**UNITARIAN UNIVERSALISTS FELLOWSHIP**

**OF CHICO**

**2020-2021**

**ANNUAL REPORT**



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**2020-2021 BOARD MEMBERS**

**Dave Keller – President**

**Susan Bachlor**

**Bonnie Bennett**

**Courtney Boyden**

**Bob Crowe**

**Pam Sachs**

**Sharon Stallings**

**Board Report**

The most striking aspect of this Board year is that we have successfully managed the business of the Fellowship entirely online. The Board adapted well to Zoom meetings, and in fact going online helped with the transition to sharing documents online through Google drive thereby reducing paper use. We developed a by-laws change for virtual meetings which was approved by the congregation at the May annual meeting, and developed guidelines for building use during the period of quarantine and for re-opening in the post-vaccination era.

Because of COVID-19 we find ourselves managing a smaller congregation and fewer members. Currently we have 47 members, and Sunday attendance in the service is in the range of 25 people. We currently are faced with lapses in lay leadership for some key committees such as Worship, Finance, and Membership. Part of the need is being fulfilled by Rev. Bryan, who is chairing Worship and Finance committees. This is of course a temporary fix and the Committee on Shared Ministry has conducted a survey to ask members how Bryan should focus his efforts for 2021-22 church year. The Board will need to discuss strategies for recruiting more helpers for these committees in the upcoming year.

Despite decreased membership, pledges came in strong this year thanks to the effort of the Stewardship committee. This is possibly because the larger donors are committed to the long-term success of the church and have increased their pledges in most cases. In addition to the pledges, the Board successfully earned a second Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) loan for just over $17,000 which will help cover payroll for the upcoming year. We also are benefiting from past fiscal decisions to run a Special Campaign in 2018 and from the beloved members Jim & Alice Goodridge who offered money to the general operating fund before they passed. Finally, we anticipate increased revenue this year from building renters and fundraising as life begins to return to normal.

The Board worked hard to balance a budget that used the pledges, PPP loan, $10,000 of the Special Campaign, $5000 of the Goodridge bequest, other revenue, and other small amounts of donated funds. The budgetary expenses reflect the Board’s shifting priorities to some degree. While the majority of the expenses are dedicated to salaries and benefits as always, the major change is that we no longer have Mary Collins with us as Music Director. Instead, we have budgeted about $2500 for a pianist. This represents a savings of over 50% on the Music budget. Recognizing the need for increased online presence, we have dedicated more money for our web domain name, and for maintaining our website and facebook site. Reflecting the uncertain nature of committee work in the upcoming year, we zeroed out the budget of several groups and committees and instead will ask them to request Board discretionary money.

One committee that continues to shine is the Social Justice Committee (SJC); those participating are a small but dedicated group of people. The Board has voted on several SJC issues this year, representing the majority of the voting the Board did on church activities. Early in the year, SJC developed and executed a plan to donate the remainder of our Camp Fire Fund to Abundant Manifestations, a nonprofit that channeled the money to Concow’s Camp Fire recovery effort. Among other things, the money was used to purchase propane for heating and cooking for displaced residents. In January, SJC and the Board began investigating the possibility of placing microshelters on our church property to house up to four homeless individuals. Rev. Bryan spoke in several sermons about the spiritualty of helping those less fortunate. The Board heard a presentation by a nonprofit Caring Choices that would help run the microshelter project and has hosted a question-and-answer session with the congregation. The Board has also voted on raising a Black Lives Matter banner on our property, a Medicare-for-All resolution, and allowing Chico Housing Action Team (CHAT) to have meetings on our property if needed—all SJC-led efforts.

Yes, COVID-19 has affected the way we traditionally run business, but the disruption has allowed us to try out new ways of doing things. Seeing the need for a focused Mission Statement in these uncertain times, the Board adopted one from UU Sacramento:

“We come together to deepen our lives and be a force for healing in the world.”

We have also adopted a new Board meeting format, one that we believe helps build community by starting with 20 minutes of informal check-ins, questions, and discussions. After 20 minutes, we formally begin and open the floor for members to bring items to consideration. Afterwards we dive into the business with the Treasurer’s report and agenda items. To run the meetings more efficiently, we now post committee reports online and approve those along with the Minutes as a consent agenda. This gives us plenty of time for our gathering time and for business.

