continue to stretch and grow as I learn to do ministry in this new world. But I am glad to be doing it with you. Thanks for all you do. Each one of you has been a blessing in my life, and I truly enjoy my ministry with you.

Respectfully submitted, Rev. Eva Cameron

Finance Committee Report to Annual Meeting Neil Bassom, 4/19/22

The Finance Committee (FinCom) formally took over from Tom Duff last September but had been meeting with Tom for 4-5 months previously. Initial membership was Alex Marks, Robin Rogers-Brown, Sarah Willwerth-Dyer, Jenn Sauriol, and Neil Bassom (Chair/Treasurer). The Minister and Moderator are ex-officio members. Robin relinquished her position in February to focus on Board work; we thank her for her invaluable help in getting the Finance Committee up and running.

Thanks to a very generous response from the Congregation, we were able to close out the 2020/21 year with only a \$2,400 deficit, and therefore did not need to request any transfer from the Story Trust. (The budget approved at the 2020 Annual meeting had anticipated a shortfall of some \$13,500.)

The budget approved at last year's meeting anticipated a shortfall this year of some \$22,670 (excluding Story fund transfers, \$16,670 including a \$6,000 transfer). As the books closed for March, we were running better than budget, with both income (\$2,600) and expenses (\$3,300) favorable to budget, with a deficit of ~\$12,500 Year-To-Date. We do expect to close the year with a significant deficit (estimated at about \$16,000) and to request a transfer from the Story fund. There may be some upside to the forecast given the success of the recent pledge drive, which resulted in new pledges of \$9,400 (over various durations).

As of the end of March we have ~\$85,000 in our checking account and the church CD and ~\$98,000 in designated funds (Building Fund, Tyler Social fund, and a Restricted bequest) in addition to the Story/Memorial funds which are reported out separately.

A large gift for the building, together with a fundraiser last year, was used to fund multiple improvement projects detailed in the Building Committee presentation. The church has met its target of having \$20,000 left over in the building fund presently as a reserve.

Accounts are now integrated with the QuickBooks system and donations through the Wild Apricot site are functioning. Special thanks to (inevitably) Alex Marks for all his efforts here, and in managing day-to-day payments.

The Split Plate collection appears to be working well. Of the one-time donations, 50% are donated to the Church and 50% are dollar-for-dollar matched from the Tyler Social Fund, so that charities receive the full amount given.

Eva applied for and won a Babson-Webber-Mustard Fund for \$4,700 which replenished the Minister's Discretionary fund. We also have an application pending with the Spinney-Mudge fund for \$4,500 to cover the costs of new windows for the NE side of the sanctuary. A decision is expected in April.

A proposed budget for 2022/23 is attached for discussion at the meeting. We face much more uncertainty in budgeting this year than previously, given the current high rate of inflation and costs associated with our adoption of a hybrid in-person/Zoom format for services.

