

## **Operation Leads Annual Reports June 2021**

### ***Growth and Learning Report***

By Susan Aigner

The last year began in crisis mode for Saltwater Church's small groups. The facilitators' hard work made them a success on Zoom.

1. The Writers Group, facilitated by Joan Tornow, Mike Yanega, and Debra Valpey, is our longest running group, more than 20 years. They flourished during Covid and entertained us with 2 writing projects. Their very popular "Covid Diaries" is being turned into a book this fall. They also are writing the "Harold and Ogden" serial story.
2. A second writers' group, the Weekend Writers Group, facilitated by Mona Lee, started in March.
3. The Saltwater Genealogy Club, facilitated by Susan Aigner, started in June, 2020. They are not experts; they just share stories and research ideas.
4. Pair Sharing Sessions, started in November, 2020, and facilitated by Janeane Weprin, engage participants in the spiritual practice of deep listening.
5. The Pen Pal Project started in May and is facilitated by Joanne Stonebraker. This group connects by snail mail and uses the monthly Soul Matters themes as their topic.
6. Growth and Learning continues work with the Racial Justice Organizing Team Education Group. They held monthly education sessions July, 2020, through April, 2021. This summer they are hosting a 3 month long book discussion and making plans for fall.

I continue to provide the Thematic Ministry page on our website, and share this info on Facebook and our SUUC email list.

I have participated in discussions of in-person group options sometime in the fall and look forward to this possibility. At the same time, Zoom has served our current small groups well. I expect Zoom use to continue where it is wanted.

## ***Social Justice Report***

By Diane Dobrowolski

Social Justice Operations consist of five teams/programs: Sound Alliance, SCAN (Saltwater Climate Action Now), Racial Justice Organizing Team, Share the Plate, and The Giving Tree.

This was a historic State legislative session! The Sound Alliance, SCAN and Racial Justice Organizing Teams all advocated for bills in the State legislature which addressed climate change, policing reform, and the prevention of homelessness. Many of these bills passed!

### **SOUND ALLIANCE**

Saltwater UU Church is an active member institution of Sound Alliance. Sound Alliance is a collaboration of 23 nonprofit and faith based organizations, labor unions, and education associations dedicated to working for social justice. Some of the issues Sound Alliance has been working on this year include homelessness and affordable housing, immigrants rights and responding to the social and economic impacts of the recent pandemic.

#### **Accomplishments:**

The Saltwater Sound Alliance Team met virtually with 10 State Senators and Representatives this past year to advocate for no cuts to social and health services while the State legislature balanced the state budget during a budget shortfall. As a result, we have begun to build a good working relationship with the legislators in 3 South King County state legislative districts.

Dave Upthegrove, King County Council Member representing South King County, asked Sound Alliance for our support for the Health through Housing ordinance. One member of the Saltwater team testified in support of the ordinance. Our team then met virtually with 5 Federal Way and Kent City Council members to advocate for the Health through Housing ordinance, an initiative by King County to buy motels and convert them into permanent supportive housing.

Several members of the team attend regular seminars with the WA Low Income Housing Alliance and we now have a collaborative working relationship with them. More recently the team has met with 3 members of the new King County Regional Homelessness Authority in hopes of doing the same with them.

The Social Connections Project was launched in June 2020. This program connected volunteers from Sound Alliance institutions with people in the community who are especially isolated due to the pandemic. Several members from Saltwater volunteered for this program.

Sound Alliance hosted 2 virtual assemblies this year, the first one focusing on building relationships and advocacy work with State and local legislators. The second assembly focused on conducting Listening Sessions within our member institutions.

The Saltwater Sound Alliance Team facilitated 8 Listening Sessions with 40 members of the Saltwater church congregation and 5 members of the Bet Chaverim congregation in April and

May 2021. These sessions focused on the impacts of the pandemic on members and their families and community. The results of these sessions are currently being gathered and analyzed.

Move-in baskets were assembled for guests of the Federal Way Day Center moving into permanent, supportive housing. Over \$1,000 was collected through the Share the Plate program and donations from Bet Chaverim Synagogue.

## **SCAN**

Saltwater Climate Action Now Team is dedicated to raising awareness about climate change and to participating in direct actions to reduce carbon emissions, reduce use of plastics and pass environmentally friendly legislation.

### **Accomplishments:**

SCAN continues to post Climate Messages of the Week in our weekly newsletter.

The team held a letter writing campaign to the state Department of Ecology to get them to deny the final permitting for the proposed methanol refinery in Kalama.

The SCAN Team provided extensive information to the congregation on the environmental impacts of owning an electric vehicle.