This year our Board members included Courtney Boyden Singer serving as Vice President (2nd year of 1st term), Pam Sachs serving as Secretary (1st year of 1st term), Susan Bachlor (1st year of 1st term), Bob Crowe (2nd year of 1st term), Bonnie Bennet (fulfilling David Keller’s 2nd year), and Sharon Stallings (1st year of 1st term).

Submitted by David Keller, President

**Minister’s Report**

**Finance Report**

As expected, the Cornavirus year was out of the ordinary, but thanks to T.W. Theodore and Dave Keller’s quick work, we received a government PPP loan, which was subsequently forgiven as a grant.  The grant and our faithful pledgers got us through the Pandemic year in relatively good shape financially.

However, the lack of in person services impacted prospective income for the 21-22 year. The Finance Committee met five times during the year, via Zoom, and pulled together a bare-bones budget for Fiscal Year  21/22. It was approved at the May Congregational Meeting.

As of May 31, we were 91% through the fiscal year.  Pledge income at 89.5% is still stronger than most years. Total income is at 79% of budget and total expenses are also at 79%.

Lucy Sperlin

Treasurer

**Fundraising Report**

Due to COVID19 there has only been one fundraiser, a bouquet donation run by Pam Sachs. It raised $440. With the help of several others, roses were cut from her garden and assembled into bouquets. Donations for the bouquets then went to the church.

**Worship Committee Report**

**Shared Ministry Report**

**Sabbatical Committee**

**Membership Report**

The Membership Committee participants were: Bonnie Bennett, Linda Converse, Bob Crowe, Thelda Eli, Sharon Stallings; Gail Ross and Susan Theodore.

As our committee’s responsibilities primarily consisted of in-person activities, the majority of our actions ceased in mid-March, 2020 due to the pandemic “shelter in place” orders. All previously planned events had to be cancelled.

Tasks that we did complete are:

* Reached out to newcomers and members living alone to insure their well-being;
* Reached out to newcomers viewed during ZOOM services when their contact information was available;
* Cleaned out and organized name badges located in foyer;
* Worked with church Administrator to consolidate various directories and house one accurate directory in church office;
* Worked with Communications Committee (Margaret Aumann) in January 2021 to transfer website administration from the Membership Committee to Communications;

**Stewardship Report**

This year’s Stewardship Campaign, for Fiscal Year 22-23, had to be undertaken swiftly after Covid restriction relaxed. The Theme was “Filling Our Piggy Bank” and the main event was a Pig Themed Potluck Dinner (the first we had been able to have in three years). It was ended with a large decorated sheet cake, a Piñata which spilled goodies and fortune cookie-like strips of paper with humorous “pig/money related” sayings which were shared with some laughter.

Stewardship letters went out prior to the Potluck, and were followed up by emails and phone calls.

As of May 1st, most pledges are in. There are 34 pledging units, including four new pledging units. Pledge total is approximately $1,000 less than the previous year, however, there are about three likely pledges still outstanding. At least eight pledge units were lost due to death or people having left the area. Nevertheless, total pledges should equal or exceed the previous years’ pledges, due to numerous generous pledge increases totaling nearly $7,000.

Stewardship Committee

   Merrily Stover

   Bob Crowe

   Courtney Singer

**Music Report**

Since the beginning of our need for using Zoom for our Worship Services it has been my goal as Music Director to build a Music Archive of our favorite hymns, or hymns requested by the Worship team for any Sunday. I enjoyed working with each Worship Team as needed to add hymns and other music.

From September through December, 2020,when the Pastor was on Sabbatical, I continued to work with the other members of the Worship Team, Acting Minister: Sonya Sukalski, and musicians: Pam, Margaret, and Nick Arteaga, to offer options for music, and to-enrich the archive with music that wove into the themes of each Sunday Service.

In the last months of 2020, I researched online recordings and music, as did other team members, and with Margaret and Pam explored information and requirements for permissions, copyrights, etc. for music. All of that information is in the shared Google Docs Music Folder.