APPROVED 2021/22 BUDGET, PROJECTED 21/22 ACTUALS, PROPOSED 2022/23 BUDGET				
ITEM	21/22 BUDGET	PROJECTED 21/22	PROPOSED 22/23	
Income				
Total Fundraising	\$16,000.00		\$17,200.00	
Interest Income	\$1,000.00		\$1,100.00	
Total Other Income			\$2,400.00	
Total Special Appeal for Donations			\$3,750.00	
One-time Offering			\$34,196.00	
Regular Offering			\$65,096.94	
Total Offering	\$95,000.00		\$99,092.94	
Total Income	\$112,000.00	\$116,968.00	\$123,542.94	
Expenses				
Ministry Expenses				
Minister Salary and Housing	\$54,363.00		\$56,262.72	3.5%
Minister Health	\$17,383.00	\$19,503.00	\$20,478.00	5%
Life, Disability, Dental Insurance	\$1,725.00		\$1,724.00	
Retirement	\$5,050.00		\$5,880.00	
Guest Ministers	\$1,200.00		\$2,400.00	
Professional Expenses	\$2,500.00		\$2,500.00	
Total Ministry Expenses	\$82,221.00	\$83,121.00	\$89,244.72	
Dues				
ECCO	\$1,000.00	\$1,000.00	\$1,000.00	
UU - regional and national	\$1,500.00	\$1,500.00	\$1,500.00	
Insurance Expense	\$4,000.00	\$4,288.00	\$4,000.00	
Cleaning and Maintenance	\$6,004.00	\$4,604.00	\$6,475.00	
Total Utilities	\$6,494.00	\$7,378.02	\$6,780.00	
Total Miscellaneous	\$3,200.00	\$1,100.00	\$1,235.00	
Total Music Expenses	\$9,032.00	\$8,868.00	\$9,350.00	
Office Admin position	\$3,820.00	\$3,820.00	\$4,950.00	4%, 25% hr
A/V Engineer			\$780.00	
Total RE Expenses	\$13,046.00	\$12,500.00	\$13,688.00	
RE Assistant	\$1,491.00		\$1,550.00	4%
RE Materials	\$790.00		\$830.00	
RE childcare	\$1,350.00		\$1,400.00	4%
RE Director Expense and Training	\$9,415.00		\$9,908.00	
Total Youth Group	\$4,357.00	\$4,356.00	\$4,570.00	
Youth Group Director	\$2,815.00		\$2,930.00	4%
Youth Asst Director	\$1,242.00		\$1,290.00	4%
Youth Group Expenses	\$300.00		\$350.00	
Total Expenses	\$134,674.00	\$132,535.02	\$143,572.72	
Net Operating Income	(\$22,674.00)	(\$15,567.02)	(\$20,029.78)	
Story Fund Transfer	\$6,000.00	\$6,000.00	\$6,000.00	
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Net Gap	(\$16,674.00)	(\$9,567.02)	(\$14,029.78)	

NOTES TO THE 2022/23 BUDGET PROPOSAL

We face even more uncertainty than usual in preparing the budget proposal. The recent spike in inflation will clearly impact many of our expenses, while the ability of members on fixed incomes to similarly raise contributions is uncertain. We have taken a cautious approach, assuming staff expenses will rise by 4% generally, 3.5% for Ministerial expenses, while regular offerings are assumed to rise 2%.

During the COVID interregnum many building expenses dropped or vanished, and this helped us achieve breakeven in 2020/21. We can expect these expenses to resume as we move more activities back into the building. During the past year we have drawn heavily upon volunteer labor to support the mixed Zoom/in-person model we are currently running and which we expect to continue next year. We judge that continued operation on the all-volunteer model will not be tenable and have thus budgeted for an A/V assistant to support services two weeks a month.

In addition, in line with the Board's wish to free more of Eva's time to focus on pastoral issues we propose to increase the Office Assistant hours by 25%.

The net effect of these assumptions and changes is that we expect to run a deficit of ~\$20,000 in 2022/23. This compares with an approved deficit (exclusive of transfers from the Trust funds) of ~\$22,700 for 2021/22 and anticipated deficit for 2021/22 of ~\$15,500 before any transfer.

Nomination Committee

This year the Nominating Committee needed to nominate one member to the Board of Trustees and one member to the Story and Memorial Fund.

Several names were discussed for the Board of Trustees. After careful consideration Lacey Cominsky was selected and approached for the position. She has accepted the nomination and would be finishing Susan's term on the board.

This year ends Jenn Sauriol's term on the Story and Memorial Fund. Sarah from the finance committee is confirming she will continue to stay on as board liaison. Stephanie recently stepped down and we are actively looking for a nominee to fill the position.

Next year the Nomination Committee will be looking to replace one Board of Trustee member and one Story and Memorial Fund member.

Sincerely,
Lyn Towne-Smith
Nominating Committee

Religious Education

The RE program has had a successful year, despite the challenges Covid-19 has presented. Most of our year took place in a virtual format, with occasional in-person gatherings between September-October. With an average between 5-11 kids participating, ages 5-14, as of March 2022, we have transitioned from virtual to fully in-person.

