

# *Committing to Our Future*



*2016  
Annual Report*

*First Unitarian Church of Des Moines  
A Unitarian Universalist Church*

# Pursuing Our Dreams

## Message from the Sabbatical Management Team

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“Whatever you can do or dream you can, begin it. Boldness has genius, and magic and power in it. Begin it now.” Johann Wolfgang van Goethe wrote these words in the late eighteenth century. It sounds as if he is speaking to this church today. Oh, the dreams this church is dreaming!

- ▶ **Your dreams** for the future of this church; Your boldness in daring to dream; The power of those dreams - were captured in the Appreciative Inquiry process used by your Board of Trustees to create the new Ends Statements to reflect what you want this church to become. Together we Experience Wonder, Grow Connections, Live and Love Generously...and Nurture a More Just World.
- ▶ **Your dreams** for what Social Justice can be took bold steps forward this year as we increased our number of Outreach Partners and started volunteering with them, and as we decided to host homeless families in our church next year with the Family Promise network. Generously sharing your time, talent and treasure with our community enriched the spirits of all involved!
- ▶ **Your dreams** of a transformative, authentic, liberal religious experience were advanced with the expansion of OWL for K-1 and Grades 5-6, Wellspring and Soul Matters mini-sessions.
- ▶ **Your dreams** of possibilities - more space, more programming, more developed outdoor spaces – were assessed by the Tomorrow Team with the conclusion we can maintain a facility and grounds appropriate for our needs and aligned with our values at our current location.

We can't wait to see what you dream next!

Your Sabbatical Management Team,

Rev. Erin Gingrich, Associate Minister of Social Justice

Tracy Beck, Director of Religious Education

Deborah Dessert, CPA, Director of Finance and Administration



# Taking a Stand for Racial Justice

## UU's Address Racism in the 21st Century

Several groups developed at First Unitarian to address issues of racial justice, to understand white privilege, and implement methods to decrease the school-to-prison pipeline in Iowa.



Local community activists spoke at two Forums about the Black Lives Matter movement.

**Anti-Racism Collaborative (ARC) of Des Moines'** mission of raising conscious awareness of racism and systemic white supremacy was seen through several endeavors:

- ▶ Witnessing Whiteness course, for 14 people over nine months, made big changes in perception of race, racism, and moving toward an authentic Radical White Identity.
- ▶ The Rev. Mark Morrison-Reed weekend engaged 53 members of the congregation in the historic relationships between systemic racism and Unitarian Universalism.
- ▶ The ARC of Justice Book Club discussed *Dear White Christians* (by Jen Harvey) and *Waking Up White* (by Debby Irving) and sponsored film screenings for *Traces of the Trade*, and *Race: The Power of Illusion*.

*“ARC of DM provides me with a safe place to go deep into questions about how racism lives in me and how racism still enslaves all Americans. This allows me to touch the long-unconscious grief I carry, especially as a human rights activist. Through ARC-sponsored education I have learned and grown tremendously.”*

- Linda Bacon

**The Restorative Justice Group** is exploring the restorative justice process and how it can be implemented through our church and in schools and the criminal justice system. We celebrate that First Unitarian held our first training for 30 members and friends about the **Peace Circle Process**, a fundamental practice in restorative justice. In addition, First Unitarian members joined with the AMOS Juvenile Justice Team to train staff and implement the circle process for conflict resolution at Hiatt Middle School.

*“Restorative Justice offers an alternative to the criminal justice system. By holding those who harm accountable to repair the harm they caused to victims, the community, and themselves, the fabric of the community is strengthened and people are made a little more whole. The criminal justice system is broken. I can do something. Getting involved in Restorative Justice practices changes lives for the better. Everybody deserves another chance. We can do this. I must do this.”*

- Michael Lauer



A Social Justice Empowerment Workshop helped attendees understand the social justice history of First Unitarian and envision its future.



Our church dedicated a Black Lives Matter banner on January 10, 2016. Our principles call us to support



this cause and to work to end the disproportionate incarceration and police shootings of African-Americans.

