

**First Unitarian  
Universalist  
Church of  
Houston**

**Staff**

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- REV. D. SCOTT COOPER
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**ANNUAL REPORT**  
2020-2021

**First Unitarian  
Universalist  
Church of  
Houston**



# Board Report

The past year presented First UU with a variety of challenges nobody could have predicted, but we didn't let that stop us. Instead, we came up with new and creative ways to keep our community in contact with one another and working together, and we managed to accomplish several truly great things as a congregation!

A few of these major achievements include:

- BLM Vigil – held vigil in front of the Museum District campus for 6+ months to draw awareness and support
- Get out the Vote – Almost 280 volunteers made contact with 42,000 voters and collaborated with 11 churches in Texas and Arkansas
- Spanish Language Services – held three services to date with plans to grow
- Online Programming Success – YouTube/Facebook – 8,000/9,000 households/likes
- 14,000 liters of water delivered to low-income communities following arctic storm
- Raised >\$18k to help two black owned and operated agricultural businesses replant following the storm
- New Members! 19 new members since July...during a pandemic!
- RE – continued strong youth and adult programs with 25 online

groups averaging 164 participants per week

- Music – unbelievably creative and high-quality music program supporting our online services
- Reopening Readiness Campaign – successfully raised \$268K of the \$275K goal (that's 97%) a month before the June 30 deadline!
- To name only a few of our accomplishments...

While the staff and the entire congregation have been carrying the load previously mentioned, the Board has largely been at work focusing on implementing the Developmental Goals we adopted at last year's meeting.

## Identity – Mission/Vision/Covenant

We have begun to dedicate time in our regular Board meetings to the important work of determining who we are, where we are going, and what is important to us in order to craft a mission, vision, and covenant that are current and relevant to our plans for the future. This is an ongoing process that we will be engaged in for the next 12-18 months, and will include the entire congregation in meetings and discussions similar to those we held to determine our developmental ministry goals.

## Governance, Ministry, Administration

We adopted our new Governance Policy in August, and created several permanent committees that are not only critical to the health and functioning of the church as a whole, but provide opportunities for our members to be engaged – something that many congregants expressed was missing from our prior governance model. The standing committees include Governance, Personnel, and Finance, each filled with several talented and dedicated members of our congregation.

## Multiculturalism, Anti-racism and Inclusion

We have established the Transformation Committee, which is specifically dedicated to guide the congregation in its discernment of the proposed 8th Principle. In the event the congregation votes at a congregational meeting to affirm the principle, the committee will advise and assist the Board on governance changes, potential staffing, and accountability, with the intention of aligning the institutional framework of First Church with this principle. Several dedicated, diverse, and talented members of our community are now beginning this important work.

## Multi-site Model

As we began to explore our developmental goal related to Multi-Site and the options available to us, a core group of individuals from the Thoreau Richmond Campus expressed an interest in branching off into a new independent congregation in Fort Bend County. A non-binding poll of the members primarily associated with the Thoreau Richmond Campus indicated that 57 of the 68 members polled were in favor of establishing a new independent congregation. As a result, the Board passed a Resolution recognizing the results of the poll and supporting these members in establishing a new independent congregation. A Transition Team has been created to establish the new congregation, which is intended to be named Thoreau Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Fort Bend. The work of separation and transition of the new congregation is progressing and is intended to be completed on or before June 30, 2021. It is very important to note that this is absolutely considered a successful outcome of our years in relationship as a Multi-Site model. While we are sorry to see them go their independent way, we are also very excited for our friends, and wish them the best as they move forward with their vision to be “a beacon of liberal religion shining brightly on Fort Bend”.

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# Agenda

Welcome – The Rev. Dr. Colin Bossen

Call to Order – Kelly Brown, Board President

Appointment – Parliamentarian, Process Observer, Time-Keeper

Minutes from Annual Meeting June 14, 2020

Presentation: The State of the Church / Annual Report – Kelly Brown and the Rev. Dr. Colin Bossen

Presentation: Slates of Candidates for Board and Nominating Committee

Presentation: Explanation of Budget for FY 2021-2022 – Kelly Brown

Adjourn

*“The world always contains the possibility, the spark, of love and beauty, this I preach, this I know, and this I invite you, I remind you, now to take time to find.”*

The Rev. Dr. Colin Bossen



# Letter from THE SENIOR MINISTER

This past year has been difficult and stressful. I struggled more with my ministry and in my personal life than I have at perhaps at any other point. In this, I was by no means alone. I suspect that for almost all of us the pandemic has marked the most challenging period we have known. For me, personally, the community of our congregation and the broader communities of Unitarian Universalism have played a vital role in helping me make it through. I am eager to see you again and delighted that we are holding our annual meeting in-person and resuming in-person worship on July 11th.

Despite, or probably because of, the difficulties of the hour, the year has been filled with numerous accomplishments for First Church. In these pages you'll get a chance to read about the impressive work of the Board, the Justice Coordinating Council, the Community Projects Team, the staff, and, well, just about everyone affiliated with our congregation. I am especially proud of our pastoral care work and the fact that we were able to make it through these last months without laying off a single part or full-time staff member. All of these accomplishments have left me somewhat astonished at the level of commitment so

many of you have to each other, to the congregation, and to the wider community.

I suspect that First Church's achievements in the last months have positioned the congregation to grow in our spiritual depth, collective impact, and, quite possibly, numbers in the coming fiscal year. From the rather crude perspective of data, we have had a greater impact than congregations many times our size. Our online YouTube programs, which included worship, connected us with over 8,000 households and our Facebook audience grew to over 9,000 people. We also brought in a steady stream of new members, including several families with children. All of this should position the congregation to make progress on its developmental goal of growth and membership engagement, phrased as the question "More people should be here with us — how do we engage them?," in ways that it has not in recent years.

On a personal note, throughout the pandemic, I have continued to have an active presence in scholarly and social justice conversations. I was awarded a contract by the Dutch academic publisher Brill to write a book on Unitarian Universalist Theologies that should be out mid-2023, and I gave online talks at Rice University and for the Anti-Defamation League and Move to Amend. My father and I published an article on the photographer Leonard Freed with the Danish photography

magazine KATALOG. With Mark Vogel, I also led worship at the Rothko Chapel. I was able to arrange many of the guests for our online forum through the connections I made during these activities. Our forum guests included.

