Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Sterling

Summer 2016

Community

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Summer Service Schedule
One service at 10:30 AM
June 5 - September 4.
Two service Sundays will commence again on September 11

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MINISTER'S MESSAGE

A Growing Community

Rev. Anya Sammler-Michael

This June marks the end of my ninth year serving the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Sterling. In that time, we have worked together to choose a new name, build two mission and vision statements, add physical space, aesthetically improve our sanctuary in countless ways, and triple the number of regular attendees to our congregation. Whew! This is not all that we have done together. We have also buried dear ones, married dear ones, and dedicated dear ones in naming ceremonies. Indeed, every time we gather, we do something meaningful together, making it impossible to recount all the powerful moments and achievements we have shared.

When we began holding a second Sunday morning worship service last September, we affirmed our commitment to keep our doors open to all who seek a free faith community. The results were amazing. Yes, we now serve 30% more souls on any given Sunday and welcome twice the number of visitors annually then we did before—but our growth is not only in numbers.

When I returned from my sabbatical on July 1, I returned to a congregation that had not only survived but thrived in my absence. Lay leaders had assumed an even greater responsibility of ministry for our congregation, proving their abiding commitment to a vital future for UUCS. When we began holding two services, our staff, leaders, and volunteers had to work doubly hard to continue to serve our visitors and community members with the same care as they had before. It was a difficult beginning, but not without joy. There were of course mistakes and missed opportunities, but the dedication of all these individuals brought us through the time of transition with agility and grace.

It is my understanding that our bold new congregation—reborn after this last transition—requires new mission, covenant, and vision statements. To this end, many of us worked arduously to prepare these statements for this year's annual meeting. Change is constant. A new mission, covenant, and vision will be our rudder as we continue to sail these changing seas. The following statements were affirmed at the annual meeting.

MISSION: Seek, Love, and Serve Boldly

COVENANT: This congregation is dedicated to the proposition that behind all our differences and beneath all our diversities, there is a unity that binds us together and makes us one in spite of time and death and the space between the stars.

VISION: We envision UUCS as…

- A Faith Community known throughout Loudoun County Virginia and beyond as an inclusive and enduring refuge for diversity in all its forms.
- A flagship congregation, being the change we wish to see in the world, nurturing all souls for courageous and transformative ministry.
- An evolving community breaking barriers to serve an increasing population within and beyond our walls.

I wish to thank our Board, and our congregation full of committed attendees, who make UUCS a force in Loudoun County and beyond for justice, for beauty, and for good.

In Faith,
Rev. Anya Sammler-Michael

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Our Community

Paul Roche
Board President

I am Paul Roche, President of the Board of Trustees at UUCS. I was President once here a long time ago, 1995 to be precise, when we had about 25 members and a budget of about $12,000. As of today; we have 113 members and a budget of about $321,000. It is a great pleasure to deliver the President's message after such a wonderful year. It started in July with the return of Rev. Anya from sabbatical. But she barely had time to be re-acclimated when we made the change to two services in September. By any measure, going to two services was a resounding success. Opening our doors a second time on Sunday morning obviously met a pent-up demand for alternate times. Since we started two services in September 2015 total attendance is up 40%, an amazing statistic and if you want another one, since January of this year, 431 individual people have walked through those doors and attended a service. That does not include duplicates. 431 individual people! Probably that means there is still a lot more pent-up demand. But that's for my successor to worry about.

But it is not all about numbers of people; it is also about our internal community and our outreach. I'm going to tick off a few things we've led, hosted, or participated in since last July:

1. Community Table of Loudoun
2. Witness for our Muslim neighbors at Leesburg Courthouse
3. Hypothermia Shelter
4. Veterans Breakfast
5. Sign Language Class
6. Various Adult RE classes
7. The Jazz/Poetry Slam
8. The Gay Men's Chorus Event
9. The annual auction
10. Help Portrait Day
11. Black Lives Matter Rally

Intergenerational Events

1. Raptor Night
2. Holiday Craft Night
3. Game Night
4. Square Dancing Night
5. Chinese New Year's Party

Outreach

1. We staffed our own booth at Sterlingfest
2. Aong with 4 other area UU churches, we staffed a booth at the NOVA Pridefest

I'm sure I've missed some. And if you want more info about any of these events and how to get involved, see me when you can.

JUNE, JULY, AND AUGUST JUSTICE ALLOCATIONS

In June, half of our Sunday morning offerings will go to Loudoun Interfaith Bridges. The purpose of Loudoun Interfaith BRIDGES is to bring together communities of different faiths to collectively address common challenges and to build bridges of understanding and respect between diverse religious and ethnic entities. For more information, talk to Yvonne Centala or visit *www.loudouninterfaithbridges.com*.

