

# Minister's Annual Report (2004)

## Rev. Samuel A. Trumbore

### Introduction

After a particularly cold winter this year, and a deteriorating situation in Iraq, spring has been quite welcome this year. Even though it's the same succession of snow drops, crocuses, daffodils and tulips each year, there is something reassuring that the cycles come around again. As we cycle into another Annual Meeting for our congregation, I'm pleased to report we're doing well, particularly after this spring wedding season.

Ministers do a lot of weddings. After a while they can become fairly routine. Not so with a double ceremony I did in March. The high point of this past year came on March 27<sup>th</sup> when I performed Albany's first two same-sex civil marriages for Lynn Lekakis and Elissa Kane and Bob Barnes and George Jursatis. The press coverage was national in scope and the support of our congregation was enthusiastic. Thankfully, I didn't serve any jail time for performing a marriage without a license.

Here is a review of some of my major areas of responsibility for this past year. It is a helpful way to get a sense of the range of what I do to support our congregation.

### Religious Services

As I look back over the topics I've chosen and the holidays celebrated, I'm feeling quite positive. I've paid closer attention to the balance between topics with an intellectual focus vs. an emotional focus vs. a spiritual focus (head/heart/spirit). Every sermon has a mixture of these elements but some go one direction more than the others. Here is an abbreviated list of sermon titles for this past year:

- Casting Our Values in Stone
- On Seeking a Language of Reverence
- The UU Buddhist Convergence
- Peace Through Understanding
- In Search of Soul
- A Theology of Relinquishment
- Emerson at 200
- Ultimacy and Intimacy
- Praising Percipency
- The Spirituality of Falling
- Hometown Heroes of Racial Reconciliation
- UU Blues
- The Intelligence of Emotions
- Emotions and Morality
- Sadie Hawkins Sunday
- Right to Live v. Right to Die
- The Faith of the Historical Jesus
- The Last Supper That Wasn't
- Gay Marriage: Lesson's Learned ... And Work Left To Do

- On Being Black Today (with Debra Dickerson)
- Building our Vision

I've experimented a little this year with the UU Blues service by composing a Blues song. Social justice issues were covered including peace in the Middle East, race issues, euthanasia, and of course, gay marriage. Two services covered the building expansion project. Several covered theological issues such as the language of reverence, search for soul, ultimacy and intimacy, and a couple on Jesus. Several were more feeling oriented, particularly the one on falling and the intelligence of emotions series.

### **Pastoral Care**

If no one else dies, we will have had more child dedications than deaths this year. That is a very good sign of the health of our congregational life. Much as I enjoy weddings, I'm pleased not to have done very many this year. Lynn Ashley and Catharine Houk continue to do non-member weddings for me, for which I am very grateful. This leaves more Saturdays free for family time.

The ordination of Lynn Ashley was a highpoint of the fall with David Bumbaugh as our guest speaker. It was an important moment for us to see ourselves as a teaching congregation as Lynn described the various ways she learned to be a minister from FUUSA.

One event I added this year was to have a potluck Thanksgiving dinner at FUUSA. It drew about 30 people who feasted on everyone's favorite Thanksgiving delicacy. I plan to repeat this next year because it was so successful. The attendees greatly enjoyed the fellowship and, for some, was a great alternative to eating alone.

I continue to visit people who are hospitalized, call and send cards to those I hear about through the grapevine or during Joys and Concerns who are ill or have suffered losses.

### **Adult Education**

This was a very productive year for me in the area of adult education. I taught a well attended Buddhist meditation class with Buddhist Anne Teich from California. While David Bumbaugh was here for Lynn's ordination, he consented to offer a Saturday morning workshop on the popular "language of reverence" theme. I followed this up with a class to further explore the topic. In March, I offered another class with Bill Batt and Sarah Birn on end of life issues that was very well received by the participants. The last class I offered was a one session forum on gay marriage.

Julie Lemoe has provided good leadership of the Adult Education Committee and we have some excellent plans already made for next year. Our hope is to put out a schedule for the year in the fall so people can plan around when the classes will be offered.

### **Spiritual Practice Support**

Finally this year I was able to organize a total of three meditation retreats with 6-10 people participating. These continue to be good both for my personal mental health and useful to the participants to get some in depth meditation experience. I also helped put together a retreat at Stillpoint House of Prayer with several members of our congregation participating. I continue to seek to make a bridge between the serious meditators in our community and our congregation.

This year I added a communion service the Saturday before Easter. This brought together eight people two of whom were college students from out of town. I continue to work to make our congregation welcoming to liberal Unitarian Christians including a couple of current leaders.

### **Religious Education**

The Religious Education Council continues to be very good at helping me with Kid's Time suggesting programs and stories. We have also done some brainstorming together about increasing the quality and attractiveness of the intergenerational services. I feel we had a success with the Easter Service this year making it friendly to both children and adults. Novelties like passing out easter eggs with candy and egg proverbs and guessing bird songs kept the children's interest.