The forum is one of the many programs coming out of the pandemic that we plan to continue. As you will see in these pages, our new governance model has us doing something different for planning for the upcoming year. Working with the Board, the staff, and in conversation with many of you, we have put together an annual plan of ministry. You will note that it does not include plans for multi-site ministry. Many people affiliated with the Thoreau-Richmond campus have decided to form a new congregation. We wish them well in their efforts and look forward to collaborating with them in the future.

Our aspirations for the next twelve months are bold. I also think that they are exciting and achievable. I can't wait to work on them with you. I see the future of First Church as bright and the congregation as growing in our ability to impact both our region and our world.

I look forward to building that future with you!

love,

The Rev. Dr. Colin Bossen

# Annual Plan

## FOR MINISTRY

### Reopen for Worship and Program Activities

Resume in-person services and program activities as soon it is safe to do so:

- implementation of safety guidelines for protection of congregants and staff from COVID;
- redesign of worship for both safety and to include elements that have proven especially successful during the pandemic (specifically more art and a greater variety of music);
- resumption of in-person religious education programs for both children and adults;
- completion of the Reopening Readiness Campaign.

### Offer Uplifting and Inspiring Worship

A weekly Sunday morning celebration coordinated by the Senior Minister and overseen by the Sunday Celebration Team:

- guest preachers with national reputations five to six times a year;
- the incorporation of visual art and audio visual technology;
- a focus on spiritual growth, prophetic witness, and liturgical elements designed to help the congregation live out its commitment to anti-racism, multiculturalism, and inclusion;

- two services each Sunday, which will be live-streamed;
- a professionally-led music program including a choir, a band, and two music services (All Souls Day plus one in the spring).

### Engage and Invite Into Membership Those Who Found Us Online During the Pandemic

Leverage the audience expanded during the pandemic to grow Unitarian Universalism:

- continue to offer a variety of online-hybrid programming, presenting some programs via Zoom;
- a well-organized path to membership, with small group ministry to welcome new members and visitors with opportunities for spiritual deepening, fellowship, and social justice engagement;
- modification of our existing web-site, with anticipation of a new web-site in the 2022-2023 fiscal year, to support both online and in-person programs.

### Provide Engaging and Nourishing Lifespan Religious Education

A religious education program coordinated by the Director of Religious Community featuring:

- a weekly Big Idea during the Sunday morning celebration;
- four to six intergenerational services during the year;
- Sunday morning religious education and nursery care for children and youth;
- a diversity of volunteer led adult programs;
- monthly Ministers' forums featuring speakers on vital issues;
- Our Whole Lives on a regular basis.

### Initiate a Spanish Language Ministry

The formal creation of a Spanish language ministry to empower the congregation to better serve Unitarian Universalism in a diverse city and region:

- the establishment of a Spanish language ministry team;
- a monthly Spanish language spiritual reflection circle;
- quarterly Spanish language services, including a Three Kings Day service.

### Reimagine Mission, Vision, and Covenant

The start of a re-covenanting process to craft a mission, vision, and covenant that are common knowledge and inform congregational life and decision making:

- the establishment of a Board Task Force to work with the Senior Minister to guide the process;

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# Assistant Minister's MESSAGE

**“For those who the world denigrates for being who they are, lifting up one another in pride is as virtuous as giving food to the starving.”**

**Rev. D. Scott Cooper**

For the second year, I report during a disrupting epidemic. The pandemic continued to affect nearly every aspect of not only my church work but my personal life. Planned trips during down time were postponed another year, annual conferences were offered only virtually for a second time, and at church our administrative and pastoral duties, as well as our service planning, continued to be affected. I became used to working at home in casual clothes and making pastoral calls via phone.

Of course, finding a rhythm and getting used to something does not make it preferred or even satisfactory. I have very much missed meeting in-person, seeing you in-person, worshipping in-person, having conversations over coffee, and having the option to visit hospital rooms and homes.

My serving two campuses has been done virtually. I have participated in nearly all of our YouTube Worship Services, and many of our Ministers' Forums.

I was able to maintain contact via Zoom with groups from both campuses, and via phone with those who needed a pastoral conversation. While it was difficult to maintain pastoral relationships, not meeting face-to-face, and during such difficult times, we managed to continue connections.

I participated in a few in-person events in June, the George Floyd Rally at Discovery Green and a Prayer Vigil in Fort Bend County. I also spoke at the virtual Fort Bend Interfaith Thanksgiving Service. As you'll read in their reports, the Community Projects Team continued their good work and the Justice Coordinating Council had amazing success with voting efforts.

As we were deep in the planning to reopen both campuses, while prioritizing the safety of the congregants and staff, many of the members who attended the Thoreau Campus chose to begin the process to form a new congregation in Fort Bend County. I was hired as Campus Minister to

Thoreau, devoting half of my time to that campus, and am saddened that relationship will not continue. I wish them well in their efforts.

As I reorganize my schedule, I look forward to devoting more time to Pastoral Care programs, such as a small group ministry and a grief workshop, and Alma and I will be focused on increasing our membership.

These nearly two years of ministry have proven an amazing learning experience. To simultaneously minister to First Houston's two different-sized campuses during a global pandemic is a unique experience, to say the least. It is one that is not taught in seminary, but it does hone one's ability to pivot and be flexible.

As we reopen and reexamine how we are doing church, and doing as a church, I am excited to continue this journey with you, one where we are doing it face-to-face, able to hear one another's voices and see one another's smiles.

Rev. D. Scott Cooper

# Minutes

Minutes from 2019-2020 Annual Meeting of the  
Congregation of the First Unitarian Universalist  
Church of Houston, Texas

***Held June 14, 2020, Via Virtual Zoom Meeting***

**Note: Voting related to this meeting was conducted virtually via a Google Form, a link to which was emailed and available to church members over the course of a week (members could vote after the meeting too). Ninety-five (95) members were represented in the voting and over 90 members voted on each individual vote.**

**Members and friends received the Annual Report via email in advance of the meeting (hard copies were available if specifically requested).**

## Quorum

Based on the constitution of the First Unitarian Universalist Church of Houston, TX ("First Church"), a quorum is met if we have at least 15% of the membership present.

