

Minister's Annual Report (2005)

By Sam Trumbore

“A Time to Thrive”

Introduction

What a year! Raising 1.4 million in our Capital Campaign. Supervising an Intern. Getting recognition in the community. Presenting a greatly appreciated Gould Discourse. Organizing a major and wildly successful convocation of UU Buddhists. This has been both a full and a rewarding year in both my life and the life of our congregation. Our congregation continues to grow stronger in many ways that I fully expect to turn into membership growth as we expand our building.

Our building expansion will open a new chapter in the life of this congregation. With the support of Tom Chulak, our District Executive, will become an opportunity for significant growth. We are seeing more people moving into the Capital Region as more high tech industry is attracted here. I feel my ministry gets stronger every year as our presence in the community also continues to grow.

If there ever was a time for our congregation to thrive, this is it.

Internship

One of the joys of this year has been to have Becky Gunn as both an intern and colleague in ministry. We quickly established a partnership and worked as a team. We have given each other counsel and critique as well as collaborated on several services together. Becky's maturity, energy and enthusiasm allowed her to come up to speed quickly and perform admirably. I'm grateful for her decision to do her internship with us and I hope we are able to begin to have interns on a regular basis..

Capital Campaign Support

As you will read elsewhere in this report, we had a very successful capital campaign this fall. My role was to sit on the Major Gifts and the Special Gifts Committees as well as the Capital Campaign Committee. I did something like 15 calls for the capital campaign. It was an honor to ask for those lead gifts and talk about how much the congregation meant to each individual we canvassed. We were well served by Paul Mack & Associates and Anna Angold.

I have participated on the Architectural sub committee looking at the design of the inside of the main hall with architect Larry Wilson. My participation has been useful on this committee as questions have come up about how the space will be used on Sunday morning.

Religious Services

Because I wanted Becky to get lots of preaching experience, I have had a more relaxed schedule for preaching this year. This was a good thing as there were many other activities that occupied my attention. Here is a list of some memorable sermon titles:

- Building and Rebuilding Public Relationships
- Taking Action & Taking Refuge
- Welcoming Political Diversity
- The Error of Seeking Salvation
- A Harvest of Gratitude
- The Deification of Jesus or How We Lost the Trinitarian Debate
- Humanizing Grace
- Hot Enough For You? (Global Warming UUA Study/Action Issue)
- The Science of Humanity
- Biodiversity vs. Humanity
- Chinese Wisdom (Chinese New Year)
- Unflattering Mirror
- Quality of Life (with profound disability)
- Finding Wonder, Opening to Awe
- From Hopelessness to Hope (Easter)
- The Same is Less (Canvass Sermon)
- Thoughts on Sharing Ministry and Leadership (condensed Gould discourse)
- Honoring our Foremothers (Mother's Day)
- Lighting the Beacon (Annual Meeting)

Community Outreach

This has been a big year for me in raising my profile and the profile of our congregation in the community. Awards from Citizen Action and the Capital District Gay and Lesbian Community Council recognized the two same sex unions I did last March 27th. My higher profile in the GLBT community has brought some more opportunities. Our congregation sponsored a day called "Pride in the Pulpit," a gay rights day for clergy to meet and network. I also spoke on a panel organized to discuss the movie, *Tying the Knot*.

But that hasn't been all that I've done this year in the community. This fall I walked all over our neighborhood registering people to vote. I've worked with the West Hill

Ministerial Fellowship to explore how we might develop a neighborhood community center for West Hill.

The new President of SUNY Albany, Dr. Kermit Hall, held a meeting with neighborhood stakeholders (including me), the deans of the downtown campus, and other key officials and leaders in the University and our local community. There are some attractive partnership opportunities that are arising from Dr. Hall's leadership that may help us with our building expansion project.

