

New York State Convention of Universalists
196th Annual Meeting
October 22, 2022
First Universalist Church of Rochester, NY

President's Report

I offer this report as I am concluding my first year as President of NYSCU- a role which I did not seek, but to which I was called. My chief message at the end of this difficult year is one of gratitude, to so many, for so much.

I took on the role of the presidency with only a few years of experience on the NYSCU Board of Trustees, after the departure of two tireless and faithful servants with lots of institutional memory (former President Judi Adel, and former Treasurer Margaret Davis). The bulk of the first part of the year was spent working with our wonderful new Treasurer, Melissa Lesley-Fox, getting banking and finances updated and running. That simple sentence sounds so easy- but there were months and months of phone calls (including a long one with the IRS!), emails, documents to sign and re-sign, steps forward and back, mysteries, solutions, frustration, and elation. Melissa deserves so very much credit for doing this amazing work, in the face of many obstacles.

Other than the financial piece, I have focused on re-establishing and updating some operational routines: staffing the committees, planning a new kind of annual meeting, working with Michael Scott, Tom Hackett, and Melissa to update the website. Although we were established in 1925, we're working to bring our operations fully into the 21st century!

Part of that updating comes with assessing how we can be most relevant to the folks in the congregations which make up this historic organization. Certainly our primary relevance today comes in the form of our grant and loan funding. I want to be sure that all of our member congregations are aware of the opportunities for NYSCU grants, and that we make the application process as user-friendly as possible. Now would be a good time to mention my profound thanks to Jim D'Aloisio, who has done a wonderful job the past several years as our main "go-to" for organization and communication regarding the Grants and Loans. During a time when, as President, I was really scrambling to update the basic operations of the organization, it was comforting to know that Jim was on top of that essential part of our mission.

I must convey some other thanks:

- Karen Dau, our archivist, who continues to stay in touch and to work with Harvard to house our archives. Karen helped us to find several essential documents for our financial transition as well!
- Judi Adel, for responding to a number of frantic phone calls and emails. Her responses always served to calm me!

- Michael Scott, who has been a moral and material support for all things NYSCU, especially with the website.
- Joyce Gilbert, for sharing her historical perspective and support
- My congregation here at the First Universalist Church of Rochester, which has been so supportive and encouraging to me in this new role
- My Vice President, Sally Hamlin, for her help and support; and our Secretary, Rev. Dr. Lynn Ashley, for tending to the record keeping in such a difficult year.
- The other members of the NYSCU Board of Trustees: Mark Berninghausen, Gay Canough, Jim D'Aloisio, Rev. Jo Von Rue, John Roleke, Barbara Phillips, and Tom Hackett for their faithful service, kindness, and support.

In this next year, I'm hoping to

- Continue to streamline operations and communication
- Determine how we can best communicate with member congregations, especially using social media
- Consider how the Annual Meeting experience might be expanded and improved.

Finally, there are many opportunities for YOU to become involved in NYSCU! We have a number of committees (please see the attached sheet!), and service on the Board of Trustees or the Nominating committee. Although I've shared that this was a difficult year as President, the commitment for Committees and Board members is not overwhelming. And it's a great feeling to know you're helping an organization that is helping our denomination and its member congregations.

In the words of a beloved hymn, *Forward, Through the Ages!*

Respectfully and gratefully submitted,

Ann F. Rhody, President