



Rev. Kristen Kuriga, Minister

Annual Report, June 2020

I am grateful to be journeying with you in my third year of ministry. It has been quite a year: one of challenge, opportunity, and transformation!

We spent this church year navigating the COVID-19 pandemic. Care for our community and the well-being of all led us into a year of virtual-only programming and worship. I never imagined that I would be a virtual Minister! But I am so grateful for the technology that has helped us to stay connected, to care for one another, and to continue worshipping together throughout this year.

I am amazed by our resilience, persistence, and creativity as a church community. In the midst of all of the challenge, loss, and trauma of this year, we have continued to engage in meaningful and life-giving ministry together. Some of my highlights include:

Living into our new mission statement: At Saltwater Church We Practice Love, Foster Connection, Nurture Spiritual Growth, Act for Justice. I collaborated with our Board to develop a series of workshops on each phrase. Together we reflected, engaged in spiritual practice, and deepened our understanding of our mission. After each workshop, I took our learnings and shaped them into a worship service on Sunday morning.

Launching the Racial Justice Organizing Team. We institutionalized our commitment to racial justice by forming the racial justice organizing team. This year we learned together, wrote postcards and phone banked to counter voter suppression, stood on street corners witnessing to our values, and raised funds for the gear lending library of the outdoor preschool. I look forward to deepening this work and following where love and justice calls us.

Collaborating with the Healthy Congregation Team on the new Covenant. At our annual meeting this June we will vote on adopting a new covenant for our congregation. I enjoyed supporting the Healthy Congregation Team and the Board in this work. Our re-commitment to covenant is about centering relationship as the heart of the community. In addition to being part of the covenant process, I have also worked with the HCT and Board to facilitate conversations around tension in the congregation. We are learning how to listen to one another and to engage with conflict in ways that are intentional, relational and constructive.

Facilitating the weekly support circle. When the pandemic began in March of 2020, we responded by creating support circles for people to drop into. This church year the weekly support circle continued on Thursdays. Some weeks it is a smaller, more intimate group, and other weeks, like around the election and the attack on the US Capitol, our numbers grew. What has been consistent has been the depth of sharing, support, and spiritual exploration. It has been a privilege to facilitate this weekly space for connection.

There is so much more that I could tell you about this year of ministry. It has been a rich and meaningful year, but also a hard one.

The pandemic was not the only source of challenge. We also experienced a major break-in at the church, resulting in the loss of all our AV equipment. We had a staff transition in our office administrator position. And we lost revenue due to decreased rental income. What I am moved by is how we are responding to these challenges.

The Board convened a Safety Team, bringing together Saltwater Church, Bet Chaverim Synagogue, Haitian Christians United, and Planting Flowers to identify the safety issues on campus and to come up with practical solutions. In the coming year we anticipate not only replacing our AV equipment, but working towards greater safety for our people and buildings through better lighting and other facility improvements.

During the staff transition, Melinda Einander, our Director Family Ministries, and Gaye Greeves, our Treasurer, stepped in to help cover administrative responsibilities. A team of lay leaders came together to form the administrative search team, and together we brought on an excellent addition to our staff. Katherine “Bubba” Miller, we’re glad you are part of the team!

Although we have been impacted financially by the loss of rental revenue during the pandemic, we are coming through this church year financially healthy. This is due to the commitment and generosity of the congregation through pledge fulfillment and donations. We have also seen generous giving to share the plate, the Minister’s Discretionary Fund, and special projects. The work of Gaye Greeves to convert the Paycheck Protection Program loan to a grant has also helped us successfully navigate a year with so much uncertainty.

As I reflect on this year, I am also looking ahead. To the possibility of being together at our beautiful church campus for in-person programming and worship! This will be another year of innovation, as we learn how to lean into or multi-platform future. And it will take time. We will re-open gradually, prioritizing the needs of children, youth and their families, creating small group opportunities for in-person connection, and continuing to offer opportunities to worship in person and virtually.