I continue to visit RE classrooms when I'm not in the pulpit or away. I find this is an important way for me to support the teachers and connect with the children.

### **Membership**

I continue to actively support the membership committee interviewing each new member and paying attention to the newcomers. Kathy Hodges has done a terrific job of keeping track of newcomers and encouraging them gently to join.

One way I support our current membership is by socializing in the congregation. I spend lots of money at the service auction on dinners and social outings. We attend social events as a family. This year we attended Karaoke & RE Games Night, the Superbowl Alternative Party, the Adult RE gardening class, the SEC murder mystery and Passover Seder. Philomena and I also performed in the Annual Dinner skit.

### **Social Outreach**

This continues to be an important focus for my ministry in Albany. I continue to serve as chair of the ARISE Clergy Caucus and support our ARISE core team. Thankfully, having left the ARISE Presidency, my time commitments to ARISE have decreased significantly. I miss not being in the middle of the action but greatly appreciate having time for other parts of my ministry. I continue to work with the West Hill Ministers. This year has seen little activity with SUNY. I've participated in a forum on gay marriage with the School of Social Work last week.

During the year, I get asked to speak and participate in local events. I spoke during a workshop offered in the fall by Interfaith Alliance titled Cultivating a Culture of Peace. I participated and spoke during the Union Thanksgiving Service. I was invited to speak during a labor Martin Luther King event. I donated money and participated in the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the FOCUS food pantry breakfast program at Westminster Church.

One new outreach began this year with the leadership of Pam Collins. We started a Young Adult Group that has now met several times. Two college students, Amy and Tom, have shown strong interest in getting this started. They are freshman so my hope is the program will be established by the time they leave school.

### **Leadership & Committee Support**

An important role for the minister is to support the smooth functioning of the institution, advising the President, Board, committee chairs, and others in leadership positions to

support the health of the congregation. I attend Board Meetings, Social Responsibilities and Religious Education Councils, Personnel, Membership, Religious Services, Adult Education and Committee on Professional Ministry on a regular basis. On a much less regular basis, I attend PCC, and ARISE Core Team meetings. I stop in on occasion at others.

### **Building Expansion Support**

One important committee I have met with more frequently than not has been the Architecture Committee and more recently the Revenue Resources Committee to support the building expansion effort. In the fall, I worked with Paul Mack and Anna Angold to support the capital campaign study. My first sermon in the fall was the result of the previous architectural work trying to come up with a short phrase to capture the vision of the building. The words I came up with were “beacon of mingling light.” The architectural design currently does have some elements of what I was discussing in my sermon.

### **Intern Opportunity**

My work mentoring the new minister in Glens Falls, Deane Perkins, last year (and continuing this year) helped me realize how much I now know about ministry and leadership. So when the opportunity to compete for an internship grant came up at the fall UUMA Chapter meeting, I threw my hat in the ring. I was quite surprised to receive the grant by the vote of my colleagues. It was a vote of confidence in my leadership that was very gratifying.

With the approval of the Board, I immediately set up an Internship Committee and solicited applications for our position. I was pleased to have eleven applications, another confirmation of the respect others have for me and the respect our congregation has. We went through an exhaustive process of analyzing each application, narrowing the selection to four people to give telephone interviews. From those four interviews we selected one. Our first pick, Becky Gunn, accepted our offer.

### **Denominational Work**

My two predominant denominational activities are serving on the UUMA CENTER committee (continuing education for ministers) and as President of the UU Buddhist Fellowship. I'm in my third year of a four year term serving on the UUMA CENTER Committee which puts on a day of continuing education right before UUA General Assembly and also organizes a chapter presenters program (which I supervise) for ministers to share their talents with each other. Next year, the UU Buddhist Fellowship will have its first ever convocation in Garrison, New York April 29-May 1, 2005.

For the St. Lawrence District, I've participated in a “Theology and Power” panel for a workshop in Rochester this winter that will be repeated at General Assembly. Last summer I was a guest speaker at Ferry Beach's Heritage Week speaking about the connections between Unitarianism and Universalism and Buddhism during our history. My talk may be published as part of the proceedings of this conference.

### **Conclusions**

Again, I feel this has been a good year for my ministry in Albany. I'm happy to report that I'm still thankful FUUSA decided to call me as their minister. My energy and enthusiasm continues to support my work here. It feels like we've developed an effective partnership

together. I hope this partnership of shared ministry we are forging together will continue for the next few years.

The next big challenge I see ahead for all of us is dealing effectively with the extra stress resulting from expanding our building (assuming it is approved). With good guidance and open communication, my hope is our congregation can transform the inevitable strains of the building expansion project into increased commitment that can fuel our growth to achieve the larger vision the expansion represents.

I want to be part of bringing that vision to fruition – with your help.