# *Giving Back and Paying It Forward*

## *Community Outreach Partners Program*

In July 2015, the First Unitarian Faith in Action Team began our Community Outreach Partner program as an opportunity to engage our congregation, both financially and through volunteer opportunities, with a variety of community organizations. Donations are provided through the offertory basket passed at each Sunday service. **In the first year of this program, First Unitarian donated a total of over \$19,000, and volunteered almost 2000 hours of service from over 270 volunteers!**

*“The First Unitarian Church has touched the lives of over 500 girls and women in Palestine, Uganda, South Africa, Nicaragua, and Ghana through their generous financial support of Des Moines Days for Girls. With sustainable feminine hygiene products, girls are able to stay in school and better their lives and their communities. Because we were a Community Outreach Partner, we were able to purchase material for 365 kits: 187 yards of cotton, 303 yards of flannel, 12 yards of PUL, 700 snap pairs, 700 yards of drawstring.”*

- Krysl Lange, Days for Girls



*“First Unitarian Church has had a tremendous positive impact on not only EMBARC, but on the the refugee youth that we serve. The financial contributions have helped us maintain our education programming over the year, and the volunteers from First Unitarian serving in our middle school literacy program --aside from being an extremely dedicated and passionate group -- have directly contributed to the students’ improvement in their reading comprehension and literacy skills. Many of our kids listed the ice skating outing as one of the highlights of their year. It’s really difficult to express just how much of an impact First Unitarian has had on our kids in just a few sentences, but they’ve given our kids guidance and experiences that we hope will stay with them well into the future.”*

- Michael Toner, EMBARC Iowa



## *Our 2015-2016 Outreach Partners:*

Monsoon Inc.  
Days for Girls  
EMBARC  
Family Promise  
Central Iowa Shelter & Services  
Link Associates

# Nurturing the Next Generation

## Religious Education for Children and Youth

Religious Education takes a village. Staff, volunteers, and, of course, the children and youth, help create a welcoming & accepting environment that nurtures children to be kind, open-minded, and creative individuals who seek answers and ask questions.

**Sunday R.E. Workshop classes** are built on the monthly Soul Matters theme by opening each month with a story-telling workshop led by Community Minister Rev. Dr. Brian Eslinger.

*“My children are a part of the program, so I wanted to be the guide I would want them to have in classes at church. Our style requires warmth, understanding, patience, and a very present body and mind. Each teacher must have the goal, every class or gathering, to send the children off into their community empowered to love and serve with confidence.” - Shanna Killam, parent and volunteer teacher*



This year, we expanded our Our Whole Lives classes to include a **6-week OWL class for Kindergarten & 1st grade.**



Early elementary children learn about birth, babies, bodies and families through stories, songs and activities with trained teachers.

*“I like that it gives children the foundation to learn about healthy relationships. OWL also helps parents open the doors of communication about topics that may feel like a challenge to discuss with young children.” - Ken McCann, K-1 OWL teacher*

Through the **Coming of Age program**, seven 8th grade youth reflected on life’s “big questions.” Weekly meetings helped the youth bond and gain self-confidence with a group of their peers and guidance by adult mentors and facilitators.

*“Coming of age is a big deal for every new-coming teen and should be handled with excitement and care. Our church provides just that. With the thought provoking questions and prompts our kind and gracious facilitators threw at us, my friends and I dove head-first into our journey to becoming youths. We shared about ourselves and learned about others and grew as friends and dare I say it, family. Coming of Age is a very important piece of any child’s life and should be celebrated; the people of this congregation celebrated us with valor and genuine happiness.” - Sophia Clark*



The youth and facilitators of this year’s Coming of Age Program.



The Wednesday night Soul Matters group for 5th/6th grade burn their pieces of paper representing something they want to let go of as part of the “Letting Go” theme.

A Soul Matters group for 5th & 6th graders was introduced on Wednesday evenings and led by Rev. Linda Barnes, DRE Tracy Beck, RE Assistant Laura Berardi, and Nate Hooegeven. The group soon became known as Soul Matters for Squirrels. Along with discussion of the monthly Soul Matters theme, short activities were incorporated to keep these busy bodies engaged.

# Growing Our Spirits

## Wellspring Provides Foundation for Exploring Beliefs

**Wellspring** was facilitated this year by Tracy Beck, Director of Religious Education. Ten individuals spent 10 months learning more about our UU faith while taking their own individual spiritual journeys. Wellspring will be expanded in 2016-17 with two groups each for Wellspring Sources (beginning class) and Wellspring Spiritual Practices (delving deeper into other faith traditions).

*“Wellspring has been, dare I say, transforming. I never considered myself to be a spiritual person, but Wellspring has given me the tools and insight to understand myself and my place in the world through the lens of Unitarian Universalism. Through Wellspring I have discovered that, as an atheist, I don’t have to close my mind whenever I hear “religious” words, but instead can find the commonality between my own beliefs and others’. Wellspring has given me an invaluable foundation in the history and influences that form Unitarian Universalism. But most importantly, through readings, contemplation, and group meetings it has provided me with a window into my soul.”*

- Karen Lauer, Wellspring participant



Wellspring participants met twice-a-month to discuss readings and share their journeys.

