**UNITARIAN UNIVERSALISTS FELLOWSHIP**

**OF CHICO**

**2021-2022**

**ANNUAL REPORT**



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**2021-2022 BOARD MEMBERS**

**Dave Keller – President**

**Susan Bachlor**

**Courtney Boyden**

**Bob Crowe**

**Pam Sachs**

**David Strohmeyer**

**Sydney Wilde**

**Board Report**

The return to in-person worship services and all of the associated ramping up of activities made for a busy year for the Board. Here are the highlights broken down by category.

**Worship Service**

The Board was actively involved in establishing hybrid church services for the 2021-22 year. With donations for technology and funds from the sanctuary improvement fund, funds were approved for buying a camera that will zoom in on the speakers from the back of the room and work with the computers. Funds were approved for purchasing an audio adapter for connecting our sound board to a computer laptop for use with Zoom. In addition, a second computer monitor was donated by Sydney Wilde and Dennis Daniel.

The Board was in charge of establishing COVID-19 safety procedures in line with state and federal guides. In August Pam Sachs took the lead and announced to the fellowship that wearing masks was required and vaccinations were recommended. We also required that congregants do not sing behind masks. By March 2022 we revisited COVID-19 Safety Guidelines and agreed to make masks optional for those who are fully vaccinated and symptom free. Masks will be required for those who are not fully vaccinated. Everyone will sign in and report if they become infected. If a person is exhibiting symptoms, they should stay home and join the services via Zoom.

**Personnel**

As part of the return to in-person services, we needed to hire three positions: an audio/visual technician responsible for running hybrid services, a pianist, and an RE teacher. Most of the details will be found in the Personnel Annual Report. In September the Board approved the hire of Christina Perske, our pianist. In October Emily Greenslade was hired as our A/V technician. A sub-committee assembled by the Board, Sydney Wilde, Pam Sachs, David Keller, Shelly Bower, and Lucy Sperlin, met several times throughout the year to strategize for our RE teacher hire. We created a Google calendar with 2 people signed up each week on a rotating basis who would make sure they are at the service, and able to leave with any children who want to go and provide at minimum a quiet activity if child stays in the sanctuary, a story or project, snack and playtime. We agreed to the Rule of 3’s: if there are two children, one person can work alone with them. If there is one child, two adults need to work with them. All members of the sub-committee were subjected to background checks so that they could work with the children. By February we hired Miranda Lowe as the RE teacher.

**Minister’s Report**

**Budget Report**

UUFC entered this Fiscal Year with a much pared-down budget, due to the ongoing COVID shut-downs. With two months left in the fiscal year, we are looking at both income and expenses being less than budgeted. Due to reduced expenses, it appears that we will end the year having used considerably less of our reserve funds than expected.

Income associated with in-person church services, such as non-pledge donations was, not unexpectedly, lower than budgeted, and we have been unable to have our usual major spring fund raiser. However, our new on-line donation capabilities have increased plate income and facilitated pledge payments for some. To the credit of all, pledges have continued coming in regularly, even though the many months when Sunday Services and other programs were entirely shut down.

Thanks to the second PPP loan/grant that we received last spring and as expected and using a portion of the 2018 Special Fund drive, as well as reducing the Minister’s salary to ¾ time and having spent less than budgeted, we will get through this year with some reserve funds still intact.

Moving, however, to the Finance Committee’s task of developing a budget for 22-23, we have the continuing challenge of being a small congregation funding a minister. Having two major disasters in four years has first taken away loyal pledging members from us, and then made it impossible to attract more members during the COVID shutdown. Another belt-tightening budget has been prepared for next year, and the Finance Committee notes that this is the 5th and final year that we will be able to supplement the budget from the 2018 Special Fund Drive. The upcoming year will be a critical one for the future of the Fellowship!

**Finances**

In July the Board approved the Endowment Committee’s plan to invest the Mitchel Endowment in an Exchange-traded fund through our local Edward Jones office.