The archive provides a direct resource for all Worship Team members to use for Zoom services. I have, to the best of my ability, accomplished my goal to begin a music archive that serves the Worship Team and our Congregation.

In the past two months, I visited other churches online, local and in other states, to learn how others were nourishing their congregations with music.

As previously submitted, I followed the input of our Treasurer to keep the budget amounts for Music Staff and the Music line item, the same as for 2020 to 2021.

I am grateful for the joy of making music and co-creating worship for this congregation over the past 16 years. I wish you healing, and success as you move forward as a community dedicated to love, service and inclusivity.

The Guitar Ensemble – a Duo this year of Pam Sachs & Margaret Aumann – continued to plan and provide music for worship once a month. Due to shelter-in-place restrictions, we had to learn new ways of making music together. This involved recording audio tracks separately, then combining them into one audio recording for use on Zoom, and (later) recording together outdoors. We both gained skills using microphones and new hardware and software at home. We gained permission from the original artists for broadcasting via Zoom – some were very generous in allowing us to use their music at no cost, while others required a small fee which we gladly paid from our personal resources. As a result, we added to the collection of recorded music on the UUFC Google Drive.

We also attended the virtual 2020 General Assembly, participating in the virtual choir and learning of more extensive music resources from the UUA. Pam arranged for Emma’s Revolution, a well-loved vocal duo, to provide music for the Mother’s Day service.

**Religious Education**

No report due to COVID.

**Buildings and Grounds Report**

To a large extent this year, the Building was maintained by Bob Crowe and Jeff Sachs. Jeff has taken over the monitoring of the Accualarm system from Tom Lewis and Bob has been involved in monitoring the repairs needed for the Youth RE building. Currently the RE building has a supporting pillar to stabilize a crack in the overhead beam. Bob is also planning to paint the building later this year.

The grounds have been maintained in large part by Adrienne Edwards. She has provided many updates, the most important of which are included below:

December 2020

I purchased a 10’ x 12’ plant cold protection blanket from Lowe’s for $11. That was enough to fold a double layer over both exposed irrigation stations, plus a little left over to put some protection around our 2 baby citrus trees. I took photos on my phone, but it’s a pain to download and post them. I attached the blankets with cable ties, so less likely anyone would mess with the valves or wires.  Unless we get a super hard freeze (say, below 22 degrees), the blankets I put on should be fine until we have a more permanent solution.  I would recommend waiting until blocks go on sale at the big box stores (usually in spring), and decide on a “look” for more long-term protection.  Doesn’t have to be elaborate, and would likely still be cheaper than the $50-60 pipe insulator bag thingies.

March 2021

Just a heads up that I have 8 undergrad students signed up to work in the garden this spring.  No major projects (like building composting stations), but they should be able to get the Giving Garden into really good shape for producing food this spring and summer.  I started lots of tomato and sweet pepper plants at home, and will be buying other veggie starts and seeds.

We will weed and plant in a staggered schedule this Saturday and Sunday, and masks are mandatory.  I will be there both shifts.  No one will be in the buildings.

Just checking in to let you know that I spent ~5 ½ hours on Wednesday (Cesar Chavez Holiday for CSUC) with 8 students who stayed various amounts of time to work on Giving Garden but also to prune and cut grass.

The weed whacker has a loose tube that leaks fuel and it cannot be used until it gets fixed. The lawn mower is working ok, but could use a tune-up.  I cleaned the paper air filter and added oil and fuel.  I was thinking of buying a new spark plug.  I believe Tom bought it new last year.  Really glad we were able to mow, because it was getting really tall.

We cut most of the lawn, and I am going to set mower blades extra high to carefully cut in the ditch at the back of the yard.

We did a lot of pruning on the tart cherry / climbing tree, and have a pretty big bunch of branches that need to be hauled away or chipped.  If we had access to a chipper, that would be preferred so that we could use the mulch.  I do not have a truck.  If no one else can haul away or chip, it will need to be cut up into short lengths and put into one of the compost station bins, or slowing hauled away to people’s personal landscape bins.

There are a few things that need to be hauled away next to the shed (mostly an old lawn mower), and the tires are flat on the wheelbarrows.