This was easily met and the meeting began after 80+ voting-eligible members joined the Zoom meeting. When the meeting began there were at least 82 Zoom logins including at least 75+ Zoom windows containing church members, some of which represented one member and some

of which represented more (for example, a couple who were both members sometimes shared a Zoom login for this meeting).

After some initial technical notes about using the Zoom platform, ways to ask questions, information on troubleshooting as needed, etc., the meeting was called to order at 1:15 pm.

## Meeting Opening

The meeting was opened with a welcome by Rev. Dr. Colin Bossen, and a Call to Order by Carolyn Leap, the Board President.

## Meeting Guidelines

**The procedural rules for the meeting were reviewed:**

**Procedures were different for the 2019-2020 Annual Meeting because no votes were to be taken during the meeting. Typical procedures were in place if significant questions/explanations became necessary. Generally questions were able to be answered freely as they arose.** Participants could un-

mute themselves to ask questions aloud, or ask them using the 'chat' function within the Zoom meeting. Staff and board members and others made sure all asked questions were addressed.

[For reference, when voting in-person during an annual meeting, typically the adopted guidelines are as follows: No person may speak for more than two minutes at a time. No person may speak more than once on any one item until others who haven't spoken (and wish to) have spoken. After initial presentation, debate time for each item shall be 10 minutes, extended by 10 minute intervals desired by the voting membership (majority vote). Once debate ends, the question is called (and a vote is taken).]

**The congregational covenant was reviewed.**

## 2019 Annual Meeting Minutes

A note was made that all voting items related to this annual meeting were being conducted elec-

tronically via a link sent earlier and still active after the meeting. This included the approval of the 2019 minutes. **[The 2019 Minutes were approved via the electronic vote, unanimously, with 90+ votes.]**

## Presentation on the Church (Carolyn Leap, Rev. Colin Bossen)

This presentation covered many areas of church life, as noted in the narrative Annual Report, including developmental ministry, membership, attendance (initially in person, then virtually), and a wide variety of adaptations due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Presentation: Slate of Candidates for the Board of Directors and Slate of Candidates for the Nominating Committee

**Voting items related to this annual meeting were being conducted electronically via a link sent earlier to church members, and still active after the meeting. This included the approval of the slates of candidates listed below:**

Slate of Candidates for Board of Directors (all three-year terms):

Michael Crouch  
(Thoreau Campus)

Connie Acosta  
(Museum District Campus)

Ron Cookston  
(Museum District Campus)

Slate of Candidates for Nominating Committee (all two-year terms):

Georgette Dredge  
(Museum District Campus)

Deidre Hammons  
(Thoreau Campus)

Sue Prochaska  
(Museum District Campus)

**The Board and Nominating Slates were overwhelmingly approved via the electronic vote.** (The only write-in additions were spelling correction or restatements of those already nominated.)

## Presentation: Explanation of Proposed Budget for FY 2020-2021

**The budget under board consideration for fiscal year 2020-2021 was explained and questions were taken.** Note: The budget at First Church is adopted by the Board — this is not part of any congregational votes.

**The meeting was adjourned at 2:45 pm.**



## RE for Children & Youth and Adult Programming



### Worship

In the Fall of 2020, we added two monthly segments to our online services: the Big Idea and the Family Chalice Lighting. Nine families participated in the latter, lighting their chalice at home and saying the chalice lighting words from their respective religious education groups.

Our Earth Day Service was planned and created by our Youth Group members, Maren, Deklan, Alexandra, Aiden and Savannah. The Youth Group Team adult leaders participants were Kevin, Adriana and Erica.

### Religious Education Groups

Throughout the year, we provided weekly religious education for these RE groups: Youth Group (ages 14-19), YoUuth Unit (ages 12-14) and Spirit Explorers (ages 7-11).

Our *Spirit Explorers* Group explored all the major church themes with a core group of 8 children attending regularly. Additionally, a Spirit Explorers Book Club was started on Tuesday afternoons, meeting twice a week in the summer and once a week during the school year. Adult leaders included: Elsa K.-W. (team leader), Autumn E. and Lisa M.

Our *YoUuth Unit* met all year, with focuses on the sources of our faith, including a few weeks on the major religions of the world. They had a session about Reducing their Carbon Footprint near Earth Day. In the Spring, youth and their families (21 total attended) made a trip to Galveston Island State Park in person for a Beach Clean Up. This group's leadership team were: Sheryl A., Lucy A., Johanna D. and Scott S. From January to May, three youth participated in our online 8th grade

*Coming of Age* program: Asa B, Grace McG. and Everett M. They will share their CREDOs (statements of belief) in an online ceremony and attended the Family Camp at UBarU. The mentors were: Chris S., Eva T. and Bob M., with team leaders: Kathy K. and James W.

Our *High School Youth Group* met weekly exploring each of the UU Principles as well as meaningful topics in Soul to Soul: Fourteen Gatherings for Reflection and Sharing (Robinson/Hawkins). Team leaders were: Kevin F., Erica G. and Adriana G.-W.

For families with *children under 7*, even though different online sessions were offered (from an evening family hour, a reading/games session, a morning reading & games time, a six-week family home gatherings to a written six-week, ½-hour sessions for families), attendance was minimal and all sessions were discontinued. Our volunteer leaders for this age

group included Rick R., Lisa M., Susan S., Catherine H. and Troi F.

### Special Events & Programs

On Easter Sunday, we gathered for an in-person *Easter Parade* with about 32 children, youth and parents. A successful and significant delivery of non-perishables and clothing was made to the Emergency Aid Coalition. Outdoor conversation, sidewalk chalk drawings and a little egg hunt followed.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, the *Parent's Group* (babies-Pre-K) met weekly and while attendance is low, this is an important touchstone for a core group.

*Parent's Night Out* met once online to play games, but then did not continue.

OWL (Our Whole Lives Sexuality Program) did not meet during the



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# MUSIC PROGRAM



At First Houston, our Music Program has been thriving even during the pandemic. Although the past several months have been anything but normal, we have accomplished a great deal, despite the limiting circumstances. In this sixth year as Music Director, I am pleased to share with you some of our accomplishments and highlights.

