

2015-16

Annual Report



Peoples Church

Unitarian Universalist

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President's Report

Bryan Davis

We have been through a lot these last two years and now Peoples Church has reached the turning point. Rev. Jeff Briere joined us at a time of unexpected difficulty. At that time, his honesty and steady determination to see it through and get it right was a great help to me, the Board, and us all. Now, we are long past that and thanks to Rev. Jeff, Judy Price, and the whole transitions team, this has been a successful interim ministry and we can now turn our attention expectantly to the future.

Standing in a class by itself is the Developmental Minister Search Committee. They have managed to organize diverse and contradictory input from all of us into a clear statement of our goals for the years ahead. They have skillfully navigated the uncertain application process of a new kind of ministry. They have endured an anxious wait for applicants. And they have succeeded in their task! In August our next minister will arrive and we will begin discovering Peoples Church for the 21st century.

But that's not all. As the reports herein demonstrate, much has been accomplished since our last Annual Meeting. The Interim Transitions Team has completed the five tough tasks of interim ministry. We have a new Director of Religious Education and a revitalized RE program. Our Social Justice Council has been active in so many areas that it is hard to list them all. The worship associates and choir have continued providing able assistance to Rev. Jeff plus high quality lay services. We now have Wednesday night craft classes. We have brought our stained glass home and have a task force seeking estimates to fill in the cross window. We adopted a revised Covenant of Right Relations. We have developed important policies for membership and disruptive behavior. The Van Vechten Guild is active and the Archives Committee is moving ahead on the timeline project.

On the flip side, we ended the 2015 fiscal year in the red and the fall pledge drive for 2016 was disappointing. Currently we are filling the gap by increasing use of endowment proceeds and expending reserve funds for church operations. In effect, we are using funds reserved for projects like building renovation and enhancement to fund the operating budget. This can only be a stop gap and is not sustainable beyond a year or two.

In response, a stewardship planning group has formed to revamp our fundraising campaign. In another move, we are separating our ask for endowment contributions from the pledge drive so we can all focus our giving on the immediate problem. Still, building up the endowment is an important goal, so we will make spring 2017 a time to focus on planned giving. Ultimately, the most important take away on our financial condition is to reinforce the need for long term growth.

So be proud of your church. We are Unitarian Universalists and that means something important! Carry your pride wherever you go and never doubt it. Be optimistic about our future. This will be an exciting time of challenge, hope and accomplishment. Everyone has a role to play and a new phase in the life of Peoples Church is about to unfold. Rejoice!

Minister's Report

Rev. Jeff Briere

I have three items I'd like to highlight concerning the health and spiritual condition of Peoples Church, and one item about your future. This will be slightly different than what you might expect a minister to report at the Annual Meeting.

I arrived here nearly two years ago to find a dispirited, directionless congregation, embroiled in a nasty scene with one very forceful member who wanted things done his way. Not only that, but the Director of Religious Education took a full-time job, yet refused to resign. And you were on your third President in one year. Along the way, two board members resigned and other members stopped attending services or drifted away. And for more than nine months, I was in serious discomfort with a cyst growing in my spine.

It wasn't what I expected. Scott Gay was the chair of the search committee which brought me here. In the depths of these depressive times, he took me out to lunch and apologized. He thought I might feel victimized by a bait-and-switch. I told him I was not angry. Just scared.

It's funny how we telescope our feelings and memories and experiences. It's hard now for me to recall those anxious days. But your—our—recovery from those times is a major accomplishment of the last couple years. That was a brutal storm and you should be proud the church did not implode, because it easily could have done that. A lot of credit for this is the steady hand of Cool Hand Luke, otherwise known as Bryan Davis. He got rattled, as did I, but without his counsel and knowledge, I would be rattling still.

You got an attitude adjustment, so to speak. You are now thinking about your future, not looking to the past. Early in my ministry, I became aware that the congregation was ambivalent about this building. People in the congregation spoke often of the church at the corner of Third Avenue and Sixth Street, as if that location and that building represented the high water mark of Peoples Church; as if it was the best the congregation had done or could do.

I am pleased to see signs that you have come to terms with your past and that you are taking more interest in this building. You found a way to keep water from pooling on the roof, you cleaned up the plants outside, you are actively considering what to do with the glass crucifix, the Archives folks have begun a timeline, and the biggest, baddest accomplishment of all, you have brought the stained glass windows out of storage.

With this single, simple development, you have connected to your history in a good way and a visible, tangible way. Implicitly, you are saying, we can have our past and our present too. I hear some talk about building boxes to mount the windows, with lighting from behind, so that the windows can be appreciated in a windowless sanctuary. My only regret is that I won't get to see them. Someone, please take some pictures and send them to me.