More pruning needs to be done, especially the Ponderosa pine in the back.  I can do it, but only with access to one of the locked-up ladders and someone to make sure I don’t fall off.

Since I didn’t hear anything about removing the dwarf Oregon grape hollies where Angela twisted her ankle, it should wait until next winter if must be removed to be able to transplant them.  I could purchase a few pavers to place securely between the shrubs and sidewalk to prevent anyone else from falling there.

I am going to propose to the Board that we pay a professional to install the kind of irrigation that should have been installed in the first place in the back.  Susan Strohmeyer called me to ask if it would be helpful if they donated an extra $1000 to expand the Giving Garden, and I told her we really need to deal with irrigation before any expansion could be done.  She was enthusiastic about doing that to make the garden more manageable and to increase production.  I have no plans to expand the Giving Garden because it is a lot of work for one person as it is.  I am glad that I have managed to get students involved as civic engagement projects, but I hope that when the church goes back to in-person this garden will be taken care of by more people.  It’s great for RE, for teaching, and has provided some fresh food to Torres Shelter and Wildcat Pantry.  The Strohmeyer’s funding and help from Claude, Tom, and me have made it possible so far.  I suppose when the use permit is renegotiated it could be a great resource for kids in a day care operation….

FINALLY, and very importantly, the irrigation needs to be turned on.  I will patch a leak in the irrigation in Giving Garden, but I do not have a key to the UUFC office to turn the irrigation on.  It should be turned on within the next week or so.  The settings (I think) were for 3 days / week for 20 minutes each.  Given the droughty conditions I don’t think we should encourage luxurious growth, and some of the stations could be set to 10-15.  The mulberries in front parking lot and Giving Garden will need to stay at 20 minutes.

Tom Lewis said he “cleaned up my paper files and folders, contractor contact info and other records that will be useful to a future chair or co –chairs”…does anyone know where all of that got filed?  He worked up a new irrigation map because the old one got thrown away by housecleaner (or someone else) a couple years ago.  His map would be helpful for re-doing irrigation in back.

Just letting you all know I spent another 5 hours this past week, mostly mowing but also weeding, at UUFC.  It’s a good thing, because if we had waited any longer we would have needed to get someone in there to cut the whole back 40 with weed whackers.  I predict that one more mowing will be needed sometime in May, and it should go a lot easier.  I remember one year Marvey paid CCC guys to do that.

Irrigation Proposal

As you know, the Strohmeyers have enthusiastically supported the idea of using some of the Giving Garden money to install more permanent irrigation in the back.  I have no idea how much it would cost, but I guestimate around $1000 to $1500.  It would be totally worth it, because I have had to continually repair the crappy black plastic that the contractors installed with the building.  Perhaps a good irrigation installer could also check stuff in the front and update anything minor that Tom didn’t already do.

I don’t have time to deal with getting estimates right now, but I would recommend the following installers:

Arbor & Earth (Shane Brock)

A-1 Sprinklers

Dr. Sprinkler

I don’t have any preferences, this is just based on what I read online.  I think it would be nice if who ever does the work could try to incorporate some of the old pvc irrigation system that existed prior to the new sanctuary being built.  Who ever gets the contract, they can’t simply be lawn maintenance / landscaping people.  They need to understand water pressure.

May 2021

Just wanted to let you know that I have been spending a lot of time each week taking care of the UUFC grounds.  I think we could get past the need for a regular maintenance contract if Neil and I do some tree trimming, and if we could have a work day where folks help with other hedge trimming (I could point to stuff that needs doing)—but that really needs to happen soon.  We also need to either rent a chipper or haul a bunch of woody debris off site.  Do you think there is anyone at the church who is able to help?  Starting spring of 2022, I think it would be a good idea to contract someone on a monthly basis.

Secondly, I was stood up by two separate irrigation contractors this past Friday.  I will reschedule meetings this coming week to get estimates for installing more reliable irrigation delivery in the back 40 next week, but need to know if there is a snowball’s chance in hell that 4 micro-housing units really could go back there.  If so, we could include a separate estimate for an outdoor washing station water hook-up.