In April the Board reviewed the 2022-23 budget from the Finance Committee. We planned that pledges will be about 10% reduced from last year, making the pledges come in at about $86,000. The Board suggested some cuts to reduce the amount of reserves that get used. Suggestions include, reducing Fair Share by ½ (save around $3900), canceling Torres dinners ($1000), not hiring the custodian ($1920), not re-hiring the Zoom technician (~$1200), and reducing cash donations in the plate from 50% to 25% (~$1200). All together that would save around $9000.

We discussed raising money through a Capital Campaign to pay off the mortgage. Through a straw poll we agreed to put this idea before the congregation at the annual meeting. It’s important to note that we did not recommend that the Capital Campaign go forward, instead that we want to ask the congregation, in order to gauge their level of support. We briefly discussed the Employee Retention Tax Credit and agreed this is a great lead to follow up on.

**Planning**

In March a sub-committee of the Board, including David Strohmeyer, Sydney Wilde, Lucy Sperlin, and Pam Sachs developed the idea of hosting cottage meetings were brainstorm sessions on how the groups see the future of UUFC. Invitations were sent out to all who pledged or are friends inviting them to the cottage meetings. Most meetings were in-person though one was conducted on Zoom. A dress rehearsal will be at Pam’s home on March 13. There will be 6 identical questions to be asked at the cottage meetings.

The outcomes from the discussions were synthesized, primarily by Lucy, Sydney, and Pam, and were disseminated to the congregation at two separate all-church meetings held after church in late March and early April. Additional feedback was collected at these meetings which will aid in planning for the future. The idea of maintaining a beloved community emerged as a top consideration, which we understood to mean keeping the fellowship going strong through meaningful and high-quality Sunday services, programming, and social events. Thus in the Budget we prioritized maintaining staffing at the current level in order to maintain enriching services for the upcoming year while we plan for the future. We also enjoyed several social events organized by dedicated volunteers such as Merrily Stover (Dinners for Eight) and the Congregation Potluck (Stewardship team).

**Personnel Report**

Several new staff members were hired this year as we began hybrid in-person/Zoom service after meeting solely online for over a year. These hires included a pianist, an audio/visual technician, and an RE instructor.

**Pianist Hire**

In August 2021 the *ad hoc* pianist hiring committee (Pam Sachs, David Keller, Gail Ross, & Rev. Bryan) interviewed Christina Perske, who came recommended to us by Jane Quan-Bell. We agreed that she really seemed like a good fit. She had played for Faith Lutheran from 2001 to 2003 and before that accompanied Butte College vocal students. More recently she has been part of a piano performance workshop group, and she prepares a piece each month. She also told us that she had briefly attended our church in the early 2000s. She signed her contract in September and her first date was Sunday 9/19/21. We pay her an annual salary of $2800.00, equivalent to 28 Sundays per year at $100/Sunday, to be paid in monthly installments. Two Sundays in September, two Sundays in June, and three Sundays in each of the months between September and June.

**Audio/Visual Technician Hire**

Rev. Sydney Wilde recommended Emily Greenslade, an A/V technician whose is working with Osher Lifelong Learning Institute. Emily is a Chico State student intern working for OLLI this year running their hybrid classes. Her job is to manage the A/V aspects of hybrid service and is two-fold: to run the sound booth for the in-person service and to manage Zoom for congregants attending remotely. Emily began 10/10/21 at an hourly rate of $18/hour. Time will be approximately 2.5 hours/week, including Sunday mornings as scheduled (10am – 12 noon), meeting with Worship Committee and/or Minister (day to be determined, approximately ½ hour), and congregational meetings (11:30am – 1pm two Sunday afternoons per year).

