



## **Rev. Kristen Kuriga, Minister**

### Annual Report, June 2020

I am grateful to be with you in my second year as your Minister at Saltwater UU Church! It has been a year of creativity, challenge, and transformation.

We started the church year with an amazing celebration of our shared ministry with an Installation service in September. One of the highlights of that day was how many people helped to make it meaningful: from the search team who said a resounding yes to being the installation planning team, to the actors in our story for all ages, including children, youth, members of the Board and Ministerial Development Team,

the many clergy from near and far, our choir, and our musicians. There were countless volunteers who set up chairs, worked the AV, managed the parking lot, served as ushers, baked cookies, and cleaned up. It was not only a celebration of our shared ministry, but a vibrant example of it. Each time I place the stole around my shoulders gifted to me by the congregation, my heart fills.

I came into this second year of ministry with three areas of focus:

Theme-Based Ministry  
Mission & Vision  
Financial Sustainability

This fall we launched theme-based ministry, using the themes and materials from Soul Matters to connect what we are exploring in worship, with what happens in our RE classes and in our small groups. Working with a monthly theme has stretched me to preach on topics I might not have otherwise, and to grow alongside our community as we reflect together. One of my highlights in worship this year has been the creation of multigenerational worship services with Melinda Einander, our Director of Family Ministries. Below are a few of those services, often centered around a story, and including participatory rituals, creative arts, and lots of singing:

"The Dead Are Not Under the Earth: A Multigenerational Service of Remembrance"

"The Blessing of Creation: A Multigenerational Celebration of Birth"

"Dreamers: A Multigenerational Service of Love and Resilience"

I look forward to continuing our work with themes to deepen our spiritual growth across the generations in the coming church year.

I had the joy of working with the mission subgroup of the Board this year to craft a new congregational mission statement. Together, we read through search materials, long range plans, and notes from listening sessions, facilitated mission workshops, drafted potential mission statements, and integrated feedback. This work has been creative, challenging, and inspiring. I am excited about the new proposed mission statement and how it will help us

focus our work and cast a meaningful vision to lead us into the future.

In my first year at Saltwater we faced a major budget deficit. I knew coming into this year that we would need to focus on financial sustainability. As your Minister, that work has included meeting with a subgroup of the Board to develop a process for budget development that is collaborative between the finance team, Board, and the Minister. I also worked closely with the pledge team in preparation for our annual pledge drive. An unexpected aspect of this work was finding a new tenant for the Lighthouse and undergoing a major renovation project. This project was time-consuming! I am so excited that we have welcomed a new partner to our church home: Planting Flowers Learning Center. This daycare and preschool will serve low income families in our local community while also helping us develop greater financial sustainability.

We also had a few other major building repairs, including replacing the roof on the Lighthouse, and repairing the back wall of the sanctuary after dry rot was discovered.

The unexpected just kept coming! In early March, we took recommendations from local Public Health seriously, and suspended all in-person programming and worship in order to slow the spread of the coronavirus. Although it was a difficult decision, it was one that we made as a church community to care for the well-being of our members and the larger community.

I am so proud of the ways that our community has adapted. So many people have stepped up: to make calls and send cards to isolated church members, to deliver groceries, facilitate support groups, and check in on neighbors. Many of you stretched yourself to learn new skills in zoom so that you could attend or lead parts of church life online.

As we started responding to the pandemic, the Board, Operation Leads and Staff team clarified some new priorities for the times we are living in:

Caring

Connection

Communication

Spiritually equipping members to cope with the pandemic/social distancing in healthy ways

Living our values as UUs

We have been flexible and creative. Although we are living through incredibly challenging times, I feel like we are strengthened as a community. We have greater clarity about what matters to us most. We continue to find new ways to worship together, to support one another, and to live our values.

Now, we are leaning in the next place love is calling us: to commit more deeply to the work of racial justice. Our members are showing up to vigils, attending political education sessions, taking action online, engaging in difficult conversations, and starting to get organized in our local community. I look forward to continuing this essential and life-giving ministry alongside of you.