

## **Annual Report 2024-2025**

Rev. Leia Durland-Jones, Minister of Faith Development

At the end of last August, I returned from my six-month sabbatical with a heart full of appreciation for all of you. The extended time away was a gift and I am still savoring the learnings from my travels, workshops, and retreats. Thanks to everyone who made this time away for reflection, rest, and renewal possible. I am particularly grateful to church member, Rev. Susan Karlson, for serving as the Sabbatical Minister of Faith Development while I was away. I also appreciate Rev. Tim, always, for his steadfast support and collegiality. Things were well-cared for while I was away!

### ***Children & Youth Programming***

Returning to church at the very start of the new church year was intense, as expected. Thankfully, Rev. Susan and RE Assistant, Caroline Heins, and the Religious Education Committee had worked hard to get our children and youth RE program ready for a great kick-off. Our children's classes included the Nursery (Celebrating Me & My World) for infants through 4-year-olds, Spirit Play for 4-year-olds through Kindergarten, Moral Tales for 1<sup>st</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> grades, and Lego UU ValUUes for 4<sup>th</sup> & 5<sup>th</sup> grades. With the church school year almost to a close as I write this, we look forward to our Summer Sunday Fun program beginning Sunday May 25.

Our youth programming included Neighboring Faiths, Coming of Age and YRUU. Neighboring Faiths introduces youth to other faith traditions and teaches how we as UUs can be good neighbors to those whose beliefs differ from our own. This class visited different local faith groups including the Temple Beth Israel, the Islamic Center of Central Virginia, the Hindu temple in Richmond, Ebenezer Baptist Church, and more. Our 8<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> grade had their Coming-of-Age year. In addition to meeting on Sunday mornings, each youth was paired with a mentor for deeper conversation and exploration of our UU faith and values. 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup> & 12<sup>th</sup> graders participated in our high youth group, YRUU. YRUU meets weekly for conversation, exploration, snacks, social action efforts, fundraising for ASP and time together in a safe, welcoming space to be their whole selves. Our rising 9<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> grades will volunteer again this summer through the Appalachia Service Program (ASP) to help repair homes in southwest Virginia.

We continued offering supervised childcare most Sundays from 12:30-1:30 on the playground for Sunday Second Hour. Our church's children enjoy this time for free play and friendship. Providing paid childcare allows parents and caregivers to attend UUPS (aka oops) our parents' a month parent's support group, attend newcomer circles, and participate in other meetings or conversations while their children are having fun and making friends at church.

### ***Children & Youth RE Committee and other volunteers***

I am grateful to collaborate with the members of the Children & Youth RE Committee on our religious education program. They are a delightful and responsive group including Camille Thompson, Cathy Sanders, Kerry Dobransky, Janine Jakim, Liberty Powers, Hilary Moorman, Katharine Maus, Heather Garrett, Katie Dawson, and Terry Epp.

It takes a great number of volunteers to make our children and youth programs possible—over 45 people! I am grateful to all the individuals who showed up this year to lovingly help nurture the next generation of UUs. You will never fully know the positive impact your presence has

made on the lives of the children and youth you have interacted with in our congregation. THANK YOU!

### ***Adult Faith Development***

Our Fall Adult Faith Development program had approximately twenty offerings this year. Included were: the online spirituality book group, the UUCville Women's Friendship group, Lobbying 101, Tuesday evening Buddhist meditation, Kundalini Yoga and Meditation, Tai Chi & Qigong, Support Group for loved one with Dementia, Yogic Medicine: An introduction to Ayurveda, the sister science of Yoga, UUCville Israel/Palestine Learning Circle, Afro Flow Yoga, Exploring the Essence of Unitarian Universalism, UU History: Decisive Moments and Movements, Botswana My Home Away from Home, Everything You Wanted to Know about Natural Burials, UU Parents Support Group, The Benefits of Plant Based Foods, First Wednesdays Plant Centered Health Movie Nights, the Women's Dream Quest, Womenspirit, and Reclaiming Your Power in Frightening Times: Spiritual Practices to Help You Find Your Strength and Defend What You Care about Most.

***Worship & Preaching:*** This year, we continued to subscribe to the Soul Matters materials and followed their monthly ministry themes. It is always a joy to collaborate with Rev. Tim on our weekly "Time for All Ages" and our multigenerational services throughout the year including Water Communion (September 8), Ancestor's Sunday (October 27), Bread Communion (November 24), The Giving Tree service (December 15), and Bringing Our Whole Selves (February 16) and PRIDE Sunday (June 15).

Additionally, Rev. Tim and I co-led several multiplatform vesper services, two prior to the presidential election and then a Service of Lament and Love following the election. It was important to create space for sharing our grief and our fears about the second Trump administration.

I led worship on October 6 sharing about my sabbatical with my sermon "Beacons and Talismans". I led the 7PM Interactive Nativity on Christmas Eve. On January 5, I preached about the ministry theme for the month, The Practice of Story, and continued to reflect on my sabbatical as well as the power of telling the authentic stories of our own lives. In April, I preached on finding our way during these challenging and fraught times. It was delightful to support our 11<sup>th</sup> & 12<sup>th</sup> grade youth in leading worship for the congregation on April 13 as they inspired us all to find joy during times of adversity. More than anything, they were living testimony to the power of our congregation's religious education program. Our Coming-of-Age class will lead worship for the congregation on Sunday May 25. I can't wait to experience worship led by these thoughtful and talented youth. We will celebrate and Bridge our high school seniors on June 1. Our congregation can be proud of the way we honor the children and youth of our congregation and live our values by generously supporting them and their programming!

