

September 7, 2021

Dear Ministerial Candidate:

As I think back to my many years in music ministry at the Valley Unitarian Universalist Congregation in Chandler, my heart is full of gratitude. I began volunteering there in fall 1991, a young mother with a toddler, looking for a church community in which to raise my family, and hoping that it would also be a place where my musical gifts would be welcomed and needed. I found much more than I was looking for, a group of passionate, committed, creative, and caring folks, some of whom are still pouring their hearts and time into the VUU community.

Over the years, this congregation and I co-created music ministry together. They helped me grow into that ministry, developing a broad and collaborative vision of music as ministry. From starting a children's choir, to developing outreach programs such as singing at bedside for those in hospice care, to an all-ages holiday orchestra and a house band, this community values the gifts and leadership of people at all ages and stages. VUU supports ministerial growth through sabbaticals, professional development, and encouraging experimentation and informed risk-taking. By the time I left to pursue a new career phase in December 2019, VUU had grown in numbers, organizational strength and health, and spiritual depth.

You will find this congregation to be incredibly vibrant, engaged and committed to justice. From church lay leaders, talented staff, and casually involved participants, they are generous, warm, and welcoming. Over the years VUU has moved beyond a small, pastoral church to a more mature, programmatic church with a huge heart for "walking the talk." They provide shelter and care in their sanctuary for those needing a physical home, as well as show up in numerous ways in the greater community to support those in need, and to work for systemic change.

The last year and a half has been challenging for individuals, families, communities, and particularly churches. The way we work, commute, engage with the greater world, educate our children, and worship has all been turned upside down. Valley UU will be one of those congregations which will find a way to not just survive, but to thrive. There are many hidden blessings during this long pandemic time and VUU is adapting and growing in creative ways to meet the many and varied needs and opportunities that continue to develop. They have an excellent and experienced Interim Minister and will be in wonderful shape to welcome new ministerial leadership to guide them. VUU is a place to co-create dynamic ministries and be a source of hope and strength for the community and the wider world.

The greater Phoenix area also is a growing, vibrant urban area, becoming more diverse and more progressive as the years go by. Downtown Phoenix, almost a ghost town at night when I first arrived, now has many live music venues, world class museums, monthly art walks, a wide variety of restaurants, and is home to "The Nash," voted one of the top jazz clubs in the world since it's opening less than 10 years ago. Arizona State University in nearby Tempe is a large public research university, well-respected, and one of the largest universities in the country. And of course the winters are spectacular, with folks able to put their turkey (or Tofurky) in the oven on Thanksgiving Day, and go out for a mountain hike while it cooks.

Please feel free to contact me with questions about VUU or living in the Phoenix metro area.

Sincerely,



Kellie Walker Hart

Former Minister of Music, Valley UU Congregation, Chandler, Arizona
Current Music Director, Trinity Presbyterian, Prescott, Arizona