I've served again this year as Chair of the ARISE Clergy Caucus. Two highpoints: the first, gathering ministers for a "Bruno hunt" the day after our ARISE Public Meeting, to talk to him about our desire for drug law reform. We met with his chief of staff and got a commitment to work toward that reform. The second highlight was meeting with Eliot Spitzer so we could present our organization and our task force initiatives. It was one of the most disciplined ARISE meetings I've attended and Spitzer was impressed with us.

Denominational Activity

Tom Chulak, our St Lawrence District Executive, continues to do great work in our district that I expect to help our congregation grow. I attended the New York State Convention of Universalists Annual Convention in Ithaca to hear Pat Emery from Golden, Colorado present their membership development program. I videoed the presentation so I could share it with members of our congregation. Both the PCC and the Membership committee have made good use of it. I also attended the UU Conference on Money and the district Mid-Size Church conference held in Binghamton. All these have added energy, ideas and connections for our congregations to work together for growth.

The highlight of the year was my presentation of the Josephine Gould Discourse before the District Annual Assembly in Niagara Falls on April 22. Niagara Falls was the congregation who ordained me in 1992 so it was meaningful for me to return there to present the Gould.

I also serve as President of the UU Buddhist Fellowship. This has been a big year for our organization, hosting our very first UUBF Convocation. 130 people attended the event – a validation of the importance of the organization within Unitarian Universalism.

Pastoral Work

I repeated the Thanksgiving Potluck, which drew about 40 people. It continues to be a significant service to those who do not have family close by and want a community experience. The food was great and the fellowship wonderful at this event.

The confluence of several couples and individuals in our congregation in their 20's and early 30's helped motivate me to organize a lunch on the third Sunday of the month after the service for people who are younger adults in our congregation. The first meeting had five in attendance and the second had seven. I'm hopeful for this to grow next fall as a way to bring together and serve young adults in our congregation.

Educational Ministry

Becky's presence and our fall Capital Campaign required me to step back from offering as many adult education classes this year. The one significant class offered was my New Humanism class that brought 40 people out to hear several guest speakers. This is an effective format – bringing in outside experts to discuss an area of interest.

The controversy over global warming caused me to organize a special forum after the service that brought out about 35 people in February. Three speakers, my sister Dr. Susan Trumbore, Dr. Chris Walcek, SUNY professor from First Unitarian Society of Schenectady, and our own environmental engineer John Rose, did a great job filling in the gaps and correcting a couple of errors in my climate change sermon. I think it was an effective, educational response to criticism of my sermon.

My sermon on biodiversity vs. humanism spawned another initiative to find a way to help people get connected emotionally to environmental issues. April 16th 15 people gathered for a pre-Earth Day ritual called “Council of All Beings” created 20 some years ago by Johanna Macy and John Seed. This was a first step for greater environmental activism that attracted interest in our congregation and helps introduce the Green Sanctuary program.

I participated with Ann D’Attilio leading our Rite of Passage class, a large one this year with eight students and eight mentors. I also continued to offer three Buddhist meditation retreats over a Friday night and Saturday to introduce our members and friends to the practice of insight meditation. Attendance stays consistently about 10 to 12 for each one and not always the same 10 to 12.

Conclusion

Our congregation is poised for great things to be happening in the years ahead. Those years will be challenging years as we do our best to grow our building and program within our means. The stress and strain will need to be managed carefully to release creative energy rather than depleting us with destructive energy that brings alienation.

The most important message of this building effort is the status quo of our congregation cannot be maintained. We cannot remain the same congregation we have been and take full advantage of the opportunities before us.

Those opportunities are very exciting ones both for the congregation and for me as a minister. The challenge of sharing the leadership in this growth is something I believe we can do together. I feel my ministry continues to be effective with many opportunities for my growth and the growth of the congregation. My Gould discourse (available on my web site) is an affirming statement of the great work we have done in sharing the ministry. I fully expect that work to continue as we both grow together in serving the members and friends of this congregation and the values our religious tradition.