

## **Minister's Annual Report (2007)**

Rev. Samuel A. Trumbore

### **“A Year of Getting Ready”**

My overarching theme for this year, as it was with my sabbatical, was getting ready for the completion of our building expansion. I've been anticipating that day since we decided to go ahead with our expansion two years ago after our successful Capital Campaign.

Expectations of my performance in relationship to membership retention and growth will go up. Quality of Sunday services will also be expected to increase as will the expectations of our greater outreach into the community. Our three priorities focusing us on hospitality, excellence and social action have been reshaping my ministry and my priorities.

Even though the Finance Committee has planned a way we can meet our mortgage commitment without membership growth, I recognize how important modest membership growth will be to fulfill our building expansion vision. We didn't build this space to remain the same. We built this space to enlarge our ability to serve our congregational members and the larger community.

I'm happy to report that my ministry in Albany is as strong as it has ever been and our congregation is well positioned to achieve the goals we have set for ourselves with our building expansion project. I don't doubt we'll have some growing pains over the next few years as we integrate our mortgage into our budget. But the energy level and excitement people are feeling promise to help see us through.

### **Bringing My Sabbatical Home**

I brought back my learning during my sabbatical both to the Board Executive Committee as well as the Board and to the Readiness Leadership Team summarizing some of what I learned. I continued to meet with the Readiness Leadership Team during my sabbatical both to share what I was learning and help prepare the congregation for the changes we should expect following the completion of the building expansion.

The decision to focus on three priorities for the congregation that led to the dessert conversations in the fall was influenced by the reports I brought back from congregations I visited. Larger congregations need to focus on their priorities to allow them to be more effective at accomplishing their goals. Priorities are very helpful in making the key allocations of resources that are necessary to make progress.

Our key priority of radical hospitality came to us through Jefferson Unitarian Church in Golden, Colorado. The catch phrase “repel fewer visitors” has inspired our Membership Committee to reach out more effectively. Several people who have joined recently noticed the change and said it was influential in their decision to join.

Every congregation I visited had a membership coordinator. They praised hiring a membership coordinator as a key factor for their growth. I brought this back to our Readiness Leadership Team and encouraged us to figure out how to hire one. I've been using the argument that a membership coordinator is like a sales person. You hire them because they increase your revenue and should pay for themselves. Dave Munro caught my

enthusiasm and figured out how to add one by financing it partly with a Chalice Lighter grant.

### **Creating Greater Congregational Visibility**

I did have the good fortune to be asked to blog for the Times Union last summer. This has been a great opportunity to get exposure in their web site and a couple of times I was selected as their “best of the blogs.” The Times Union’s refusal to print Helen Sharpe’s Obituary as she requested also got our congregation a story to highlight us through the blog I posted about it. I got some more public exposure by being one of the speakers at the worship service before Eliot Spitzer’s inaugural.

I’ve limited my work with ARISE this year to encouraging the use of Faith in Action Conversations, developed by Gamaliel, the community organizing institute that works with ARISE, to stimulate congregation involvement in our ARISE CORE team, ARISE and our neighborhood. I offered two trainings in the Faith in Action Conversation for the ARISE Board and for congregational leaders in Albany. We used it in our congregation to work on how to better serve our neighbors as part of our commitment for our IDA loan for our new building. Over 25 people attended including three of our neighbors. Some good ideas were generated and, more important, several people stepped forward to get involved, including some neighbors.

### **Capital Region Connecting**

One of the more exciting group meetings in which I’m participating is our UU Metro group that brings the ministers and presidents of Albany, Schenectady, Saratoga and Glens Falls together to work on growth both of our own congregations and of Unitarian Universalism in the Capital Region. As I’ve watched his conversation evolve over the last 18 months or so, I’ve been pleased to see a new consciousness developing that is creating a sense of common identity. I see that change in how I think of our sister congregations, not as much as competitors but more as allies in our common work. The fruit of that work could be a new congregation in Clifton Park in three to four years.

### **Keeping the Home Fires Burning**

I taught two classes this year and attended a third. The class I taught in the fall was titled “Liberal Spiritual Politics” and the spring class I taught was titled “Lenten Bible Study.” I attended most of the classes on World Religions organized by Bob Therriault that ran contemporaneously with the Bible study class.

I’ve faithfully served on a number of committees as well as the Executive Committee, the Board and the Program Coordinating Council. The special committees have included the Readiness Leadership Team, the Safe Congregation Task force, and the DRE Search Committee. I participated in all the regular committees I usually attend. As I reviewed my schedule for the last year, I was impressed with the number of meetings I attended, sometimes 8 to 10 a week or more, and how many evenings and Saturdays, and Sunday afternoons I spend at FUUSA. While it is hard to give up so many evenings, one of the

ways I assist the smooth sailing of our congregation is through working with these committees.

### **Conclusion**

We have completed eight years together, which feels like a significant milestone after returning from my sabbatical. My ministry continues to be well supported in the congregation, if not getting stronger.

The completion of our new space will be both an opportunity and a challenge for me. Expectations of my ministry and leadership are likely to rise. I don't want to follow our former minister James Madison Barr's example. He left to serve another congregation as our RE wing was completed in 1962. I'm committed to helping us grow into our new space.

As I feel my ministerial skills growing each year, I feel more and more confident I am ready for the challenge. But I cannot pull it off alone. The key will be our close collaboration. I'm grateful for the support I've received from Ann, Amy, Dave and Matt, with special appreciation of Ann as she retires this year.