**Communications/Media**

Major volunteer efforts this past year have created more robust and interconnected communication channels for our Fellowship. This has been especially helpful during the pandemic, when in-person and word-of-mouth communication is limited, and it may be harder for visitors to learn about UUFC.

**Website:**

With gratitude for the extensive work Susan Theodore and Bob Crowe did to update the website in 2018 and establish a new Members Only section in 2020, Margaret Aumann volunteered as webmaster when Rev. Bryan returned from sabbatical. After consulting UUFC staff, committee chairs, other members, and a professional website developer with UU experience, Margaret spent over 35 hours across three months to update the website further to utilize more of the field-tested template provided by the UUA. This produced a new look for the homepage, including more information, colors, photos, sections, acknowledging our LBTQA+ Welcoming Congregation status, and a tribal lands acknowledgement. Also, the content for every webpage was reviewed and updated as needed, written and formatted with first-time visitors in mind.

The reorganized menu system includes several new webpages featuring more information about UU beliefs and our collective history, UUFC’s justice work – including our Camp Fire relief work – and LGBTQ welcome, pastoral care, visiting UUFC, and other ways to get involved. Many pages now feature at least one photograph, and the worship service information updates automatically to ensure current info is on the homepage and easily available to website visitors.

Website metrics show that of about 300 website visitors a month, over half are first-time visitors and one third access it on a mobile device. Some access our website using links from our e-news and Facebook pages. ***In the future,*** we hope to include more recordings of sermons, stories/testimonials about the benefits of membership, and a user-friendly calendar page.

**E-news:**

The weekly e-news continues to be the most widely-used communication channel for members and friends. Jane continues to compile and send the e-news on Thursdays, printing and mailing copies to members without email, as well as special emails when needed. As much as possible, articles are kept short and links to our website refer readers to more information. The current e-news format (revised in January 2020) has its advantages (colorful, organized by section, mobile-friendly) and disadvantages (information can get buried when it is too long). ***In the future,*** we may consider an even better design if we have paid or volunteer expertise to help with that. It would also be helpful to have someone review/edit it before it goes out each week.

**Facebook:**

As part of an effort to increase opportunities for connection and engagement, Pam Sachs started a closed Facebook group for all members to share posts. There are 32 members of the new group so far. There are also 241 followers of the public UUFC Facebook page, where Pam is posting more official news of the congregation such as Sunday Service Zoom information.

**Other communication/marketing:**

We announce our Sunday services in the Chico Enterprise Record.  ***In the future,*** we could consider raising our profile in the community via more advertising, such as with a worship announcement in the Chico News & Review.

**Social Justice Report**

Busy and challenging year. Continued with regular SJC activities including but not limited to: Camp Fire & Berry Creek recovery, CC4J support, CHAT, Black Lives Matter banner purchased & installed, food justice, weekly cash contributions, Torres Shelter, purchase for $3500.00 a Tiny Home to be placed on our property when possible, Greater Chico Homeless Task Force and an attempt to establish 4 micro-shelters on our property in conjunction with Caring Choices, and more. At this moment, we are at a crossroads in deciding if UUFC should continue with the effort.

In the beginning Bob, Angela, Bonnie and Mike were primarily involved but because of the heavy lift help was needed. Larry and Megan stepped up to assist.

Recently Bob & Angela have taken on the committee’s efforts. One outcome has been more visibility for SJC with a goal of continuing such visibility to assist with the goals of UUFC and attract interested potential members. Thanks Bob & Angela for work above & beyond

**Social Activities Report**

No report due to COVID.

**Caring Committee Report**

Members: Pam Sachs (chair), Suzan Scott, Thelda Eli, and Marvey Mueller

The Caring Committee felt a strong obligation during the pandemic to keep track of members and friends of UUFC. We reached out to the entire congregation through calls, letters, flowers, meals and cards, and we focused specifically on people we did not see at the Zoom Sunday church services, people who lived alone and those elderly and at risk for depression/illness. This was truly an effort made by our entire congregation, as many were checking on one another, and we were happy to learn of this and hear about the kindness shown by everyone. Below is a brief summary of our monthly efforts starting with the most recent.