This year, we have explored many themes, maintained the kids' emotional needs, and created a supportive community as the main priority. In the Fall, we focused on how our UU "roots" help us to build our strengths, explore our truths, and act on our faith— while building a strong foundation that can help us weather tough times. In November, we were able to create holiday posters for the Soldier's Home in Chelsea (with the help of Mary Carlin, Neil Bassom, and Bethany Swanson) . In December we explored different winter holiday traditions. In February we explored the On the Side of Love, focusing on how kids can make a difference when it comes to social justice. In March, we gathered in person at the church, utilizing the beautiful new downstairs Church Hall. The excitement the kids had returning to this space was contagious. In our new space, the kids decided that creating Blessing Bags for Northshore Health Project was something they felt passionate about. Since our return, we have focused on researching the organization, greetings lists of materials, and creating heart ornaments and cards to accompany the items that will be donated. Easter and Earth Day services were intergenerational— a beautiful way to re-engage and make our kids feel re-incorporated into our larger community. Thanks to all the generous donations we have received, we will spend the month of May compiling the items and planning for the summer months.

Looking back over the year, we have accomplished so much on the curriculum side of things. However, this report does not begin to measure the importance of consistent community that many of the kids have been able to maintain during these challenging times, and during our multiple transitions, and how that community has expanded since we returned in-person.

Our kids never cease to amaze me, with their depth, compassion, and natural ability to hold space for each other. That is a direct reflection of the strong roots laid out by their families and this cherished community before the pandemic began. Without those previous connections, moving forward successfully would not have been possible.

In this new chapter, we will be looking for adult volunteers to help us maintain our RE in-person program, and help us create connectivity events for kids and families outside of regular Sunday service. Please contact Allison Rosner (reuuessex@gmail.com) for more information on opportunities.

UBU Report

UBU remains a strong and active part of FUCE. We meet every other week throughout the year, mostly around the Gould firepit. We've had 5-6 teens attending UBU on a regular basis; supporting each other has been our main goal, but we also have fun (like when we go sledding or have movie nights). We really enjoy being together! We've connected around spiritual stories, favorite songs and music, spiritual and self-care practices, UU principles, emotional intelligence skills, poetry, and empathy. Some favorite service projects have continued for this group, like raking lawns, producing the Annual Halloween Walk, and doing an Earth Day litter clean-up. This year we enjoyed making firestarters to be used for our meetings and also at church.

Thank you all for any and all support you've given this remarkable group.

Warmly,
Molly Gould and Sean Walsh

Hospitality Committee Report

Committee members (May 2022): Chair, Becky Axelrod; Jenney Harkness, Lynne Holton, Diana Hughes, Robin Rogers-Browne and Carol Thedford

These past two years, there has been very little for our committee to do, given the pandemic restrictions on any gathering for coffee hours, meals or celebrations. However, while the building was being worked on, we have done our part. We culled out and packed up everything from the kitchen so it could be stored temporarily in the sanctuary pews. Later, when the basement work was nearly completed and the sanctuary needed to be emptied, we brought everything down to the Wee People's Room. Once work in the kitchen was finished, we transferred the boxes back and unpacked all the saved items. Recently, we cleaned from the floor sanding dust and reorganized the storage areas in the kitchen. T

Once sanctuary services resumed, we continued to maintain the candles at the altar. Special thanks to Lynne and Will for their care and attention in this.

Even though the kitchen has not been used, we still needed to submit the paperwork and meet with the inspector for the annual Board of Health certification of our kitchen.

Our committee truly appreciates all the amazing renovation work done by the Building Committee! We are so grateful for our freshly painted white walls! We look forward to the time when we will again be able to prepare coffee hours and meals for all to share.

Submitted by: Becky Axelrod, Chair of the Hospitality Committee

Worship Committee Report

Members of Committee: Becky Axelrod, Jenney Harkness, Linda Goddard, Sean Moynihan and Lindle Willnow.

As you know, Worship Associates help Eva during the worship service by ringing the bell, lighting candles, co-leading the responsive readings, making announcements, and reading meditations. We try to transition smoothly between the various segments of our services.

