

## Caring Beyond Belief

The motto “Caring Beyond Belief” arose from a BUU Board meeting last fall. At the time, it felt like we took a deep breath after holding one for much, much too long. It felt like we were recognizing our values once again, after starting the church year with unprecedented challenges. Those values were named nearly eight years ago in response to my asking our then Board of Directors, “What in our congregation are you grateful for?” Their reply was immediate: inreach, outreach, spiritual nourishment, and institutional stewardship. As you may know, these gratitudes were developed by our congregation, adopted as our four ministries, and finally crafted into our mission statement:

### **WE CARE**

- for one another through Inreach.
- for our community through Outreach.
- for our souls through Spiritual Nourishment.
- for our church home through Institutional Stewardship.

As we come to the end of this church year, I return to “Caring Beyond Belief” and invite you to join me. Let’s all take a deep breath together, and renew ourselves to our mission: We Care.

This last church year was a year beyond belief. I wish this was an exaggeration. Globally, it was a year of ongoing pandemic. Socially, it was a year of racial unrest in response to the murder of George Floyd and threats to our democracy before, during, and after the presidential election. Regionally, it was a year of deepening drought in Southern Arizona. Here at Borderlands UU, our beloved faith community, it has been a year of separation, heartbreak, and fear. Perceiving all of this as one BIG unexpected trauma, isn’t a dramatic hyperbole, it is our reality.

Having served as a trauma response minister for the Pacific Southwest District, I am grateful that our UUA has perceived this reality and moved to offer clarity, naming how trauma impacts congregations from individual emotional/spiritual responses to how trauma disrupts church systems. The UUA's research is ongoing and we are learning alongside them, seeking to understand our congregation better, and preparing programming that cares for the needs of our BUU community.

Perhaps the most clarifying thing I've learned thus far: despite the best efforts of UU congregations' to create online or virtual programming over the last year, congregations have experienced a wide spectrum of emotional/spiritual responses from feelings of integration and intimacy to feelings of distancing and distrust. This is not a judgement on any congregation, online programming, or even leadership, it is merely the reality that has emerged from an unprecedented and traumatic year.

This clarifies for me that despite hours of learning and hard work to develop creative online programming over the last year, it has not been experienced uniformly by BUU Members, Friends, and Guests. Some of you have experienced our daily BUUB, our Baja 4 worship, or any of our various online programs over the last year as making our congregation more accessible and deepening caring. At the same time, there are those of you who have felt emotionally and spiritually distanced and disrupted by our work. This is not a judgement, but a recognition of our reality, one that matches up with what has been happening with UUs throughout our faith tradition. And, it feels to me like a call to caring.

My call to UU ministry is to pastor within and among a community of people. It is no surprise then, that ministering remotely this last year

has felt deeply disruptive to me. While it has helped to know that clergy across faith traditions have had similar experiences, it has not erased the constant heartbreak I feel being physically distant from you. What has been more meaningful to me than knowing that others are in the same boat, has been leaning on our BUU Mission, “We Care,” for focus and support.

Each day over the last year at 10am, my smart phone alarm chimes calling me to gratitude. Each time it has gone off, I have breathed in and out 10 times and focused my gratitude on all of you. I imagine your faces and recall your presence and seek to feel the caring spirit of our congregation. There are times when I can and times when I cannot feel that caring. Regardless, this practice motivates me to put my caring into my ministry and our community. Despite catching COVID-19, and continuing to experience long haul symptoms still, I find solace knowing that each day, I have served BUU with my heartfelt ministry of care.

This is not to say that I haven’t engaged an unexpected depth through online programs. Among the Members, Friends, and Guests in our weekly Sunday Fellowship, with those that have engaged in Vespers, Theology Café, and Odyssey: Listening to the Journies I have found opportunities to connect like never before. Through analytics from our webpage, emails, and Youtube we know that we connect with more people each week than ever before. Our two online Celebrations of Life were far from our usual practices of celebrating Members after their death, yet they did rise to meet the needs of family, friends, and our congregation for me.

Our mission, however, isn’t “I Care”, but “We Care.” Despite our reality of unprecedented trauma, leaders at BUU have given their care each and every day. Hugh Rhine has served as our congregation’s

President with great insight and compassion. Martha House has offered vigilance and love as our Vice President and chair of Spiritual Nourishment. The members of our Board of Directors have given conscientious attention to our personnel, finance, and policy needs. Our Program Council chaired by Judy Harmer has taken responsibility for moving programming forward despite the many obstacles in the way. Jerry Leggett, Corrinne Bartell, Terry Rosenmeier, and Nancy Murphy have each contributed their care in ongoing and sustaining ways. It has been the caring of these people each day, as well as those of you who have given your care-filled service during the weeks, months, and quarters over the last year who serve as a testimony to our mission statement: Borderlands Unitarian Universalist exists because we care.

We are not yet at the end of experiencing the reality of unprecedented trauma, though I wish it were otherwise. As we learn about this reality with the UUA, we witness ongoing disruption within and among us at BUU. Despite being told that there are many congregations in the same boat, what can best orient us to more clarity and healing together is our commitment to care. The four facets of “We Care” has brought our congregation to this point and I trust it will lead us on.

When “Caring Beyond Belief” was chosen as our theme for our stewardship campaign, I was deeply grateful for the reminder. It brought back the truth that caring is our mission, our purpose for being a UU congregation. It brought back that we have challenged ourselves to be caring in inreach, outreach, spiritual nourishment, institutional stewardship. It brought back that we care deeply, which has made our congregation viable through an ongoing, unprecedented trauma. And it brought me to know that whatever comes, as long as we continue as Unitarian Universalists who care for each other, our broader community, our hearts and our souls, and our spiritual home in

Amado, there is nothing that we cannot face and overcome together as the people of Borderlands UU. This is neither an exaggeration or a glossing over of what lies before us. Rather, it is the reality that we can choose to live into, and - if we are so bold - can find caring beyond all that we've dared believe in before.

In faith,  
Rev. Matthew Funke Crary

May 20, 2021