**RE Instructor**

Shelly Bower recommended a friend’s daughter, Miranda Lowe, a Chico State student who grew up in a UU church. In February an *ad hoc* hiring committee made up of Lucy Sperlin, Pam Sachs, and David Keller met online with Miranda to interview her. We agreed that she would be a good fit. However, it’s fair to say that communication with her is challenging. Shelly Bower has been able to reach her but the other members have not. As of May 2022, we have had spotty attendance by children and Miranda has not been notifying us when she will be absent. We didn’t plan to retain her this summer, and we would recommend we do not rehire her next Fall. She is very difficult to communicate with and does not seem interested in the position.

Because of the return to in-person service, the Personnel committee has had a busy year. In addition, there are ongoing issues with how Merrell Irwin is tracking Rev. Bryan’s sick time and vacation. After two lengthy conversations with Tracy Donner, we believe that Bryan’s sick time and vacation are being correctly reported.

**Fundraising Report**

No report due to COVID.

**Worship Committee Report**

**Shared Ministry Report**

**Membership Report**

It should come as no surprise that the UUFC has suffered from the double blows of Wildfires and a pandemic shutdown. As a result our membership has suffered. Some members moved away after losing homes. Others have drifted away during the lengthy time we were unable to meet in person.

Before the pandemic shutdown we had an active committee that worked on membership and Sunday greeting. This has frittered away over the last two years. We are working on updating our records in Power Church which will help us stay in closer contact and to identify members/friends who have drifted away and to encourage their return.

At this point, we are looking for three or four volunteers who can take turns at the greeting table – the work is simple

* Arrive about 30 minutes before the service
* Greet both members and regular attendees as well as first time visitors.
  + Ask “local” visitors to fill out a simple contact form so we can do follow-up. Get then a name tag.
  + Get out of area visitors a name tag – make them feel welcome
* Have everyone – members, guests and visitors sign in on the COVID contact sheet.
* After the service place any contact forms in the basket with the collection so that they will get to the office.
* Make an effort to connect visitors with our regulars during the social hour.

We are also seeking some help in following up with visitors, sending them information on UUFC and following up by phone inviting them to visit us again.

**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

   Lucy Sperlin

**Music Report**

The music committee was disbanded during the pandemic. In the past, the music committee would coordinate and music-related events, such as concerts.

**Religious Education**

As the Fellowship returned to in-person services, in October, Pam Sachs created a nice space in the foyer for children to self-entertain, but the Board realized the need to reconstitute an RE Program for children and youth. A new RE Committee was developed (Lucy Sperlin, Pam Sachs, Shelley Bower, Sydney Wilde and Dave Keller) , and for a time, the RE Committee shared responsibility for going out and providing an activity for any children who were in attendance. At this point there were two families and four or five children who attended frequently but not regularly. In hopes of having a more regular RE program develop, we hired a college student with a UU upbringing and understanding.  Attendance has continued to be sporadic or non-existent as we moved into spring, and it is likely that we will need to reevaluate our program for children during Sunday Services.

**Buildings and Grounds Report**

Three major issues were tackled this year. First, somewhat serendipitously, during the Board Retreat the Sanctuary bathroom drain backed up, spilling water into the bathroom and out into the hall. Immediate action by the Board prevented further damage. Follow-up showed that tree roots were blocking the sewer line downstream from both the Sanctuary and the Social Hall. By September the Board approved Earl Plumbing to do the work. Earl Plumbing charged $3,200 for the repairs.

The second major issue was a re-start of our updated Use Permit application to allow us more flexible use of our property. Currently we are restricted to certain activities and on certain days of the week. The process began in October when Bob Crowe met with Marie Demers who referred him to a person in the City Planning department to get Reconsideration of Approval for the Use Permit. It will cost about $3,740 and take about 60 days to go through the decision process. He suggested that this is the time to reach out to the neighbors who are within a 500 ft. radius of the church. The City will send out an email and invite these neighbors to a public hearing. If the process is started soon, the church could receive an answer by the end of the year. Bob will pick up the form, complete it, send it to the Board for edits. He will also send a draft of proposed activities. He will also get copies of other churches’ Use Permits. It was also suggested that the Board review how much to charge for the use of the facilities and how to advertise the availability of the facilities.