At the beginning of 2021, the second year of the pandemic, our church community still held services entirely on Zoom. Thankfully, church members who had moved out of state could continue to attend our worship services, including our Worship Associate Sean. Many tech people have been responsible for the smooth running of Zoom, including the hosts – Bethany Davis, Lyn Towne-Smith, Jenn Sauriol, Mary Cardin, Neil Bassom and Amy Morrison. They welcomed all attendees at the beginning of the service and ushered them into various chat rooms for small-group conversations after the service.

Later in the year, we saw many changes. As more and more people had been vaccinated and the severity of the virus seemed to be abating, the board decided to hold services outside, whenever the weather permitted, while continuing to offer Zoom as an alternative. Many congregants were glad that worship services on the lawn made it possible for them to meet in person, safely masked, while others could still attend via Zoom. Later in October, live worship moved into the sanctuary. These hybrid services have added another layer of technical complexity. We are all enormously grateful to Alex, who has served as our sound and video coordinator, enabling both live and virtual attendees to see and hear each other from wherever they are.

Throughout the pandemic in all its phases, Eva has kept us worshipping together. Being technically adept at Zoom and attentive to detail, she has coordinated all the many aspects of our services – our pianists and hymns, responsive readings, videos from the UUA and tech hosts and worship associates, to name a few. She has been flexible and patient when technical glitches arose and has encouraged us to be patient with Covid restrictions, designed to keep all safe, including the most vulnerable among us. Thankfully, we can now safely sing in church, when masked and distanced. We hope for further easing of restrictions on our services, as we follow board decisions which are based on local public health guidelines.

Submitted by Becky Axelrod, Worship Associate

Health & Safety Committee

This has been a long and trying two years for us all. While COVID is still a pandemic, it is becoming safer to gather together. While we are both happy that things are moving in a positive direction with vaccination rates and the current surge starting to subside, you'll see that these recommendations reflect a cautious approach as we seek to protect the most vulnerable of our congregation. We appreciate everyone's flexibility and open-mindedness as we continue to navigate these unprecedented trying times.

We are constantly watching the Covid Act Now website that has all the updates for Massachusetts. We also watch the wastewater reports that some cities and towns do. These monitor how much of the virus is in wastewater.

We have updated our Covid Covenant to reflect the positive direction the county is moving in. The Health and Safety Committee maintains regular emails and meets monthly to discuss any changes to the covenant.

Our recommendation currently is not to change the Covid Covenant until we see a decrease in covid numbers.

Lyn

Health and Safety Committee

Chalice Groups Committee

The Chalice groups have not been active of late. Over the summer I will be restructuring the Chalice groups to see if that gets any traction. In the fall meetings with Chalice group organizers will be scheduled regularly every month.

If you are interested in helping with the Chalice group restructuring, please reach out to me.

Lyn

Black Lives Matter Presence

Starting in June 2020 following the murder of George Floyd as well as many other Black men and women in our country, at the same time that Black Lives Matter rallies were happening around the nation, a number of our congregation members began standing on the front lawn of the church on Sundays, with our own signs proclaiming that Black Lives Matter, bringing the issue to life in our own community. Our signs expressed a range of sentiments about social justice issues, and it was great to see that generally the response from people walking, cycling, and driving by was positive, with many beeps of encouragement (and only the occasional rude comment). We even sparked some interesting conversations about the messages that Black Lives Matter vs All Lives Matter. And in those months when we were not able to meet in person in the church, it was a wonderful feeling to at least be outside, together.

In 2021, as we saw increased aggression toward Asian Americans as well, including the spa shootings in Atlanta, Melanie added a sign saying Stop Asian Hate, and many of us felt re-energized to advocate for justice for those who are marginalized. We used our time standing together on the lawn to talk about other issues which also deserve attention (for example voting rights and reproductive rights), while we also agreed that the Black Lives Matter message was still relevant and needed.

We kept the BLM rallies up once a month almost every month until late 2021, when we decided to take a break for a while, and perhaps re-assess the best way to continue our presence in the community.

Many thanks to all the congregation members who have joined us - too many to mention by name, but you know who you are! - and to the occasional guests who discovered our activities via Facebook and expanded our ranks. That was an extra special part of the experience! With everyone's participation you have helped "that quirky little church on the hill" take a step toward dismantling racism in our community and beyond.