At the heart of our program is our dedicated Sanctuary Choir. This past year, the choir has continued to meet online bi-weekly for hymn singing, fellowship, discussion on worship topics, and guidance on our ongoing virtual recording projects. The Sanc-

tuary Choir members' dedication has been inspiring as they consistently worked on several recording projects. Recent highlights include the hymns "Lift Every Voice and Sing" and "Jazz Alleluia." The latter was a particular standout, including a guest appearance from saxophonist Evan Burrus. We have also delivered two special Music Services: "The Breath of Our Ancestors" for All Souls in November, and "The Wide Universe" for our sermon series on Humanism in May.

Diversity has also been an active focus on our music programming. Each month, we have offered at least one Spanish-language hymn

and have regularly showcased guest performers of color. Recent performers included Steve Buza singing "We Shall Overcome," Dr. Jolie Rocke singing "Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child," jazz musicians Daleton Lee and David Craig, and vocalist Kenneth Gayle. During Black History Month, on each of the services, we highlighted a work by an African American composer. In March, we did the same for Women's History month, highlighting female composers each week.

Our online music has also included engaging recordings from Thoreau musicians Teruhiko Toda and James

Westfall. Merging our recorded music with Rev. Colin's and Rev. Scott's superb choices of imagery has been such a joy, complemented by Christian Holmes's captivating videography.

In November, our Music Program launched a very successful fundraiser debuting a six-month, music subscription service called "Mark's Music Picks." Subscribers were treated to a monthly collection of five recordings from our Music Program. "Mark's Music Picks" included Unitarian Universalist classics performed by myself, the choir, congregant musicians, James and Teru, and other guests.

A newsletter with special information about the music accompanied these selections. Upon the series' conclusion, donations from sixteen subscribers had allowed us to raise \$1,600 for First Houston.

As Music Director, I can say that this year has certainly been unusual, yet I am proud of the creativity, dedication and powerful music that this program has produced. Thank you for the opportunity to deliver this report on our wonderful Music Program.

Mark Vogel

# Business Administrator's REPORT



It has been my pleasure to serve as the Business Administrator since September 2019. In the past year, I have worked alongside many of the amazing, dedicated members of both the Museum District (MD), as well as the Thoreau/Richmond (TR) campus, to further enhance the beauty of the campuses. We have had a very challenging year to say the least, but I am extremely optimistic about this upcoming year.

## Facilities

Although both campuses have been closed since March 2020, we have continued to undergo extensive repairs to maintain each campus properly. The Museum District campus has required multiple A/C repairs, of which we are awaiting the replacement of four units to be completed by July 2021. Extensive pest control treatments (to eradicate the building of rodents) were successfully undertaken. Treatments will continue monthly to avoid future infestations. The MD Garden Fund was used to renovate the courtyard garden, while restoring the beauty of our fountain. After the February 2021 freeze, both campuses' Garden Teams and I, were tasked with trying to salvage our once beautiful gardens. Luckily for me, help was on the way. The Garden Teams from both campuses and our amazing cleaning services team (Yanet & Roberto) stepped in to save the plants that were salvageable and replaced the others that were not. Numerous pipes were repaired in the commercial kitchen, bathrooms, gas lines (including the installation of valves to prevent sewer smell after storms), and front underground pipes. Currently, there is no main water supply shutoff valve present in the event of an emergency/major leak.

The main water supply shutoff valve will be installed by June 2021. Roof repairs and routine maintenance were completed to prolong the life of the roof, which included minor tree trimming. Also, First Church has undergone several projects attempting to "Green the Building". Michael Morrison has worked tirelessly to change all our bulbs to LED, energy efficient bulbs, as well as many more electrical projects throughout the church. The other members of the MD Facilities Team are Bob Miller, Joe Lach, and Jon Naylor, who have been beyond amazing in assisting me with maintaining the facility. Thanks Guys!

Regarding the Thoreau Campus, we have completed several repairs including plumbing, insulation installation, chimney/roof repairs, tree trimming, pest control, leak repairs, garden restoration, as well as many of the projects on the Special Gifts Campaign list. To date, we have raised \$75,270 of the goal of \$100,000 to complete many of the special projects at the TR campus. A large screen tv was purchased from collections for the SGC to replace the TR sanctuary screen in February 2020. Some projects were placed on hold, due to the pandemic. TR Facilities Team, and many others, have been extremely instrumental in maintaining the Thoreau/Richmond campus. Jan Elias, Ron Hammons, Doug Kohn, Davis Tolman & Johanna DeYoung have extended themselves well beyond the typical volunteer level with many of their selfless acts to maintain the beauty of the campus. I am truly thankful.

In addition to the major repairs, I have begun to declutter/organize the church, paint various rooms, add

room décor, as well as complete multiple small projects throughout the church. The installation of our amazing Donor Wall was completed in December 2020, of which Marilyn Knight so graciously assisted with the project.

Finally, I must acknowledge the work that Ron Cookston does for First Church. Ron assists with just about every area of both campuses now, so I will not list them. I will simply say... THANK YOU!

## Personnel

This year was very challenging for many. I do not know where the church would be without the expertise and constant support of Rev. Dr. Colin Bossen and the best Board of Trustees. They have worked extensively to ensure the best for the churches, the members, and the employees. We have been able to retain most of our exceptional employees, with the exception of our Sexton & Kitchen Aide (Gustavo & Clara) who decided to leave the church in July 2020. Jon Naylor (Administrative Assistant) also retired in June 2020. We will soon be filling the Sexton and Kitchen Aide positions with "2" part-time Sexton positions beginning July 1, 2021, so that the needs of the church are better suited.

## Finances

We are thankful to have received a bequest from the Roy Kveton Estate in December 2020. In May 2020, First Church was also able to receive a Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) Loan from the Small Business Administration in the amount of \$93,140, of which will become a grant once loan forgiveness documentation has been approved. All funds were

used on payroll expenditures, as required. Therefore, I am confident this loan will be forgiven. The Reopening Readiness Campaign began in April 2021 and will draw to a close by June 30, 2022. We have raised \$269,555 of our goal of \$275,000 to prepare our buildings for reopening in July 2021. Thank you to all of the donors who have contributed to making our reopening a success.