You have developed a culture of worship that is attractive and inviting to visitors. With a focus on inclusion and consistent follow up with visitors, you will build your membership slowly over time.

You have a dynamite and energetic religious educator in Jamie Zaruba. I thought we were in hot water when we lost Val Harlynn, but we struck gold with Jamie Zaruba. You are lucky to have him guide the religious education program into the future.

You have a developmental minister. I am pretty sure you will want to keep her, so remember this: a good relationship takes good work. A good relationship—any relationship—does not run on auto-pilot. It takes work from both parties, so do not ignore your part to make the ministry of Rebecca Hinds a success. She can't do it alone. It's a two-way street, folks.

There are so many people for whom I am grateful. The transitions team, the worship team, Bryan, the board, Jamie, Pam and of course, Jill Jones. Thank you very much.

I think you are in a good place to do some great ministry and rebuild Peoples Church. I am pleased to have played some small part in that. Good luck, work hard, but with joy, and don't make me come back here.

Interim Transition Task Force

Judy Price

Members: Rev. Jeff Briere, Barb Gay, Geoffrey Johnson, Maria Kell, Scott Mansfield, Tristan Maynard, Judy Price, chair

*Talking Circle Facilitator: Marion Patterson (Connections)
Rev. Jeff Briere (Mission Vision)*

This is the second and final year of the interim transition with Rev. Briere. We have been worked on all of the tough tasks outlined by Rev. Briere in his sermons. Last year, we worked on: Heritage and Leadership. This year we worked on Connections and Mission/Vision. Talking circles were held in October, 2015 and February, 2016. Each topic was attended by 16 to 18 congregants. Notes were taken on what was said. The information was compiled into reports. Reports on the talking circles were sent to all Board members. Information was also reported in the Voice. The complete reports for all four (4) talking circles can be found on the Peoples Church website in the documents section.

The Connections Talking Circle (DARN) uncovered a wealth of current and past connections of the church in the community, state, nation and world. The Archives Committee took an active part in contributing information to the talking circles and adding information for the report.

The Mission/Vision Talking Circle exposed two themes quickly: growth and social justice. A third theme, church community, became apparent as the notes from the circles were compiled. Church community was generally addressed as a prerequisite for growth and/or a strong social justice presence. The diversity of our members and their views was seen as a challenge to a new mission and vision. People agreed that we need to take time to make sure that everyone is on board to establish the common ground needed for a strong vision and mission to emerge.

Thank you to all the many members and staff who have participated in the tough task interim transition talking circle process! We have worked together to ensure that those interested have the opportunity to meaningfully share our thoughts on change with the congregation and board. We have also provided important information for the congregation and staff to consider as we move forward together.

Social Justice Council

Marcia Swift

In 2015 the Congregation chose poverty and income inequality as the social justice issues on which to focus its attention. Social Justice Forums were held with representatives of the Linn County Food Bank, Feed Iowa First, Center for Worker Justice and Head Start. Forums were also held on human trafficking in Iowa and the Bakken pipeline. The Congregation adopted the Olivet Head Start Program and provided the children in this program with funds and supplies. The Congregation continued to grow kale on our property and planted rhubarb to be donated to Feed Iowa First. We continued to collect food which we donate on a regular basis to the Linn County Food Bank.

The SJC completed its project to market and sell tee and sweat shirts which proudly display our church name and mission. We evaluated our participation with the Ecumenical Community Center and recommended to the Board that we continue to support this interfaith effort to aid our fellow community members in need with a \$2,000 contribution.

In 2015 and 2016 we continued to be represented on the Board of the Iowa Unitarian Universalist Witness & Advocacy Network. Peoples Church continues its membership with this group at a cost of \$1 per member per year. The IUUWAN organizes four lunch and lecture events a year on various social justice issues in Iowa. The IUUWAN strives to coordinate all of the UU churches and societies in Iowa to effectively fight for social justice and equality.

For 2016, the Congregation voted to direct its efforts toward health care access and gun protection and safety. Forums related to pressing and urgent health care concerns were held. State Senator Liz Mathis spoke on the impact Medicaid privatization will have on Iowans and County Board of Supervisor member Linda Langston spoke on how privatization and mental health reorganization will impact residents of Linn County. Representatives from the Community Free Health Clinic and the Iowa Abortion Access Fund spoke on their clientele's continuing needs. We learned about access to dignified health care for the dying from Iowa Compassion & Choices. A representative from Planned Parenthood enlightened us on how to respond to continuing assaults on access to women's health care.