So let us go into this new year with hope. With a renewed commitment to relationship. Nourished by the possibility of being with one another in new ways. We have all been changed by this experience. May we find our way forward as a church together!



Melinda Einander, Director of Family Ministries
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This year, my focus has been providing ways for children, youth, and families to stay connected to the congregation and with other UUs. Families continued to be overwhelmed and uncertain of their needs, so I continued trying to reach out in a variety of ways to meet folks where they are.

We offered online summer camps jointly with other congregations, weekly online RE for children and youth joint with Northlake UU, and online conferences for youth with other youth across the country. In the fall I began offering a “church in a box” option, with picture books, crafts supplies, and other materials to use at home, for families whose children were not served well by screen-based virtual connections. Delivering supplies to families also allowed me the chance to offer socially distant pastoral care. Youth leaders also provided care packages to our youth, including bulbs which the youth planted together during an online social last November. Several packages were sent to families throughout the year, as another way to maintain connection. Our parent group continued to meet regularly online, and the families who participate tell me how important it is to have the opportunity to connect with one another. The majority of our families and youth participated in a socially-distanced Easter egg hunt on the church grounds. Families expressed what an appreciated event this was, especially for our youth! The event was a great success in terms of following safety precautions and providing our young people and their parents a chance to connect with one another in person. We hope to offer more outdoor events as a way for young people to connect in person throughout the summer.

This year I have especially enjoyed contributing regularly to the Time for All Ages portion of the service. Collaborating with Rev. Kristen in choosing stories and preparing them for online worship has allowed me to participate regularly in the worship service. Stories help sustain a sense of multigenerational community at a time when most of our adult community is more separated from the ways our children and youth are engaged in the congregation. I appreciate the creativity called for in helping craft these stories. The worship services Kristen and I planned and co-lead this year have been especially meaningful for me, and a way to connect our young people a bit more to the rest of the congregation.

Kelly Blaylock, who has served as our preschool lead teacher since September 2016, resigned from her position last August, due to the challenges of holding classes on Zoom. Her four years of service to our young people and to Saltwater are deeply appreciated. Maia Bjornson has been serving as our lead children’s teacher this year, meeting weekly with the children’s class on Zoom.

Members of the church donated 22 books with themes of diversity and social justice to our Family Ministries' library. Families appreciated the access to new books, which were included in our "church in a box" take home kits. The gear library fundraiser for Little Explorers was another way our members showed support for the young people in our broader community. I designed the webpage that allowed members to easily donate in collaboration with members of the racial justice organizing team.

Families were invited to have one-on-one conversations with me about their experience of church this year and their hopes and family's needs for church for the coming year. In these phone calls, people have shared their struggles and yearnings. I know we cannot meet all the needs, but my sense is that each family appreciates being heard and having their needs taken into account.



Thomas Burt, Director of Music

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This has been a year of growth for me as a music director. Unlike last year, when everything changed abruptly and we all scrambled and improvised, we entered this year planning for a full year of online worship, and it began to feel fairly “normal”. We were able to explore and embrace the many possibilities of the online format.

Staff meetings by Zoom were much easier to schedule and manage, so we got more quality collaboration time. Saltwater staff built a regular rhythm of brainstorming, conferring, and planning, which fostered a deeper collaboration and strengthened relationships between staff members. This level of connection promoted more thorough integration of our various ministries and helped us align our efforts with our church Mission and Vision.

Accompanying hymns on guitar also became routine, so I was forced to grow as a guitar player (it feels weird to even call myself that). I have always been a singer first, cultivating just enough guitar proficiency to get by, but playing every week, learning new songs, and focusing on techniques that would help everyone sing along pushed me to evolve as a musician. I still would not call myself a “guitar player,” but I’m less awkward than I used to be, and I will keep growing.

I think the online format has made us braver about trying new hymns. When we sing with our microphones muted, we aren’t as worried about making mistakes out loud. I’ve been willing to explore more challenging hymns, expanding the congregation’s repertoire of hymns and enriching our worship experience. I look forward to these new hymns becoming some of our “regulars”. Let’s stay brave and sing out boldly as we return to worship in person!

