

# First Unitarian Universalist Society of Albany

## Annual Report 2002

### by Rev. Samuel A. Trumbore

This report is a significant one this year. It comes toward the end of the third year of my ministry here in Albany. I'll have soon exceeded the interregnum of interims! Today, people are looking forward not backward. We are welcoming a significant number of new members who are attracted to our congregation and responding to my ministry. A general good feeling in the congregation, increasing membership and a solid financial picture are the major indicators that things are going well in our congregation and in my ministry.

### Sunday Morning

**September 11<sup>th</sup>** was the major framing event for the beginning of our institutional year. I addressed the attack by adding a special service at noon on Friday, September 14<sup>th</sup> that was well attended by members of our congregation and the community. I debated whether or not to abandon my sermon topic that Sunday. Thankfully, the topic I'd chosen, "On Becoming a Human Race Activist," could be adapted to respond to people's anger, shock and dismay. The next several Sunday's, I continued to address the attacks in the services in different ways.

Some of the memorable topics I've preached on this year have been:

- Becoming a Human Race Activist
- Zen & the Art of Recovery
- Grassroots Public Ministry
- Breaking New Ground
- On the Beginning and Ending of Life
- Examining an Ethic for Taking Life
- Living with Sleeping Dragons
- The Power of Commitment

### Programming

Helping get **ARISE** off the ground curtailed my offering an Adult Education Class this fall. I did offer **Build Your Own Theology** this winter. I've continued with my **Buddhist Meditation group** that meets on the first Thursday of the month. The numbers vary from 3 to 8 and there are several people who are regulars including a woman outside the congregation. I offered two **Meditation Retreats** this year and each one had about ten people participating. I plan to continue offering my meditation class and weekend retreats to give people a sample of the practice and its benefits.

The big new program we've added this year is **Small Group Ministry**. I've been very grateful to Robin Miller who has taken much of the responsibility for organizing our program. From the training in September till now, Robin and I have worked closely in the design process with the organizing committee and now with the Small Group Facilitators. SGM is working the same magic in our congregation it has in other UU congregations around the country. Something like a 10-20% of our congregations have started small groups or are contemplating it.

### Passages and Pastoral

This was a quieter year for passages. So far we've had three child namings, all in the fall, and four memorial services, **Frank Cole** (with David Weissbard on September 11<sup>th</sup>), **Julian Belin**, **John English**, and **Mildred**

**Guffin.** I've gone from about 15 weddings to 7 this year. To accommodate the added work of being President of ARISE, I've chosen not to do weddings of people unrelated to our membership. Pastoral Care continues to be an area of concern. I just don't get out enough to visit the older members of our congregation.

I continue to receive excellent support in my pastoral duties by our excellent Caring Network, led by Therese Broderick. Priscilla Crago does a wonderful job keeping up with everyone's lives. I take notes during Joys and Concerns and try to get cards and calls out where appropriate. When I hear of someone being in the hospital, I make a point to visit. I monitor the caring network email discussion and use it to prioritize my visiting time.

## Social Outreach

### ARISE

Being President of ARISE has been a valuable education in leadership and ministry. My major responsibilities have been to chair the Executive Committee meetings, the Board meetings and work with our organizer, Andreas Kriefall and the Executive Director of the Gamaliel Foundation, Greg Galluzzo. About this time last year, I felt like I'd just jumped on a fast moving train. I couldn't sleep at night tormented by all the problems and conflicts in the organization.

Things started getting a lot better after our **Issues Convention** at the end of June. 350 people showed up with enthusiasm and excitement. All of a sudden, ARISE started becoming a real organization. The formation of the **youth, education and employment task forces** and the whirlwind of activity interviewing leaders in the community occupied much of my summer. Our **November 13<sup>th</sup> Public Meeting** was an ever-present pressure driving the organization forward. When the day finally arrived and we had 1000 people in the room with 119 from our congregation, I felt all the effort and misery had been worth it. Since that Public Meeting, we've made significant progress on all our initiatives. The first \$25,000 check was received by one of the after school programs in Saratoga called Project Lift we supported and lobbied to get. ARISE is becoming a force in regional politics and is already making a positive difference.

Currently, each ARISE organizational member is working to develop "**core teams.**" The core team will be the connection between the organization and ARISE. The core teams will also be able to initiate projects in their neighborhoods. Our Core Team has eight people involved so far and will be doing outreach on West and Bradford Streets between Lexington and Quail. On Saturday, April 20<sup>th</sup>, we walked this territory and began meeting people. Right away we uncovered issues and concerns to start thinking about. These conversations energized the core team members as we began to get to know our neighbors.

My work and our involvement in ARISE continues to satisfy an important need for our congregation to be connected with the community around us and with issues in the Capital Region. When we take our values into the streets they make a difference transforming the community and transforming us as well.

### West Hill Ministers

In our congregation's neighborhood of West Hill, I continue to be active in the West Hill Ministers Fellowship. We've focused this year on two areas. The first has been to **advocate for more after school programs** for West Hill. We've worked with the Mayor's office and the new Brighter Choice Charter School on the corner of Lake and Central to see if we could get something going. We're also going to be lobbying for the two new schools that are going to be built in West Hill to be designed with after school programs in mind.

The major project that has just gotten started is applying for a grant for a **West Hill/Arbor Hill SUNYA/HVCC Community Outreach Partnership Center grant from HUD**. This would create a single point of contact between the two higher educational establishments and our community. A community based advisory committee would then identify needs in the community and work with SUNY and HVCC to apply their students and resources to help solve our problems. It is a very exciting program in which our congregation could participate.

### **An Ambassador**

ARISE and the West Hill Ministerial Fellowship have been my primary areas of social activism. I've also attended a number of other functions in the community such as breakfasts, lunches, and dinners for different organizations and causes, benefits such as the one at Capital Rep for the Albany Boys and Girls Club, Lobby Days for Family Planning Advocates, and the AIDS Walk, being an ambassador for our congregation.

### **District, UUA and UUMA**

Denominationally, I serve as **treasurer** and **publisher** for the **UU Buddhist Fellowship**. The other larger responsibility I've taken on is serving on the **UUMA CENTER committee**. This is a Continental Committee working to help ministers with continuing education. My portfolio on the committee will be serving as the coordinator of UUMA Chapter programs and helping with the web site.

My major UUMA continuing education activity was attending the **UUMA Convocation in Birmingham Alabama** in March, coupled with a meeting of the UUMA CENTER committee. The Convocation was an excellent time to step back and review my ministry and compare notes with other colleagues. I find these kinds of events very enriching as I build connections with other ministers and share ideas. I find the more connected I am to Unitarian Universalism as it unfolds in other congregations around the nation, the better I can serve our congregation.

### **Conclusion**

The first week of October, I will celebrate the **tenth anniversary of my ordination to Unitarian Universalist ministry**. It is a significant time to reflect on where I've been and where I'm going. I'm now in the middle of my ministerial career and generally satisfied with how it's going. I'm still learning and growing into the ministry yet I'm also aware of my competence.

I continue to be very grateful for the opportunity to serve the First Unitarian Universalist Society of Albany as its settled minister. I feel we are working together well and moving forward on many of the desires and concerns expressed at our Startup Weekend in the Fall of 1999.

Pleasing as it is for me to see just how much we've accomplished together, I see an exciting future ahead for us. We are effectively sharing the ministry of this congregation. We are taking our faith into action. We are envisioning the growth of Unitarian Universalism in Albany.

Yes, we've had three good years together. May the next three years be even better than the last three!