In the area of gun violence and gun protection we held a Forum with a speaker from Iowans for Gun Protection and Safety. Another Forum was held with the Cedar Rapids Police Chief where we discussed gun violence in the community and what we can do as a community to address its root causes. This Forum was covered by a local news outlet.

In 2016, the first quarter Sunday Plate Collection was donated to the Community Free Health Clinic and the second quarter's proceeds will go to Iowa Compassion and Choices. The third quarter collection will go to the Iowa Abortion Access Fund and the fourth quarter will be donated to the political advocacy arm of Planned Parenthood.

In the winter of 2016 Peoples members collected many hats, gloves, and scarves which were donated to the Willis Dady and Madge Phillips homeless shelters.

In 2016, Peoples members, proudly wearing our tee shirts participated in a political protest as we stood in solidarity with our Muslim neighbors.

Currently, we are collecting personal care items to be donated to patients of the Community Free Health Clinic. This project will continue through August of this year.

The SJC will hold future Forums twice a month. One will be held at 10 am on a Sunday when the choir is not practicing. The other Forum will be held after the service and possibly be connected with a potluck lunch.

Participants on the Social Justice Council continue to grow in number. Thank you to everyone who has worked to bring social justice concerns to our mission and action.

Pledge Campaign Planning Group

Bob Butikofer & Judy Price

Traditionally, autumn has been the time for our pledge campaign. But for a variety of reasons we believe there are advantages to starting earlier and ending earlier. So for the 2017 budget we are trying a different approach. Here's what you can expect:

The Campaign Will Start and Finish Earlier

July 1 is the kick off date and the campaign will finish at the end of September. Instead of beginning at the start of the church year when things start getting busy, the campaign will be finishing then.

The Campaign Will Be More Relaxed Than Before

During July and August, we will run a "No-Hassle Campaign" for those who want to get in ahead of the formal campaign. We will have a table on Sundays where people can complete their pledges and there will be an electronic pledge form link in our newsletters.

In September, we will begin contacting people by phone who have not already returned their pledges, and stewards will also be available to call on people one-on-one, as requested. There will also be two Miracle Sundays - September 4 and 11 - where returning outstanding pledge forms at the service will be emphasized. On September 4, the traditional Labor Day Picnic Sunday, in addition to the emphasis on returning pledge forms, the festivities will be extended into the afternoon with activities for kids to make it more flexible for families to attend.

The purpose is to make it easier for you, easier for stewardship volunteers, and easier for the Finance Committee to construct a budget with complete pledge information prior to the December congregational meeting. It's a win, win, win!

Religious Education

Jamie Zaruba

We accomplished much during the last year in Religious Education.

- Registered youth this year was 28 students.
- Average attendance was 17 students for the year per week.
- Went on three field trips: Indian Creek, Cedar Rapids Fire Station and Downtown Cedar Rapids to march in the Fire and Ice Parade.
- Conducted 2 plays, one a small skit involving our young students in November and the other was our Winter Play in December.
- The combination of the Parade and our Winter Play brought new attendees to our services, so the promoting of our church.
- Our kids enjoyed our RE pancake breakfast, and our RE potluck in the fall, building a better relationship with the congregation.
- The Chili Cook-Off was a success bringing in over 100 dollars for our church.
- The big event Seuss-I-Con, hosted by our Church this spring was great exposure for People's and great networking for us with other DRE's.
- Our RE Chair Robert Loughry stepped down due to his family moving, he will be missed.
- We appointed Co-Chairs Deb Maynard and Amber Todd.
- We look forward to our upcoming summer activities and our future block party in the fall.

Van Vechten Guild

Jan Watkins

The Van Vechten Guild met monthly on the second Monday from September through June, except for January, the month when there is no scheduled meeting. There are 37 members in the guild.

Programs included:

September: Opening Potluck and Program Planning for the upcoming year

October: "Feed Iowa First" Presenter Sonya Kendrick

November: "Chimney Swift Archive" Presenters: Bob and Linda Scarth

December: Annual Christmas Cookie Exchange

February: "Nepal" Presenter: Suresh Basnet

March: "Young Parent's Network Programs" Presenter: Crystal Hall-Young

April: "The Cedar Lake Project" Presenter: Felicia Wyrick;
Technical Assistance: Charlie Veeshak

May: Archives Committee: Sort and identify old pictures of Peoples Church members.

