

Minister's Annual Report (2002-3)

Rev. Samuel A. Trumbore

Overview

For all the turmoil around the world, in the economy, fighting a war with Iraq and fear of SARS, I'm pleased to report one place that seems to be doing just fine is our congregation. After four years of ministry, my sense is that we have developed an effective partnership. The membership numbers are good and growing. People are joining and giving generously. We have an expansion plan that looks like it will be well received by the congregation. Community outreach through ARISE, the West Hill Ministers Fellowship, and a developing partnership with the SUNY School of Social Welfare continues to develop our congregation's connection to our neighborhood and the larger region.

Sunday Services

Some of the significant sermons I offered this year were:

"Growing Bigger by Getting Smaller"	September 22
"Universalist Worship Service"	October 13
"How to Fight Terrorism"	November 3
"Declaring Interdependence"	November 17
"Living Well with Less"	December 1
"Loving Without Believing"	January 26
"On Seeing Your Shadow"	February 2
"Mystery and Mysticism"	February 16
"Patience and Humility for Liberals"	March 2
"Facing the Forces of Evil"	April 13
"Praying: 'To Whom It May Concern'"	April 27

This past fall, I worked with a speech coach, Dale Klein, to tune up my presentation skills from the pulpit. She helped me see I had plenty of assets but also had some problems that were undermining them. I feel I've made some significant improvements in my presentation skills and have heard that reflected back by the congregation. Preaching is a craft that takes a lifetime to fully develop. Public speaking isn't one of the gifts I came into this world with but one I plan to take with me to my grave. I plan to continue to develop my skills in sermon composition and delivery. It is an interactive process and I appreciate all the support, encouragement, and critique I receive as I strive for excellence.

Kid's Time

One of my goals for this year was to develop a collaboration with the RE Council around Kid's Time. The RE Council did an extensive survey of the congregation about Kid's Time and the results were quite positive. The RE Council decided they would assign a couple of people a month to work with me around selecting stories and making presentations. I believe this has greatly enhanced Kid's Time and helped me enormously.

Adult Education Programs

I offered three programs this year. The first, this fall, was working with Ernest Becker's book, *The Denial of Death*. As part of that class, we had Skidmore Professor, Sheldon Solomon, come speak to us. In late fall, I offered a Credo Writing Class of my own construction loosely based on the credo writing component of Eagles Leadership School. We picked topics and wrote our beliefs about a different topic each week. In the class we would share what we wrote and discuss what was shared. Then we would hear a presentation by one or two participants about the topic for the next week to stimulate our thinking. The last class I sponsored was on Voluntary Simplicity. It was popular enough to have two sessions meeting on different days. This was a great class because it had the flavor of small group ministry as we got to know each other and ended our class with a potluck at a participant's house.

Rite of Passage

As we did two years ago, Ann D'Attilio and I worked together to offer the Rites of Passage class for our youth from about 12-14. They learn about Unitarian Universalism and decide if they would like to become youth members. The class culminates in a trip to Boston which we will be doing May 3-5.

Membership Growth

I feel an important role of the minister in a congregation is to work with the Membership Committee to bring new members into the congregation. The Sunday Service, for many, is their first point of contact with our congregation and I am the one who represents the congregation to them. I have an important role to be a bridge that allows the prospective member to cross the waters of uncertainty and find the solid ground of connection and commitment on the other side.

My work with community organizing has shown me the value of graduated steps of commitment to get people involved and make them feel connected. Membership chair, Kathy Hodges, and I have identified several steps of commitment from getting a name tag to signing an intent to join form to help people get clear about the expectations and opportunities that come with each step. I've encouraged the membership committee to develop a 'friend' category and differentiate it from 'member' so the step of membership has more meaning.

I continue to visit everyone who joins as a member. In that interview, I investigate the religious needs each person brings to our congregation and probe for areas of interest for involvement. My goal is to make sure they feel comfortable with me so if, in the future, they have a pastoral concern, they will feel comfortable approaching me.

Supervising Small Group Ministry

The facilitators for our Small Group Ministry (SGM) meet once a month and I organize and lead that meeting. The meeting runs much like an SGM meeting. We start with check-in, talk about problems that have arisen in the groups, and then do one of the new sessions for next month to both practice it and allow the facilitators to be more active participants in a SGM session. We've had a good year and the program continues to run well with many positive comments.

Community Ministry

With pride and a sigh of relief, my term as President of ARISE is coming to an end. This has been both a joy and a burden over the last two years. We've seen the transition of our organization from a fledgling group to a functioning organization that is reaching into powerful places and has the possibility of realizing some progressive social change.

I attended one training and one meeting with the Gamaliel Foundation this past year. Last June, I attended advanced leadership training and this December I flew to Gary, Indiana to attend their

annual meeting, they call their 'National Leadership Assembly.' The meetings were useful to me, reinforcing and strengthening some of the learning of my 'basic training' in March of 2001. I continue to learn about how to motivate and lead people effectively through their methods and ideas. A constant focus on leadership development is needed in our organization as we seek to strengthen it and create a culture of commitment and accountability.

One of the developments that has come out of ARISE's work is the revitalization of the Washington Square Neighborhood Association which now meets in our building. The Dean of the SUNY School of Social Welfare, Dr. Katherine Briar Lawson, and I have been developing a partnership between our two organizations. Dr. Lawson is also very interested in neighborhood revitalization and involving her students in that work. Two groups of students worked with us this past fall, one researching solutions for prostitution and the second, organizing support for the 'Time Dollar Store' at the elementary school. A third opportunity dreamed up by Dr. Lawson is a community garden project for the students to be implemented this summer. We are fortunate to have someone like Dr. Lawson to work with in revitalizing our neighborhood.

Spiritual Leadership

As I've mentioned, Iraq has overshadowed much of this year. Through sermons, columns, and action, I've provided moral leadership in response to this crisis of national identity. On February 15th, a group of FUUSAN's all attended a huge rally in New York City. I was a bus captain on one of buses from our area.

I continue my once a month meditation group but only managed to put on one weekend retreat this year in the fall. Meg Bassinson has taken over the Soulful Sundown project. We've had a couple of well-attended ones, in particular, the December Solstice service.

Denominational Involvement

I serve on the Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association's Committee for Continuing Education (called CENTER) that meets two times a year over a weekend. I serve as the committee's secretary, printer and as the chapter presenter's person. The other denominational hat I wear is as President of the UU Buddhist Fellowship.

Conclusion

Effective ministry helps an organization and its individual members manage the tensions they must endure. People who come to us on Sunday morning want to be both challenged and comforted. Critical to that process is developing and deepening a trusting relationship. I feel we are continuing to do this effectively. When a minister and a congregation can work out a good relationship together, great good can result. We're doing this and I look forward to the unfolding of the process that allows the Spirit of Life to move within us and between us. I continue to feel the same delight and pleasure, if not more, at being here that I did when I was called. I continue to feel blessed to have had the opportunity to come to Albany and serve such a fine congregation