# Planning for Tomorrow

## Tomorrow Team Outcomes

As a growing congregation, it’s important to assess our ability to fulfill our programming vision in the physical spaces we occupy. The Tomorrow Team formed in 2014 to analyze facility limitations and opportunities; the outcomes were reported during Forums in Spring 2015.

**2014-15** - The Tomorrow Team engaged the congregation in dreaming sessions about the future of the church with particular emphasis on the facility we need and the church we envision.

**2015-16** - The Tomorrow Team studied whether those dreams could be realized at our current site. YES! was the answer. We have opportunities:

- ▶ To better utilize existing spaces
- ▶ To expand the building without encroaching on the most beautiful outdoor areas
- ▶ To improve the beauty and usefulness of our natural areas
- ▶ To improve building egress, accessibility and usefulness of our facility

However, projected parking challenges cannot be solved solely on our property. Parking can be managed with nearby off-site parking with shuttle service if needed.

**2016-17** – A Next Steps Weekend will be held in September 2016. A UUA consultant will examine the congregation’s strengths, challenges, risks and opportunities and provide specific recommendations and observations to assess our readiness for a possible building project.





*Authenticity*

*Acceptance*

*Wonder*

*Connection*



*Together we:  
Experience  
Wonder  
Grow Connections  
Live and Love  
Generously  
...and nurture  
a more  
just world.*



*Generosity of Spirit*



# Looking to the Future

New for 2016-17

This year, our Board led an appreciative inquiry process to learn when church is most meaningful, transformative and vital in our lives. We learned that what we most value as a church community is experiencing wonder, growing connections, living and loving generously. . .and nurturing a more just world.

Now, we have the opportunity to live into this shared calling. This won't be hard with some of the opportunities planned for next year:

- ▶ Hosting families experiencing homelessness in our church through the Family Promise network
- ▶ Practicing restorative justice principles with youth and adults in our classes and programs
- ▶ Creating a Family Justice team to engage youth and families in putting our faith into action
- ▶ Expanding Wellspring to include Wellspring Spiritual Practices

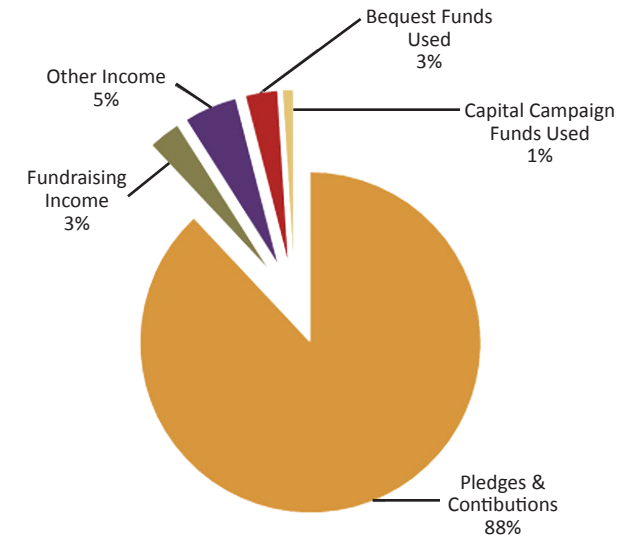
How bold and creative can we be next year? I dare us to take risks together and find out!



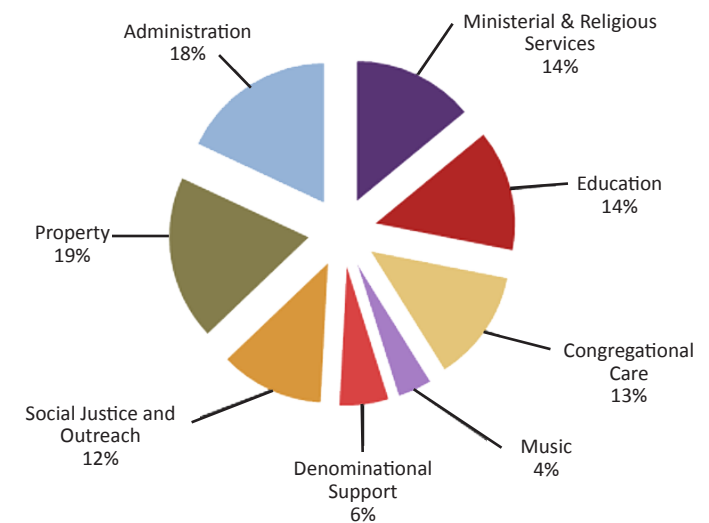
Rev. Erin Gingrich, Associate Minister

# Financials 2015-16

## 2015-16 Financial Support



## 2015-16 Money Spent



**First Unitarian Church of Des Moines**

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