Intermixed throughout the year was Children's Worship for 4-year-olds through 5<sup>th</sup> grade. Children's Worship is one of my favorite things. I cherish having the opportunity to interact with our congregation's children in such a meaningful way.

We also had special events including after church pumpkin carving, the Winter Holiday Party, our Solstice Lantern Walk, the New Year's Eve Labyrinth Walk, PJs and Pancakes, Chili and Bingo, and the Easter Fun Fair.

### ***Rites of Passage***

It was a delight to officiate at the wedding of Molly Michie and Aaron Hackett on September 7. Molly and Aaron both grew up in the church but did not know each other. They crossed paths later in life and it was a joy to celebrate and witness their commitment to their partnership. I officiated at a wedding in late December for a Queer couple who are not part of our congregation. They reached out to us because they felt the need to legally protect themselves due to the incoming administration.

### ***Pastoral Care***

I am grateful for our wonderful Pastoral Visitors team, under the leadership of Patty Wallens and Meg Dunham, and the support they as well as the CareNet team offer our community. I continue to meet with individuals and couples regularly for pastoral conversations and Rev. Tim and I are in close collaboration on pastoral matters.

### ***Justice Ministries***

While our congregation has many justice ministries and initiatives, the ones I was most directly involved with this year include our annual Giving Tree, Meal Packets, Food Sharing Sundays, IMPACT, and the Mosaic Squad.

This year, members and friends of our congregation donated gifts cards totaling \$4600 of which \$1230 was given to individuals and families in our own congregation and \$3370 was gifted to Greer Elementary's Family Support Team to use at their discretion for students/families in need.

Our Hospital Meal Packet Program, under the leadership of church member Terry Epp, has created the opportunity for our congregation's children to make almost 1000 meal packets this year. Meal packets are distributed to individuals who are food insecure while they are in Charlottesville supporting a loved one in care at Uva Medical Center. Our children love making meal packets, especially creating a note for each meal packet using the beautiful hand-made cards provided by Nik Skaggs. This tangible way of providing food to those in need helps our children embody "love at the center."

Our congregation's bimonthly Food Sharing Sundays continue to be a loving way for those who can to share foods and cleaning supplies with those in our congregation whose budgets are tight. It helps us live our values of everyone being welcome, being able to both give and receive, and to share with one another.

My support of IMPACT this year included making sure the monthly RE Committee meeting did not conflict with the Nehemiah Action and to attend the action along with members of our congregation. I also invited Rev. Susan, current Co-President of IMPACT, to weave worship with me on April 6. We talked about the Nehemiah Action at that service and commissioned those attending the action during that service.

Following my sermon on January 5, those at church that day were invited to write affirming messages on cards to be sent to trans folx through [pointofpride.org](http://pointofpride.org). We wrote fifty cards and included a donation from the Ministers' Discretionary Fund to cover the cost to process and ship the binders and femme shapewear these cards accompanied.

I attended two protests this spring wearing my clergy collar and speaking truth to power. There will be more protests in my future. This spring, I've been meeting twice a month with the Mosaic Squad, members of our congregation who are looking at how we can address anti-racist, anti-oppressive, multicultural work (ARAOMC) from the ground up. In these frightening times, we need to be assessing the assets in our congregation – the people and resources we

already have—and identify ways for us to access these resources most quickly and effectively when needed. The Mosaic Squad is managing an email list for people in our congregation who want to be notified of upcoming actions and protests that other UUs might be involved with. We are in the beginning stages of our work but know that these efforts will serve us well regardless of what the future holds.

### ***UUCville Board of Trustees***

I attend the monthly meetings of our Board of Trustees as well as the monthly meetings of the Board Executive Committee. It was a delight to work with Board member, Sylvie Semmelhack, on our very successful Chili and Bingo night. As part of the goals of our Strategic Plan, we are still hoping to create a “Fun & Fellowship Committee.” Additionally, Rev. Tim and I have been in conversations about creating several “Parents Night Out” types of events in the new church year to continue to support our congregation’s families.

### ***Professional Development***

-Our congregation hosted the cluster meeting for UU religious professionals in our region in September, November, and March.

-I attended the Liberal Religious Educators Association Annual Fall Conference virtually in November.

-I attended the Faith and Unity Summit sponsored by the One America Movement <https://one-america-movement.org/> Their mission includes working to end toxic polarization.

-I have become active this year in both Congregate Cville and the Charlottesville Clergy Collective. Rev. Tim and I are intentionally reaching out and building connections with clergy colleagues in our area.

-This spring, I completed LREDA’s Mentor Training and am now eligible to serve as a LREDA Mentor for a colleague in the UUA’s Religious Education Credentialing Program.

-I am participating in a year-long online seminar series “Leadership in Liminal Spaces” through the Centre for Holding Space.

-I will attend the UUA’s General Assembly and UUMA Ministry Days in June.

### ***Transitions***

On March 2 we said farewell to longtime RE Assistant, Caroline Heins, who left UUCville’s employment for a full-time position locally. With help from the Personnel Committee, we conducted a focused search process and welcomed Bryn Malone as the RE Assistant. Bryn began working as the RE Assistant March 16 and it is a delight to have them with us!

What a year it has been! I am so glad to be on this journey of shared faith development and religious life together.

In faith and with love,  
Rev. Leia