Ron Cookston and I have worked with many contractors, volunteers, and staff to make this reopening a success. We have also had several members that have extended themselves far beyond the typical annual pledging. (I would love to list their names, but some are private donors.) Many have called/mailed and asked what they could do to assist other members, while some simply donated to the Minister's Discretionary Fund. Others called/mailed and made special requests to send assistance to others. Thank you to all of the members who maintained a connection with the church in some way. Whether it was the phenomenal doctors on the Health Advisory Group assisting us with the reopening restrictions, Elsa Kapitan-White mailing in handmade masks for the staff to stay safe, Sue Prochazka rushing over during her lunch break from work to water the garden, or even Iris Sizemore (Women's Group) stopping by many times to drop off a slice of cake and just say "Hello"...the list goes on and on about you amazing, inherently great people!

I am very excited about this upcoming year.

I love you all!

Tawanna Grice



# Nominating Committee

## NOMINEES

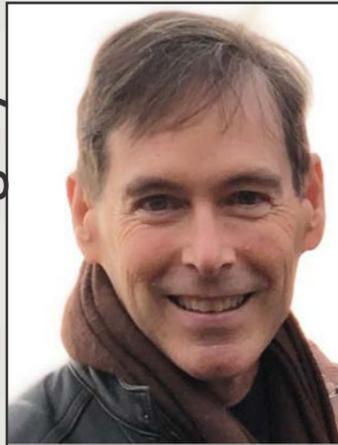
Penny Cerling



In 1995, my four-year-old granddaughter told some other children (in my presence) that she was going to start going to Sunday school. I had her on Sundays, so I had to decide where we'd go. On our first visit to First Church, she made friends with another child. While I came to realize that this church was interested in helping people consider how to lead an ethical, thoughtful life — rather than following a set of rules. We joined a few months later. Years later I met my husband, Jeff Skarda, at First Church.

I've served on the Board, chaired the Flower Committee pre-COVID and have been very active in First Church's neighborhood outreach program (Neighbor to Neighbor).

Dick Doughty



I have been a member of First UU Museum District since the mid-90s together with my partner Kathy Kinson. We raised our two kids here, through all the levels of RE. I was on the RE Committee for a number of years (maybe 5? I don't remember!), taught pre-Ks, and was acquainted closely with Spirit Play since its conception. I'm also the one taking class photos of the RE groups since the late 90s. I welcome the opportunity to serve on the Nominating Committee because it looks like the times toward which we are moving will challenge the church to cultivate leadership more widely than ever, and I can't think of many more interesting conversations than the ones that might help that along.

Linda Richardson



Linda has been an active member of First UU since 2004. She has served in various leadership positions including the Board of Trustees, the Nominating Committee, the Audit Committee, and the Membership Committee. She recently was a co-lead on the Governance Task Force which drafted new Governance Principles for First UU. Linda retired in 2019 from a long career in business consulting, program management, and business strategy development. She has three children, four grandchildren and has been married to her husband Doug for almost 40 years. She is highly committed to the long term success of First UU.

Chris Scott



Chris Scott has been a member of First UU since 2013. He and his wife Celina have two human children, Chloe (age 12) and Connor (age 10) and a dog (Patch, age 6). Chris is a counseling psychologist in private practice in the Pearland area. His practice focuses primarily on helping people improve their relationships and works with a diverse clientele. Prior

Lauri has been a member of First Unitarian Universalist Church of Houston since 2006. Lauri originally hails from Buffalo, New York and has lived in Houston since 1981 with her husband of 40 years, Joe. They raised their son Nick who married his wife Kelsey at First Church, and grandson George attends RE when possible.

Lauri has participated in multiple Adult Programs over the years and has been involved with the auction, provided organizational support to stewardship, and volunteered on several social justice efforts. What she really loves about First Church is the community and the liberal, open, and welcoming nature of the

congregation. She has made many close friendships over the years at the church that have enriched her life and is eager to make more friends.

Lauri recently retired from a career in IT spanning 41 years, with the last 18 years at Boeing as a certified Project Management Professional (since 2009). Now that Lauri is retired, she has time to become more involved in the church in leadership roles, something that she did not have the bandwidth to do in the past. Based on her many years of experience in both management and project management, she brings those skills to the Board of Directors. As the church moves forward

# Board Nominees

to entering full-time private practice in 2019, Chris was the Associate Director of Clinical Services at Counseling and Psychological Services at the University of Houston (main campus) where he served for 10 years. When Chris is not at work he is often pursuing his interests in the Star Wars and Harry Potter fandoms.



Lauri Plesur Zuchlewski

with the opening in July, there is a need to identify what path the church takes to grow and flourish. Lauri feels there needs to be open collaboration and communication between the congregation and the Board with transparency to the state of the church, especially the opportunities and challenges.



### FISCAL YEAR 2020-2021

Fiscal Year 20-21 at First UU was totally within the historic COVID-19 pandemic. The church was closed and almost all contact among & with congregants took place virtually via Zoom, email, phone, etc. Also, during this time, a critical national presidential campaign and election was held, George Floyd was murdered by police in Minnesota, the Black Lives Matter movement burgeoned nationally and in Texas, and an insurrection took place at our national capitol on January 6, 2021. With this as the playing field, the Justice Coordinating Council continued its work.

The areas of action the Justice Coordinating Council focused on in 2020-2021 were:

- Protecting Democracy
- Racial Justice and Dismantling White Supremacy
- Climate and Environmental Justice
- Immigration Justice
- UU the Vote and Get Out the Vote Action

Rev. Dr. Colin Bossen submitted a grant application to UUA to support a temporary election organizer at First UU. The UUA grant was matched by First UU and a voting organizer, Karen Speer, was employed for three (3) months to support the Texas UU the Vote network. First UU and TX-UUJM took the lead to initiate the network of UU congregations to work together with UU the Vote on Get Out the Vote activities. Eleven different congregations collaborated. Together we made 138,500 contacts. Sixty-two (62) volunteers from First UU participated in these efforts and overall, 279 UU's within the 11 congregations participated.

### Climate & Environmental Justice

An estimated seventy-five (75) First UU members participated in the Climate/Environmental Justice Action rally.



### TMO Police Reform and Public Education Action Teams

As part of our partnership with The Metropolitan Organization (TMO) members of the Justice Coordinating Council participated on the Police Reform Action Team and the Public Education Action Team.