June: Potluck and Summer Farewells

The biggest change is that VVG is now part of the Church's accounting system, although we are maintained as a separate continuing account. We have 35 dues-paying members (\$350) \$3 of each members dues is donated to the charities that we select each year. This year our charities were the Iowa Abortion Access Fund and Catherine McAuley Center. At each meeting we collect a freewill offering for these charities and in December we sent each a check for \$159. A second check will be sent to each when we end meetings for the summer in June

Pecan Sale netted \$724.72. More details from Judy Price who did a GREAT job of organizing the sale and record keeping. Paid our Pledge of \$550 to the church. We renewed our membership in UNA \$40 In June we made a freewill collection of \$133 that was sent to Rebuild Nepal and sent another \$200 dollars to Rebuild Nepal from our funds after the speaker in December. Jill co-ordinated the purchase a larger coffee maker for the Ely Room Kitchen to avoid making multiple 12 cup pots.

The Guild's treasury balance at the end of the year is \$2,431.39. Charity donations totaling \$518 were made to The Iowa Abortion Access Fund, Catherine McCauley Center, and "Rebuild Nepal."

In all, it was a very successful year with very good attendance.

Worship Associates

Scott Mansfield

The worship associates are Scott Mansfield, Kathleen and Joseph Watson, Bryan Davis, Deb and Lance Maynard, Maria Kell, Sammie Wilson, and Marian Patterson. We assisted the minister with most services and also were in charge of one service once a month. Special thanks to Kathleen Watson for leading the choir, and Scott Mansfield for accompanying the hymns and finding musicians to play for church.

Choir

Kathleen Watson

The Peoples Choir has some really good stuff to look back on over the past year.

Bryan Davis, Kris Davis, Abram Doval, Megan Jones, Bill Kilbourn, Scott Mansfield, Sherri Martin, Lorrie Metcalf, Judy Price, and Arianne Waseen have been great sports all year – learning songs in Spanish and Zulu, helping me figure out timing when I get stuck, tackling lyrics to song parodies, and even (Gasp!) *walking while singing* the last song of our last service of the year.

On another happy note, the Peoples Choir is getting bigger! (The group, not the individual members of it.)

We welcome the voices of newcomers Sherri and Lorrie – and we'd welcome yours, too.

"Well, yes, Kathleen," you may say, "but it's different for me. I haven't sung in a choir ever/for years/in this lifetime, and I can't read music, and blah blah blah."

"Well, then, dear prospective choir member," I say in reply, "you're in good company. Several of us do better learning songs by hearing them than by reading the music, and there's no time like the present to grow your brain by doing something you haven't done before."

Still not convinced you're a singer? Then maybe you'd enjoy being our resident noisemaker. We've got a bunch of percussion instruments – drums, shakers, claves, and tambourines – that don't get played nearly enough. Your name might just be on them.

Not feeling noisy? You can still participate in the choir by sharing your favorite music with us; just leave the song titles on the Suggestion Board in the Ely Room. If we have enough voices to cover all the parts, we'd be happy to check them out. (Are you *sure* you don't want to be one of those voices next year?)

Thanks for your support and appreciation of our efforts. It makes all the work worthwhile.

Archives Committee

Clarice Krippner

In order for us to know who we are today, we need to have an understanding of who we have been. Our history can show us how we have evolved in belief and practice and how we have attempted to assert a positive influence on the world around us.

The Archive committee of Peoples Church has taken on the mission of preserving and sharing that history with our members.

Accomplishments this year:

- Updating and placement of the Ministerial Plaque in the upper hall
- Near completion of the content of a history timeline of our church from primary sources, including **The Voice**, annual reports, personal interviews, and newspaper articles
- Continued sorting and organization of our collected history and our space
- Retrieval of information for leadership of the church
- Securing sensitive artifacts in appropriate archival materials
- Preparation for an oral history project, especially targeting our oldest members and those most knowledgeable about the past

Continuing needs:

- Funding to turn our history timeline content into a more permanent display
- Tech expertise and equipment for the safe electronic storage of documents, oral history, photos etc.
- Continued collection and donation of our historical documents and artifacts

Sources of support:

Aside from repurposed filing cabinets, metal shelving, funds for the ministerial plaque, and some office supplies, we are self-funded by our committee members.

Current Active Members:

Judy Price, Bill Hart, Dorothy Hershner, Joye Winey, Bev Philpott, Marcy Mattison, Jan Federer, Jan Watkins, Mary Ballantyne, Ron and Toni McGraw, Shirley Alexander, Sarah Sutton and Clarice Krippner, advised and inspired by Pam Edwards, and David Miessler-Kubaneck

Let us step into the future armed by the wisdom of what we have learned from the past. We must not forget the mistakes that have been made, the heroes who have lived among us and the work that has been accomplished.