In July, half of our Sunday morning offerings will go to the Loudoun Free Clinic. The Loudoun Free Clinic was established to serve low-income, uninsured residents of Loudoun County. The clinic provides quality medical care at no charge to adults (ages 18–64) with acute and chronic illnesses by relying almost entirely on volunteers—physicians, nurses, and others who give freely of their time—and on the generous support of our community partners and private citizens. For more information, talk to Judy Gruner or visit *www.loudounfreeclinic.org*.

In August, half of our Sunday morning offerings will go to Help Portrait. UUCS will host a portrait event on Saturday, December 5, from 9:00 am to 2:00 pm, to provide families who have limited means a family portrait for the holidays. These portraits aren't for a portfolio, website, or sale. It's about giving people who otherwise couldn't afford photography a chance to capture a moment, a memory…and a whole lot more. For more information, contact Dave Hearn or visit *http://help-portrait.com/about/our-mission*.

In March, we collected $762.50 for Meadville Lombard Theological School.

In April, we collected $625.50 for VSA Arts International.

In May, we collected for the Wounded Warrior Project, a cause chosen by the youth group. (More information can be found at *www.woundedwarriorproject.org*.)

RELIGIOUS EXPLORATION

Looking Back on the RE Year

Linda Weaver, Director of Religious Exploration

The Religious Education program this year focused on transitioning to two services and providing all ages events to build connections across the generations and among congregants attending different services. Sundays mornings were very full this year, and the transition to two services was smoother than expected. The additional service provided the opportunity to add a children's class that explored UUCS's monthly themes. On most Sunday afternoons, we also held the 7th–9th grade Our Whole Lives comprehensive sexuality class. To help people connect beyond Sundays and beyond the congregation, Kathy Ashland organized four First Friday events and children's activities for two outreach events. These events engaged more children and adults than ever before, deepening their experience of our fun and caring UUCS community, allowing them to meet and serve people in our local community, and creating wonderful memories.

More than 60 children and teens took part in the religious education program. Two hired teachers and twenty volunteers provided Sunday morning programs for preschool and elementary school age children; six adult volunteers provided programs for middle school and high school teens.

9:30 Class and UUCS Monthly Themes

This year we introduced a class focusing on the congregation's monthly themes, such as change, gratitude, peace, freedom, and wisdom. During the 9:30 service, children in preschool through sixth grade enjoyed exploring these themes together. They learned from and supported one another as they experienced the topics through games, role play, drama, art, science, and other activities. The older children became valued mentors who developed leadership skills and learned about the topics as they helped the younger children, and the younger children learned more and gained greater self-confidence due to this support. No matter their age, their experience within this class equipped children to further explore the monthly themes with their families and other people within the congregation.

Members of the UUCS children's choir performs at the RE Service on June 5th

7th–9th Grade Our Whole Lives

15 young teens, including two from the UU Church of Reston, took part in the 7th–9th grade Our Whole Lives, a comprehensive, holistic, justice-based sexuality program developed by the Unitarian Universalist Association and the United Church of Christ. The curriculum is designed to equip youth with the knowledge, attitudes, and skills to make healthy sexual decisions. The group met with their trained and dedicated facilitators—Clarisa Marcus, Karen Hawley, James Gealy, and John Gallant—three Sunday evenings a month from October until May. During the 26 sessions, the students obtained accurate information about human sexuality, practiced speaking up for their own values, and gained knowledge that will help them develop healthy relationships and exercise responsibility for themselves and others. This major commitment by the teens, their families, and their facilitators was celebrated with a ceremony and potluck following the final session on May 1. Congratulations to the graduates, and thank you to their facilitators who made this life-altering program possible!

We are currently offering 7th–9th grade Our Whole Lives in a three year rotation, so expect to see it again in 2018–19.

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ORDINATION DAY

Rev. Andrew Mertz

Congratulations Rev. Andrew!

Rev. Anya Sammler-Michael gave a resounding Charge to the Minister.

Sunday, May 22, was an historic day for UUCS. After morning services featuring the combined UUCS and Accotink choirs and our annual meeting, at 4:00 pm our congregation gathered to ordain our former intern minister, Andrew Mertz. The ceremonies began with a solemn processional by local area clergy, marching to the hymn "Rank by Rank." Music from the combined UUCS Adult and Youth Choirs and jUUStUUS band members featured Kris Adams' rousing rendition of Queen's "Somebody to Love." Rev. Scott Sammler-Michael's sermon was followed by our Board of Trustees President Paul Roche performing the Act of Ordination. On behalf of the congregation and the Prayer Shawl Ministry, Yvonne Centala presented Andrew with a prayer shawl and Noel Miriam and Episcopal Minister Annie Pierpont Morgan (Andrew's wife), presented a stole that was also made by the Prayer Shawl Ministry. All in attendance participated in the traditional Laying on of Hands followed by Rev. Anya Sammler Michael's Charge to the Minister.