### Letter Writing, Phone Calls and Attendance at Governmental Meetings

Although we do not have an exact count, throughout this year, letter-writing campaigns to elected officials, virtual participation and testimonials



at governmental meeting and hearings and phone calls to elected officials were conducted. These were focused on City Council, Harris County, Texas Legislature and Congress.

### Congregational-wide Virtual House Meetings

In order to assess the social justice priorities of the congregation, the Justice Coordinating Council held a series of virtual house meetings via Zoom during a one-month period using the TMO House Meeting method. Forty-six (46) members of the congregation participated. Asking participants "What keeps you awake at night?", the highest responses were (1) Racial inequities (2) Mental Health (3) Environmental Justice (4) Civic and Political Action and (5) Health.

### Black Lives Matter Vigil

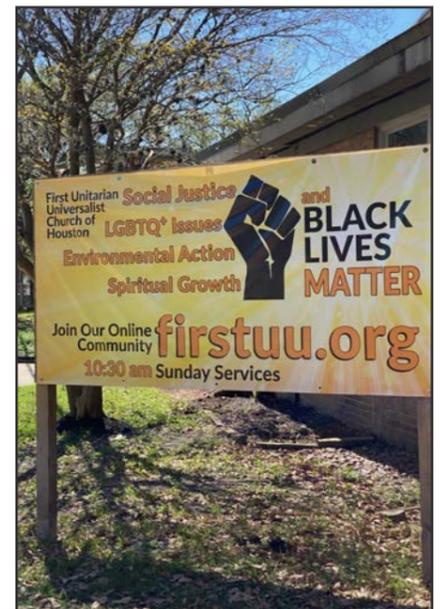
Led by Craig Oettinger and Lisa Murphy, daily vigils have been held at the church since July 1, 2020, and continue to now.

### ACLU Voting Justice Rally

Approximately twenty (20) First UU members participated in a Voting Justice rally at Emancipation Park.

### Get Out the Vote Parade in Third Ward

Several First UU's participated in the "Get Out the Vote" car parade in Houston's Third Ward.



# COMMUNITY PROJECTS TEAM CPT



Although the doors of the First Unitarian Universalist Church of Houston have been shuttered since March 2020 due to the COVID-19, the Community Projects Team has reached out to meet the increased community needs during this pandemic. We responded by continuing our outreach efforts when feasible, while employing CDC guidelines to protect our volunteers and recipients. First UU has continued to fulfill our mission of “deeds, not creeds” through the following projects:

## GULF COAST REGIONAL BLOOD CENTER (BLOODMOBILE)

When the Houston area experienced a critical shortage of blood during the pandemic, First UU members rallied to reduce this shortfall. During COVID, many companies could not organize blood drives, high school and college blood donation efforts shut down and many donation sites were not available. Blood supplies declined to a one-to-two-day inventory and elective surgeries were cancelled.

Each quarter, First UU members have responded to this blood shortage. The bloodmobile

parked in front of our church has received an average of 18 blood donations from First UU Church members, while others have also donated blood at a center closer to their homes.

## REBUILDING TOGETHER HOUSTON (RTH)

Each year, for the past several years, First UU Church has rebuilt two homes for low-income, senior homeowners giving them the opportunity to safely continue to live in their homes for many more years. Although this program was put on hold for 2020 due to the pandemic, we resumed our volunteer work this Spring. RTH was able to rebuild 25 homes and First UU Church provided one of



Yates Nixon carpenter team (Jan. 2020)

Yates Nixon house after preservation (Jan. 2021)



the crews supporting this effort. Due to a shortage of other volunteer crews, RTH’s campaign was reduced from the usual 60-80 homes.

Once again, our crew succeeded in making a low-income, senior homeowner very happy with the transformation of her home! “I had waited three years for Rebuilding Together Houston to repair my home,” Mrs. Jackson said. Most of our rehab work included siding replacement and painting. Fourteen volunteers worked two days to make this happen. Mrs. Jackson was very pleased with the result. (See left image). Hopefully, we not only repaired the rotten siding but also closed the holes to prevent annoying varmints from entering her home. Mrs. Jackson’s neighbors also will benefit from Mrs. Jackson’s improved home appeal. Past RTH projects have also included building wheelchair ramps, replacing doors and windows, and repairing roofs, porches and decks.

## THE RUTHERFORD B.H. YATES MUSEUM

The Signature Project of the Community Projects Team is the preservation and expansion of the Yates Museum in Freedmen’s Town, located in the Fourth Ward just outside of downtown Houston. We are taking a holistic approach with this project by providing a wide range of resources including consultation, house preservation,

project management, fundraising, marketing, public relations, etc. First UU Church members volunteer providing a range of services from museum house restorations, board membership, office staffing and fundraising.

During the past year, First UU Church donated several shared offerings and members also donated several thousand dollars in addition to accelerate restoration efforts. Our carpenters and painters alone worked over 50 separate days with an average of five volunteers each workday.

Why are we making such a huge investment in this project to preserve these historic structures situated in Freedmen’s Town? Because it fits with First UU Church’s focus on racial justice, building racial bridges in Houston and beyond. This is one of the few remaining urban neighborhoods in the United States founded by for-

mer slaves and their descendants. The six Yates Museum houses are Texas State Historic Landmarks and registered in the National Records. Two houses are Sites of Memory Associated to the UNESCO —Slave Route with applications on other Yates Houses pending approval.

Two structures in particular, the Nixon and Lewis houses, have garnered most of the attention and labor. As much of the original materials, as it is practical, are utilized in remodeling the homes. Our preservation efforts for the Nixon House included comprehensive exterior repairs, painting and installation of new roof, floors, walls, ceilings. Preservation of the Lewis House has begun. The roof structure repairs are complete. In June, our next step is a new house foundation and roof.

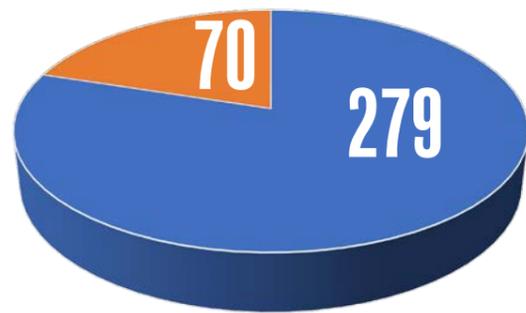
*Continues on Page 26*

# Membership

During this fiscal year, 19 new members joined First UU Church through our online membership process. As of December 31, 2021, First UU Church had 349 members.