In November David Keller and Pam Sachs met with the neighbors to explain the plan to revise the Use Permit and to answer any questions the neighbors might have. Bob and Rev. Bryan made further outreach. From visits with 11 neighbors there were no major objections voiced to church members at that time.

The Board decided to file the Applicant Statement and pay the city fee in early December. After this time, however, there was one neighbor who had problems. David K. met with that neighbor and explained how the Use Permit will be changed. A draft of an invitation for a “Meet and Greet” has been written and will be sent to the neighbors within 500’ of the church. The “Meet and Greet” gathering will occur on January 15, 2022. Unfortunately, no neighbors came to the meeting so a follow-up meeting was held with five concerned neighbors who did not approve of the proposed change.

After positive indications from City Planning department, the Board decided to move forward with the Use Permit application at the level of Zoning Administration. A public hearing occurred in April via Zoom. Bryan, Pam, Bob, and Angela Risdon will be present at the hearing. Kelly Murphy of the Planning Department seems cooperative in getting the revised Use Permit approved. Her caveat is there could be a problem if there is frequent occurrence where an event results in overflow parking onto the street. The Board wrote a ‘Good Neighbor’ policy to the City, outlining our plans to mitigate overflow parking, among other issues.

After the meeting, there was no immediate decision by the city in our meeting this week. The city will put together a list of conditions soon for us to look at. Next step would be to accept their conditions or negotiate for something better. Or we write another check and go to the planning commission with no guaranteed good outcome (about $2,500 more). David K. met with City Planners Kelly Murphy and Mike Sawley who explained that a re-do at the level of Zoning Administrator was possible. Neighbors would have to agree to Use Permit changes, which would likely involve severely restricting or banning our ability to rent to outside groups. The Board may consider legal representation and move to the level of City Planner.

The third issue the Board examined this year was the possibility of sub-dividing our church property so that low-income housing could be built. Potentially this would serve two purposes—fulfilling our Mission to aid the community and to generate revenue from our property. To determine if this was an issue to bring to the fellowship, in January the Board heard from Ed Mayer, Butte County Housing Director. Ed shared with us on the broader historical overview of local and county housing policy, current challenges in Butte County and Chico and even some thoughts on how we might consider the potential opportunity of our church property being used for some type of low-income housing. While we decided this was an interesting idea to bring to the congregation at some point, the Use Permit application took precedence.

**Communications/Media**

Workers: Margaret Aumann (makes technical changes to website and e-news), Pam Sachs (editor e-news and coordinator), Jane Quan Bell (office secretary), David Keller (recordings)

* Managed both Facebook sites (Page and Group)
* Placed church service recordings on the website.
* Modified the e-news to place all “new” news at the top.
* Edited E-news every other week (used to be Bryan’s task).
* Placed the Calendar back on the website.
* Adjusted Covid notices
* Kept all sanctuary sign-in sheets and called participants when Covid was identified (only two exposures and no spread was reported).
* Made major modifications to the keep the 32-page website updated (especially the front page) to make it more user-friendly.

**Social Justice Report**

**Caring Committee Report**

During the 2021-21 church year, the Caring Committee sent cards and meals to members and friends with injuries and illness, helped with David Mallory’s memorial service, delivered poinsettias to some shut-in members over the holidays, arranged a good-bye party for Carolyn Dorn and held the following outdoor celebrations for the congregation-at-large: the Oktoberfest, Christmas party/caroling around a fire pit, and a Valentine’s Party. Our goal was to encourage members to reconnect following the pandemic in a safe manner.

Members: Suzan Scott, Angela Risdon, Thelda Eli, Marvey Mueller, Pam Sachs, David Strohmeyer

**In Memoriam**