These events occurred thanks to detailed planning over an extended period of time. Guided by Andrew and Rev. Anya, the Ordination Team—consisting of Steve Dick, Rosalie Clavez, Albert Pucio, Allie Roche, and Paul Roche (ex officio)—met multiple times to plan many aspects of the ordination, with essential help from many groups in the congregation, including Dorine Diconti's hospitality team, the decorations team, the music leaders, and performers. Congregation members too numerous to mention helped with setup, cleanup, child care, photography, and other tasks. It all resulted in a world-class UU Ordination. Congratulations Reverend Andrew! And congratulations UUCS.

Want to share something in the Fall newsletter?

- **Reflections or articles related to this fall's liturgical themes, *journey, covenant,* and *mercy***
- **Announcements (including those related to events that will take place in September, October, November, and early December)**
- **Recent photos taken at UUCS or during UUCS events**

Please send anything you'd like to include to *newsletter@uusterling.org* by August 15 .

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Multigenerational Events
Kathy Asland

Our goals this year included continuing to offer opportunities for members and friends of our church to engage with each other and the wider community, outside of our Sunday services, in meaningful and enjoyable ways. We hoped to increase the number of events we offered, include new types of events, and see a consistent increase in the numbers of people involved in and enjoying our events. We are happy to report we have met all our goals. The events we offer fall into two categories, those like our First Friday events, which take place at our church and usually involve mostly people from our congregation, and those like HELP portrait day, which involve members of our church engaging with people from our extended local community. In both types of events, we saw a marked increase in the numbers of participants contributing to their success.

Our First Friday nights included themes like a game night, the holiday decorating party, a Chinese New Year celebration, and square dancing. We also helped out with the campfire stories and a raptor night with the Raptor Conservancy. We consistently saw at least 25–35 participants. We also noticed an increase in attendance by new visitors and by people within our congregation who have not traditionally attended these events.

Our community outreach events included providing crafts and conversation at the UUCS booth at Sterling Fest, providing and leading crafts at the HELP Portrait day, and walking in the Martin Luther King Jr. march in Leesburg. We are especially proud of the fact that a record number of us marched despite brutally cold conditions. We also saw an across the board increase in the numbers of volunteers who helped us reach out to the community, including the Girl Scouts of Heather Suri's troop assisting other children in making crafts the entire morning of the HELP portrait day.

Children's Religious Education topics and a list of programs and events for children and families is on the calendar at the UUCS website, www.uusterling.org.

Rev. Andrew Mertz gives the Benediction with his wife, Rev. Annie Pierpoint Mertz, looking on.

JUSTICE OPPORTUNITIES

Want to change the world? We do this a little bit every day, in multiple ways, at UUCS. Visit the new Justice Corner in the Fellowship Hall and contact Liz Miller, Justice Coordinator, to get involved: *liz@millerhousehold.com.*

Members of thechildren's choir perform perform at the service

An impressive group of clergy took part in Andrew's ordination. Several shared that this was the best ordination they'd ever attended!

SAVE THE DATE!

Northern VA Unitarian Universalist Fun Fest
September 24,11:00 AM–5:00 PM
Accotink Unitarian Universalist Church

REFUGEE INITIATIVE

UUCS is planning to work with UU Fairfax and other congregations to co-sponsor a refugee family. We serve these "UU Ideals At Work" in helping a refugee family:

- The inherent worth and dignity of every person
- Justice, equity and compassion in human relations
- The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all.

Here are the ways in which you can help:

Some Basics:

- Stock the Pantry: Purchase groceries
- Arrival: Pick up from the airport and welcome family
- Welcome Meal: Prepare a meal to enjoy upon arrival at their new home

Education:

- Health: Accompany to medical appointments
- Conversation: Focus on developing English skills
- Financial Education: Facilitate financial education
- Job Development: Help with employment preparation

Friendship:

- Transportation Assistance: Arrange for transportation
- Community Guide: Help teach about new community

To learn more, contact Social Council Lead *Liz Miller, Roshan Chaddha,* or *Rev. Anya*.

Board President, Paul Roche, presented the Act of Ordination to Andrew Mertz

One of the most powerful parts of the ceremony was the Laying on of Hands

SUMMER RE

Journey Through Our National Parks

Celebrate the 100th anniversary of the U.S. National Park Service by attending or helping in summer religious education. This PK–6th grade program will be held at 10:30 am on Sunday mornings from June 12 through August 28. If you would like to assist one Sunday, contact Linda Weaver at re-director@uusterling.org.

Prayer of Ordination, presented by Rev. Sarah Gettie McNeill and Rev. Scott McNeill.