## MEMBERS

As of Dec. 31, 2020



■ Museum District  
■ Thoreau

## Communications Report

Data through March 31, 2021

### SOCIAL MEDIA LIKES/FOLLOWERS

Digital Newsletter	747
YouTube Channel	851
Facebook MD Followers	7,109
Facebook TR Followers	916
Instagram	330
Twitter	262

### WEBSITE MONTHLY STATISTICS

Website Visitors	9,839
Unique Visitors	5,403

# Attendance

In March 2020, in-person services were suspended due to COVID 19. Since then, members and friends have been watching our full services online and participating in our online programming (Forums and Online Groups). Some of our most popular videos are presented below with their corresponding viewership as of June 2021.

## SERVICES



## PRAYERS



## FORUMS



## ESPAÑOL



# 2021-2022 Budget

## Income

Pledge	\$530,000
Inspiration Sunday	\$16,000
Shared Offering	\$56,000
Rental Income	\$94,500
Endowment	\$32,400
Auction	\$35,500
Gifts and Other	\$38,000
Reserve Fund Draw	\$81,600
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$884,000</b>

## Endowment Fund

\$ 749,000

## Reserves

\$40,430

## Expenses

Dues	\$37,200
Fees	\$5,000
Endowment Transfer	\$3,600
<b>Sub-Total</b>	<b>\$45,800</b>

## Programs

Social Justice	\$37,300*
Religious Education	\$2,100
Music	\$9,900
Welcome	\$2,800
Membership & Publicity	\$4,250
Worship	\$10,500
Stewardship	\$2,800
Leadership	\$3,800
<b>Sub-Total</b>	<b>\$73,400</b>

## Facilities

Maintenance	\$40,000
Utilities	\$34,800
Office	\$17,000
Insurance	\$27,900
<b>Sub-Total</b>	<b>\$119,700</b>

## Personnel

Staff (FT & PT)	\$645,100
<b>Total Expense</b>	<b>\$884,000</b>

\*Includes Shared Offering

## Community Projects Team (Continues from Page 23)

### MONTROSE GRACE PLACE

Due to the COVID-19 protocols, we provided a catered lunch instead of a volunteer-prepared lunch to vulnerable, homeless youth of various sexualities and gender identities. The fifth Thursday of each month, the youth arrive seeking nourishment and a positive environment. All volunteers must be at least 25 years of age and pass a background check if they intend to do any meaningful work with youth who identify with the LGBTQ+ community.

### EMERGENCY AID COALITION (EAC)

During the pandemic, a few First UU Church members volunteered reduced hours at the EAC helping sort and arrange wearing apparel, preparing grocery baskets and assembling kits containing toiletries. More than 100 clients benefited on any given week. Each week, the EAC publishes a list of needed items. First UU Church members delivered donations directly to the EAC.

The Community Projects Team partners with several other community organizations, but these projects were curtailed or tabled during the COVID-19 pandemic. We are excited that these projects will be resumed in the coming months. Volunteers can join as CDC-pandemic guidelines are relaxed and our church is re-opens.

### CHILDREN AT RISK AND CHILD ADVOCATES

These organizations are dedicated to breaking the life cycle of child abuse through a court-appointed, special advocate system. Our members donate new toys and clothes to the children at Christmas.

### HOUSTON FOOD BANK

We donate money and food for the hungry throughout the year, especially during and after disasters.

### ANSWER NEPAL

This non-profit empowers low-caste, Nepalese children by providing them with quality education and counseling. This program provides basic education for 12-15 years through college. Individual sponsors select their children to fund through school and to mentor and befriend through their formative years.

### INTERFAITH MINISTRIES FOR GREATER HOUSTON

Interfaith Ministries provides weekly, delivered meals to frail and isolated seniors. First UU Church assists with meal delivery to these seniors and with the aniMeals on Wheels program. The aniMeals program was founded to help feed four-legged friends and help seniors not feel compelled to share their very-limited food resources with their pets.

### PLANT IT FORWARD FARMS

This community partner offers economically-disadvantaged refugees the opportunity to become self-sufficient through growing, harvesting and selling produce from a sustainable, urban, micro-farm within the city. Our volunteers help maintain established refugee garden plots at an assigned location.

### VOTER REGISTRATION

First UU Church trains registrars to assist The League of Women Voters in registering new immigrants to vote after they are naturalized.

### RECLAIM OUR VOTE

Volunteers assist the Justice Coordinating Council in signing up voters who might have been removed from voter rolls and in providing information on voting registration deadlines.

### PROJECT ROW HOUSES

First UU Church is involved with Project Row Houses through our Healthy Parenting Signature Project, providing tutoring, mentoring, and nurturing childcare to program participants. The Community Projects Team supports this effort with construction/maintenance projects requested by Project Row Houses.

### SEARCH

This organization provides assistance to people living on the street through job readiness assessments,

skill training and employment assistance. Cases are managed by a skilled employment counselor. Clients are also placed in a home of their own with support and guidance to help them increase their income, improve their health and overall life. Our volunteers provide lunches for SEARCH clients.

### WILLOW WATERHOLE GREENSPACE CONSERVANCY

This park offers recreational opportunities as well as flood control during Houston's heavy rainfalls. The area includes walking trails and gazebos. Volunteers help mulch, prune and plant trees along with litter pick-up to help maintain this preserve for the enjoyment of the community.

## Board Report (Continues from Page 3)

### Growth and Membership Engagement

Growth continues to be a focus for the Board, despite the setbacks of the pandemic. The staff has done a remarkable job in helping to drive this goal over the past year, leading to on-boarding 19 new members, generating YouTube services reaching over 8,000 households, and growing our Facebook presence to over 9,000 "likes," giving us a Facebook presence two times that of First Unitarian Dallas, which has over 1,000 members. We are looking forward to welcoming new friends and members who have met us virtually when we open for in-person services! In addition, we have launched a new Spanish Language Ministry, one of the most successful online UU presences in Spanish in the nation, with engagement from

as far away as Chile and Guatemala. The Board will continue to dedicate resources to this goal in the coming year, and to work hand in hand with the staff to capitalize on the successes of our virtual efforts as we return to in person services.