The team studied and advocated for passage of several climate related bills in the State legislature, such as the WA Strong Act and the HEAL Act.

Several members of the team had their Letters to the Editor regarding climate justice published in several area newspapers.

## **RACIAL JUSTICE ORGANIZING TEAM**

The Racial Justice Organizing Team was launched in June 2020. Its goals are to promote action, develop partnerships and provide education for racial justice.

### **Accomplishments:**

A Racial Justice Stance in the Puyallup area or the Saltwater area has occurred every Sunday since June 2020. This action still continues.

The Racial Justice Organizing Team facilitated monthly education sessions from July 2020 to April 2021. This summer they are hosting a 3 month long book discussion.

As part of the national UU the Vote campaign, a member of this team organized a Saltwater UU postcard writing campaign. Over 55 members of our congregation participated by sending postcards to and phone banking with potential voters in swing states, encouraging them to vote in

the presidential election. This effort continued with Reclaim the Vote, where congregation members encouraged voters in Georgia to vote in their two Senatorial races.

## **SHARE THE PLATE**

Share the Plate is the practice of sharing 50% of the undesignated funds in the Sunday collection with local nonprofit organizations that reflect our UU values of justice and compassion.

### **Accomplishments:**

This program has been trying to engage more members to nominate organizations that they would like to see become recipients. As a result, more diverse organizations have been nominated in the past several months.

We collected over \$1,000 in December's Share the Plate for move-in baskets for guests of the Federal Way Day Center moving into permanent supportive housing. This included donations from both Bet Chaverim and Saltwater UU Church.

## **THE GIVING TREE**

The Giving Tree is a program which provides gifts during the holiday season to families in need at Mark Twain Elementary School.

Due to the pandemic the Giving Tree was virtual this year. SignUp Genius worked well. Fewer tags for gifts were taken, but more money was donated which meant much more shopping, sorting and boxing had to be done by the organizer. This program served 16 families with 39 children at Mark Twain this year. 78 gifts were distributed and each family also received a \$25 gift card.

## ***Stewardship Report***

By Mary Paynter

**Stewardship Operations** To be a steward is to take care of resources other than your own. The five teams that comprise Stewardship Operations are charged with making wise use of all of the material resources of the church. Facilities Team ensures that our buildings and grounds are maintained. Finance team oversees day to day financial matters and makes recommendations to the Board regarding the annual budget. Fundraising teams plan and carry out events that raise money and also build community. Pledge Team plans and carries out the annual drive, working to ensure every Saltwater Church member has an opportunity to learn what our sources of income are, where the money goes, and how our pledges support our programs. The Endowment Fund Team makes investment decisions for our long-term funds.

**Let me briefly summarize the remarkable accomplishments of this Operations Area along with some of the challenges.**

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***Our hardworking and skilled Facilities Team*** has kept the campus in good shape during the shutdown. We are especially grateful to **Jim Carey** for his many volunteer hours cleaning gutters, pruning, fixing toilets, mopping up after a flooded sink, battling Himalayan blackberries, and getting rid of moss. More than a dozen volunteers helped at a fall work party organized by **Jean Ray**. Facilities Team calls on **Jim Morgan** for research on and answers to all sorts of technical questions. Jim never says no even though he is one of the busiest people around. Thank you, Jim

In February, we began outsourcing regular lawn care to a professional maintenance firm. Having some routine work taken care of by outside professionals with their own equipment and tools has significantly lightened the work load of the team. Yet so much more remains to do if we are to see our beautiful property at its best—weeded, pruned, mulched, and tidied, with maybe some refreshed plantings in key areas. **Tom McDavid** coordinated a well-attended outdoor work party on June 5. It was a good start! .

**A disheartening challenge** is repeated break-ins—to offices, sheds, and the sanctuary. Thieves have made off with AV equipment, tools, our safe, and anything that can easily be sold. Facilities Team works with Des Moines Police and the Bet Chaverim on these issues.

**And finally, I am thrilled to announce that as of July 1, 2021, Glenn Andrews** will lead the Facilities Team. Let's support him!

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***What's a Pledge Drive*** with no kickoff potluck meal, no in-person church to remind us of all we love about this community, no colorful posters all around the Welcome Room, and no Celebration Sunday at the end? In a word: Successful. Despite all the economic uncertainties, Pledge Drive raised almost as much money this year as last year, when we were mostly open. Thanks to all who responded so generously. And thanks to **Saphronia** and her creative, hard-

working team. Special appreciation to **Miriam Woito** for her artwork; I hope you saw the animated version! It was memorable.