PFLAG - Parents and Friends of Lesbians, Asexual, Gays, Bisexuals, Transgender, Pansexual, Queer and Questioning

Our support group for parents has continued meeting throughout the pandemic. We appreciate the support from the church providing meeting space, zoom technology and now hybrid technology for mixed meeting in person and remote. There were several new parents who joined us in distress during this covid cycle. There are long term participants who find that their situation keeps changing and they may move from supporter back to supported. Our largest meeting had 13 participants on Zoom, but 8 is typical as people balance this with other demands. There's a strong core of experienced parents who do so much for each other by showing up and listening, sympathizing, and sharing.

There have been a lot of improvements in the time we've been hosting this support group, but 2022 brings a lot of hate, ill will, and misguided laws in states around this country. The progress made when gay marriage was legalized is now followed by real antagonism in many states - banning conversation, books, and healthcare. It is a really stressful time for parents - even those that live in a liberal state of Massachusetts - because the news from the country suggests that people won't be welcome in many parts of our country.

My role (Tom) in this group is to open the doors and welcome the people, but I have learned so much about the power of conversation and togetherness. I consider it a testimony to our Unitarian message which teaches "all are welcome" and encourages us to get out and make them feel welcome.

Tom & Melanie

ECCO Report

Our community continues to support the work of the Essex County Community Organization. We contribute financially through our dues and through private donations from members of the congregation. We also support ECCO by our work in the community.

ECCO is an association of churches, mosques and temples that seeks to build a more just society. We believe that our work needs to be led by the communities most affected by systematic racism and economic marginalization.

The current work is focused on finding solutions for the shortage of affordable housing in Essex County. We have been working at the local level with mayors, councilors, and zoning board members. We have also been lobbying our state senators and representatives for work that will support the efforts in local communities.

In addition to the work on housing, ECCO has been lobbying at the state level for three pieces of legislation.

1. The Fair Share amendment to our state constitution
2. The Safe Communities Act
3. The Worker and Family Mobility Act

Respectfully submitted,
Debbie Frontierro

Family Promise report

As many of you know, Family Promise North Shore Boston is a regional affiliate of Family Promise, a national organization that supports families that are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. Since the onset of the pandemic, FP has significantly changed its business model. Because of the risk of contagion, it is no longer possible for homeless families to be housed temporarily in churches throughout our area. However, their goal is still “ending homelessness one family at a time” and they have various new ways to utilize volunteers who want to help.

FPNSB has hired a new volunteer coordinator, Claire Goldberg, who is scheduled to speak with us on Sunday, May 22 at our service. Claire will explain the new programs which our local affiliate offers and describe in more detail the various opportunities that exist for any of our church members who may be interested in volunteering.

Submitted by Becky Axelrod

Open Door

The congregation donates food goods to Open Door; Art and Becky deliver whatever comes in.

Congregational members Alison Anholt-White, Becky Axelrod, Art McDonald and, more recently, Fran Pierce, volunteer at Open Door in various ways. Becky and now Fran volunteer to pack food for delivery and pick up. Alison and Art do deliveries of food, mostly meals now, to Rockport, Gloucester, Manchester. Occasionally, one of us volunteers in Ipswich where there are also deliveries and food pick-ups.

Many church members contribute financially to Open Door. Soon, we hope to renew cooking meals from the Open Door kitchen as soon as that service is renewed.

The congregation has a 19-year history working with Open Door.