June (2021): Assembling a congregational list of birthdays so we can send cards. Our plan is to call members, not just to get their birth dates, but to also let them know that in-person summer services are happening and invite them to attend.

May: Sent Mother’s Day cards, and quite a few people commented that they were touched to receive them.

April: We prepared a Sunday service for April 25th, with the subject on how we care for one another, and take our UU values into the community and the world, which was well-received. We resumed the rose bouquet fundraiser.

March: Discussed getting church info to people who don’t have internet but have asked to stay informed.  We reached out by phone. Pam mailed them a list of group leader’s phone numbers (instead of email addresses) and the dates for all locally led services with a one-time instruction on how to dial in.

February: We sent out Valentines to members/friends who are alone. Marvey provided the cards, Suzan and David also emailed a Jacquie Lawson card to every member and friend who did not get a paper valentine.

January: We continued our monthly review of who may be in need of a phone call, card or minister’s attention. Thelda said she would be a first contact for new people and agreed to have her phone number on the pre-service slides.

December (2020):

1. To create community, we started a Facebook group “Unitarian Universalist Fellowship in Chico (UUFC)” where anyone can post.
2. We delivered over 40 poinsettias and Marvey Mueller art cards to members and friends of UUFC, prioritizing those who are alone during Covid and/or elderly.  We even managed to get a poinsettia and gifts of gratitude to our Sabbatical Minister Sonya Sukalski (thanks to Dave Keller)!

November:  The Pastoral Care committee sent a gift basket to welcome Bryan from his sabbatical, arranged two weeks of meals for Tom Lewis after his hip replacement surgery and supported a post-election zoom gathering.

October: Members of the Care Committee called every member that had been living alone, especially if elderly and isolated due to Covid 19 risk. We asked them:

1. What can we do?

2. How have you adjusted to pandemic life

3. Are you feeling any specific way about the church that you’d like to express?

4. Do you need a pastoral call from our sabbatical minister, Sonya? (or Asya?)

5. Can you meet in person, or only by phone or card?

6. Do you need meals (this might be in case of a short-term situation like illness or surgery or move)

We were able to determine that most of our members were keeping in touch with other members on a regular basis. A few removed themselves from the fellowship for unknown reasons.

September: Sonya Sukalski (sabbatical minister) joined the committee, fulfilling Bryan’s pastoral care duties. Pam accepted chair of this committee. Asya Leslie also filled in to help during Bryan’s absence.

**Hospitality**

No report due to COVID.

**In Memoriam**

UUFC lost two beloved members this year.

**Samuel Ready**, 86, died in Chico on October 28, 2020. He is survived by his best friend, Suzanna Holland and his loving family, including two sons, Marc and Kirk, three grandchildren and two sisters.

Samuel graduated from Miami High, received an engineering degree from Georgia Tech and two masters degrees from UCLA and USC. He worked at Hughes Aircraft and Litton Industries. Samuel then became involved in the Earth Stewards Network and was always very environmentally conscious.

Samuel was a member of UUFC for a number of years, but we had not seen him recently as Alzheimer’s disease took an ever-increasing toll. Samuel spent his last couple years at Twin Oaks Acute Care. Samuel was a member of our choir for a time, and he enjoyed music. Those of you who sang with the Christmas caroling group may remember us singing to Samuel in recent years. He loved our caroling. May we remember Samuel with gratitude.

**Elizabeth (Bette) Lawler**, 82, died in Chico on May 22, 2021. She is survived by her children John and Beth. daughter-in-law Fanny, sister Naomi, brother Lee, two grandchildren, and numerous nieces, nephews, cousins and long-time friends.

Bette grew up in Atlanta and earned her baccalaureate at Vanderbilt University. She moved to Chico with her young family in 1971, after living and teaching in Tennessee, New Mexico and the Bay Area. At various times Bette was a stay-at-home mom, president of the PTA and active with the Omega Nu Foundation and the North State Symphony Guild. She taught in Magalia, where she had future quarterback Aaron Rogers as a kindergarten student. In 1997, Bette participated in a Fulbright Exchange in Maidstone, England. Bette was a long-time member of UUFC, where she participated in various leadership roles and charmed us with her graciousness