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**Fundraising** was low key due to Covid. We appreciate **Joanne Stonebraker** and others who piloted an online fundraising effort. Jo Stonebraker wrote: “I’m still not sure if we will be able to have an in-person Bazaar this year. If we do, I imagine it will be on a much smaller scale. I do hope to sell my handmade cards in person at church this November, along with any other handmade items people volunteer to make for the fundraiser. The online Bazaar we did last year was too expensive because of Etsy’s fees and shipping costs, so I will not be doing an online fundraiser again this year.”

Fundraising is included in next year’s budget. We hope to raise \$10,000 for the General Fund. As fall approaches, stay tuned. The Fundraising team will be looking for volunteers.

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**Finance Team**, building on the success of the Pledge Drive, was able to make recommendations to the Board once again for a prudent, fiscally sound budget that preserves all staff salaries and benefits. Gaye Greeves, our always awesome Treasurer, has applied to convert our Paycheck Protection Plan from a loan to a grant. Gaye reported throughout the year that our generous congregation outperformed typical years in terms of fulfilling their pledges.

Finance team thanks Carole Brown for her 10 years of service on the Finance Team and prior to that as the church treasurer for 13 years!

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**Endowment Team** continues to oversee our Endowment, a fund whose use is governed by its Charter. For more information, contact Carol Mohler or Gaye Greeves.

## ***Worship Report***

By Galen Guffy

### **The Challenge and the Opportunity:**

The COVID-19 Pandemic brought a challenge to the Worship Operations staff and volunteer team that none of us has ever encountered before. We had to figure out how to create a multidimensional worship experience for our congregation that was consistent and meaningful while at the same time, entirely remote. It was daunting and at times felt overwhelming, but it also yielded opportunities to collaborate across our community and with other congregations and to discover our own resilience and grow spiritually by forging services and rituals using techniques, tools, and platforms that many of us had never used before.

### **Building Success from Struggle:**

Conducting worship on Zoom was hard at first. We needed to develop our skill sets and garner support. To this end, Saltwater hired Robert Snipes to provide his audiovisual technical expertise for our Sunday services. The Worship Operations Team recruited a dedicated team of Digital Ushers who Melinda Einander trained to assist her, Kristen, Tom, and Robert every Sunday in the digital waiting room, the breakout rooms and backup A/V tech support.

Funds for guest ministers were limited so we collaborated with other UU Congregations to form the Puget Sound Worship Collaboration. Our Saltwater staff got much needed breaks this summer when we would attend church services in the zoom rooms of other local UU Congregations which were always interesting and meaningful. We were also blessed with multiple lay-led services from the members of the Healthy Congregations Team, SCAN, RJOT, Sound Alliance, the Meditation Group, and the Writers Group. These services illustrated our community's commitment to social and climate justice, creative expression, mindfulness, and living by our seven principles and the role these play in our collective and personal spiritual growth. Another very inspiring and personal lay-led service was Janene Weprin's message of *Becoming Authentic* describing her own spiritual evolution throughout her life. What funds we did have for guest ministers we used to bring in an amazing roster of diverse, uniquely spiritual bright lights such as Matt Meyer, Emilie Hartlie, Cristy Cardinal, and our own former minister Reverend James Kubal-Kumoto.

While we kept our UU traditions intact in our virtual services with modified flower communions, animal blessings, and ingathering water communions, we worked on new opportunities for collaboration and spiritual support. Our Thanksgiving and Passover services with Bet Chaverim Synagogue reminded us that the blessings of Saltwater Church extend beyond our congregation to our community partners. Spiritual support for our community was evident in our Saltwater Meditation Group who provided weekly meditation sessions the entire time that we have been operating remotely. The Saltwater CUUPs group (Covenant of UU Pagans) hosted Litha, Samhain, and Ostara rituals in our church zoom room that were well attended by the congregation at large. CUUPs also worked with Reverend Kristen to perform an onsite church blessing and protection ritual after we experienced a series of break ins and theft.

### **The Light at the End of the Tunnel:**

Saltwater has weathered the storm of the Pandemic and, in many ways, we have thrived by becoming more seasoned and resilient as a congregation in the face of hardship. Now it is time for us to focus our attention and energy on the process of returning to church in person. We know that things will not be the same and that it may take time for people to feel comfortable attending in person again. We also want to continue our connection to folks who have been zooming into services from other states and countries. Thus, the return to our church space will be different and we are committed to building a multiplatform church experience that is both physical and virtual in scope. To this end, we are forming a Return to Church Committee that will begin meeting regularly soon to program some outdoor gathering options this summer to help us ease back into in-person interaction in time for our official reopening this Fall. We will also begin researching, planning, and investing in equipment and people power to facilitate a multiplatform in-person and virtual reopening that is inclusive and sustainable.