Thank you all for your dedication, determination, compassion, selflessness, and generosity over this past year. Remembering the challenges of the past twelve months can make it easy to lose sight of our many accomplishments, but we really believe we have successfully laid a foundation that is going to serve First Church well as we move forward. We are counting the days until we are able to be with you all in-person again, and begin the exciting new chapter in our life together.

## Annual Plan for Ministry (Continues from Page 7)

- services, small groups, town halls, and other programs to help the congregation in its discernment.

### Launch a Larger Capital Campaign

The commencement a spring 2022 capital campaign focused on securing parking, deferred maintenance, and other items as desired by the congregation:

- the creation of a master-plan with town halls and other forums for congregational input on aesthetic decisions and possible reconfiguration of physical space;

- the proposed greening of the campus.

### Organize Impactful Social Justice

A commitment to side with love and to build the beloved community in Houston and beyond:

- community projects, shared offerings, and social justice ministries working with The Metropolitan Organization, the UUA, and other partners on issues vital to our region, country, and planet;
- participation in FotoFest 2022 through the hosting of a social justice-oriented exhibition co-

curated by the Senior Minister and a professional curator.

### Strategically Nurture Growing Presence in the Houston Region

- the creation of an advertising campaign by the Membership and Communications Coordinator;
- ample opportunities for volunteer development, engagement, and encouragement;
- consistent communication of an uplifting justice centered message throughout congregational life.

Please contact the Community Projects Team at [communityprojectsteam@firstuu.org](mailto:communityprojectsteam@firstuu.org), if you are interested in volunteering or if you have ideas to expand First UU Church's participation in our community outreach efforts.



year. The UUA highly recommended not having OWL for any age group online. Parents of the grades 7-9 OWL program we were not able to finish met with staff and volunteers and received support and had an opportunity to ask questions.

### Leadership for Religious Education & Family Ministry

This year, our RE Leaders Circle has met quarterly. As part of our mission, the focus has been how to bring the leadership of religious education to parents at home. This group set up the Family Home Circles and Wednesday gatherings for young families.

In order to find out how effective the church's RE offerings were to all families, in March and April, members of this group contacted all families with children between 4 & 11. During these conversations, we learned about these families' needs and provided another opportunity to learn and invited them to be part of our Home Family Circle gatherings.

### Adult Programs

Our Adult Programs Facilitating Team helped existing groups transition into an online format and created new programs. The successful transition to Zoom, training both facilitators and participants for all groups were major accomplishments. Volunteer leaders for RE and even some members of other UU churches received training on using Zoom. Having online programs enabled us to maintain the social connections for people attending our groups, becoming a powerful antidote to isolation. The Adult Programs Team also added the Wednesday Discussion and Programs group.

### Other Adult Groups

The **Changing Women Group** has been very successful online with an average of 13-14 participants each week.

The **Early Morning Book Group** met online and read books on different topics selected.

The **String Band**, with leaders including Lydia L. and Howard H., has met every other Thursday for most of the

pandemic. An average of 9 attendants have enjoyed each other's company while getting a song ready to share.

Our **Garden Team**, led by Hazel H., has continued to water, weed, compost and remove trash from the church building area almost daily, helped the garden survive the winter freeze and had a planting day for new Spring plants.

New to our congregation is our **BIPOC** (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) Group, led by Georgette D. and Kianna T. Online meetings are held monthly.

The **Sunday Coffee Half Hour**, facilitated through the year by Rev. Scott, Carol Burrus, Alex Keimig and Dianne R. has a core group of regular attendees who seem to really enjoy the chance for this weekly social visit.

Our **Green Revolution and Climate Action Teams** planned a few events leading up to Earth Day, including an online make a plant-based meal together and a session about Reducing one's Carbon Footprint. In addition, the Climate Action Team had regular, monthly sessions on environmental action and advocacy.



### Thoreau Campus

Since the pandemic, all online offerings from staff and volunteers at both Museum District and Thoreau have been combined, giving everyone more opportunities for participation.

The Thoreau Campus volunteers offered a Thursday Reading Hour, held weekly and then bi-weekly from April to July of 2020. This included reading a picture book aloud and engaging in a related craft or creative project afterwards. Average attendance was one to two families per session, and did not increase over time. We had very little participation of Thoreau families in our online children's or youth offerings overall.

### Adult Discussion Group

Meeting on Sunday mornings, the Adult Discussion Group hosted an average of 30 attendees each week, covering a variety of topics of interest.

### 2nd Thursday Discussion Group

Over the last year, an average of 14 attendees have met to talk about different topics of interest.

### Women's Book Club

Approximately 10 group members meet on the first Monday of each month, facilitating literary discussion. Selections are often resonant historical fiction or memoirs.

### Adult Enrichment

This group meets weekly for lively discussion over lunch. Over the past year, these discussions have continued via Zoom, allowing everyone to bring their own lunch and connect from home.

### Men's Group

During the pandemic, the Men's Group has been meeting online to enjoy a "bring your own dinner" evening each month, instead of meeting at a restaurant. There is no set topic for the meeting aside from conversation and community.

### Continuing Education

Our Director of Religious Community, Carol Burrus, continued her work in the Credentialing Program for Religious Educators (UUA and LREDA -Liberal Religious Educators Association) She also attended Southwest LREDA monthly meetings and LREDA conferences regularly.

### Weekly Programs

Wednesday Discussions and Programs

Sunday Discussion Circle

Mindful Meditation Practices

Beginner Yoga classes

Saturday Book Study Group

### Workshops and Series

Healing Racism: Compassion, Allyship and Acting for Change

Healing Racism Discussion Series

### Additional Programs

UU Bible Study

Leadership Sharing Circle

Creating Writing Group

### Adult Programs Planning Team

Carol Burrus, Pam P., Jan M., Elsa K.-W., P.D. W., John H., Dianne R., Eric B., Steve B., Margaret K., Eileen A., K.K. G., Katherine M.

### Adult Programs Healing Racism Planning Team

Carol Burrus, Pam P., Eric B., Jan M., Deirdre H., Ron H., Lisa M., Leslie M., Toni H., P.D. W, Steve B., Elsa K.-W., John H., Kianna T., K.C. P.

# Photo Gallery



Thank you to all volunteers for all your efforts and contributions towards the beloved community.