Art McDonald

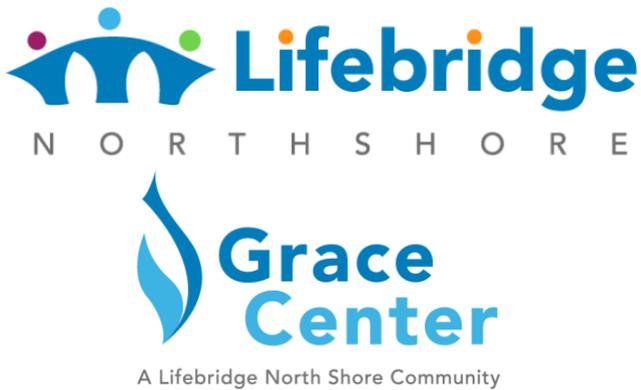
The Grace Center/Fifth Friday initiative

As most of you know, the Grace Center is a day shelter housed in the basement of the Universalist Church in Gloucester. It provides breakfast and lunch for individuals who are either living in the homeless shelter on Main Street or those who have apartments but need food assistance. Those who are served are respectfully referred to as guests. If you would be interested in helping as a volunteer, there are shifts on Monday through Friday from 8 am to 12 noon and 12 noon to 4:00 pm. In the morning, volunteers make breakfast and lunch; in the afternoon, they serve lunch, clean up and mingle with the guests.

Throughout the pandemic, the GC has been vigilant about protecting everyone. They have provided onsite vaccinations and testing for both guests and staff and have enforced the proper wearing of masks by everyone. All kitchen work is done in accordance with ServeSafe guidelines and procedures.

Several of our church members have volunteered at the Grace Center, but Diana Hughes thought up another way to help. She envisioned that our church would provide lunch on the last Friday of each calendar month when there are five Fridays, which happens four times a year. We still maintain this Fifth Friday tradition, by ordering baked haddock from the Causeway Restaurant and making the rest of the meal.

Many thanks to all church members who have contributed to this Fifth Friday tradition, either by donating money or making part of the meals. Please consider visiting or volunteering at the Grace Center.



Our mission at Lifebridge North Shore is to support homeless and vulnerable individuals in our communities by establishing access to resources that provide safety and promote healthy physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional development.

10 Church Street
Gloucester, MA 01930
978-675-6240
www.lifebridgenorthshore.org

The Grace Center Gloucester is our day resource center serving individuals in need of a safe and supportive environment.

Impact – “Meeting People Where They Are At”

- Those in need of day services – using the restroom, getting a meal, seeking a safe place to get off their feet
- Older or disabled adults, isolated neighbors who seek hospitality and community
- Recently transitioned out of homelessness and seeking resources to stay housed

Services

- Breakfast & Lunch Daily
- Restrooms
- Personal care item distribution
- Case management and referrals to our partner agencies for mental health and substance abuse treatment, medical care, job training, identification, housing, and more
- Programs including meditation, self defense, writing, therapeutic arts and music

Responding To The Needs During A Pandemic

- Once the pandemic started, we moved the Grace Center from our usual location at The Unitarian Universalist Church where we were only able to safely serve 25 people because of physical distancing. Due to the increased need of seeing 50-60 people a day, we re-located to The Gloucester House Restaurant function space for winter, 2021.
- Helping to navigate telehealth
- Providing personal protection materials, temperature screenings and Covid testing

Ways To Help

- Donate online or by mail
- Food, personal care items, and medical supplies are greatly appreciated
- Help in our meals program
- Share your expertise by teaching a workshop

Splitting Our Collection Plate with a Charity

Our Splitting the collection plate is off to a good start. All amounts collected will be matched from the Tyler Social Justice Fund, up to \$500. To clarify how the collection is done, we give only on the one day of the month that will be announced and use only the contributions that are a one-time contribution, any donations that are a recurring contribution will be assumed regular church funds.

So far, we have donated \$445 dollars to NPH USA, a charity near and dear to Tom Duff and his family, \$773 for a UU church connected to Romania where they are taking in refugees from Ukraine, and most recently \$273 to the Manchester/Essex Conservation Trust. We seem to have a couple of other people waiting in line to be a recipient for the future months and encourage anyone who knows of a charity they feel is special to them to let Liz Raycroft or Ken Swanson know.

Split-the-plate Summary

Month	Organization	Member	Amount Raised for Church	Amount Raised for Charity
February	NPH USA	Tom Duff	\$222.50	\$445.00
March	Ukraine: Providence Charity Org.	Eva Cameron	\$386.50	\$773.00
April	Manchester/Essex Conservation Trust	Mary Carlin	\$136.50	\$273.00