Back in the “before-time”, I used to sing a solo in church a few times a year, and though I always appreciated it when people said, “You should do that more often,” I never wanted it to become the “Tom Show,” because my main job is to bring out and cultivate the musical gifts of our members. This year, I sang 2 or 3 “solos” every week! Of course, they aren’t meant to be solos, we want everyone to sing along, but the reality is, we can’t all hear each other, so you can only hear me. I have to admit, this has been one of the most rewarding aspects of my music ministry this year. As self-centered as it might sound, I just love singing for you each week. It’s a dream come true for me. Ever since I taught myself to play guitar in high school, I’ve always wanted to just play and sing for people, and now I get to do it every single Sunday. I give thanks for this blessing every day, that I have a chance to share my gifts, that I might be an instrument, a channel, a part of something greater than myself, that the Light of Love might shine through me and minister to others.

Thank you for letting me be of service to you this year.



Katherine “Bubba” Miller, Office Administrator

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During the last three months my days have been filled with great joy and a newfound purpose. I have been a member of Saltwater for years and have always felt like it was a welcoming community filled with many distant relatives. When our Search Team & minister offered me the opportunity to serve as your Office Administrator, I realized Saltwater is not a community of distant relatives but a home full of close family and friends.

You have welcomed me with optimism and gratitude. My “first day jitters” dissipated the moment I saw Rev Kristen’s excited smile shine through her eyes above her newest fashion accessory, her COVID mask. I have never felt so instantly embraced and appreciated in my employment history and that feeling is highly empowering.

Since assuming the position, I have been focusing on oiling the gears and getting back into the practice of helping streamline communications and business operations. Melinda, Gaye, Holly, and of course Rev. Kristen, have been valuable assets in showing me the ropes.

The Pledge Drive was the perfect opportunity to roll up my sleeves and dive in. Working with Saphronia, Gaye, Melinda, and the Pledge Team taught me our processes and many of the ways our volunteer teams benefit from office support. I also learned quite a bit about financial management and feel prepared to assist Gaye in managing our finances in the future.

Melinda gave me a crash course in website management and how our newsletter comes to be. After 3 months I am the primary editor and designer of our newsletter. I continue to seek ways to make it more accessible, reader friendly, and overall appealing.

In March I reviewed our communication set up for internet, telephones, etc. and I began working to improve our network while also cutting costs. Since then, I have been exploring new management systems to increase our business productivity and efficiency. With Rev. Kristen’s guidance and the constant feedback from Gaye and Holly, who have been the masterminds behind keeping our membership database up to date and a useful resource, I feel confident some exciting changes are in our future.

You may have noticed; I’ve mentioned Gaye, our Treasurer, quite a lot. She has played a critical role in keeping all things financial running smoothly over the last couple of years. Sure, I came in and immediately jumped into launching our Pledge Drive, assisting with our Fire Alarm System upgrade, and taking on the challenge of our internet connectivity issues, but Gaye kept the lights on. Literally. Gaye’s assistance and guidance has enabled me to delay taking on bookkeeping duties and focus on finding new tools to better assist our membership in building and maintaining relationships. She has given me the time to streamline our processes and be a resource for our volunteers. I am honored to work along side her and look forward to tackling our bookkeeping improvements during the upcoming year.

I'm proud of our community and am humbled by the strength of our relationships. I'm invigorated by our commitment to Climate Justice, Social Justice, and Racial Justice. I cannot wait to see how we evolve into a multi-generational and interactive community that values both the in-person experience as well as the on-line interactions. I'm eager to work with our volunteer teams to implement innovative technology and help us prepare for hybrid services and activities. It has been exciting to see the new ways we have found to connect with those who don't have electronic access, much like our new Pen Pal Program, and I can't wait to see our next discovery. Thank you for inviting me along on this journey. We are going to have an adventurous year.