

## **Minister's Annual Report (2008)**

### **Rev. Samuel A. Trumbore**

#### **"Many Changes and Adjustments, Great Results"**

I'm completing my ninth year of ministry here and it feels like one of the best. After years of anticipation, we finally occupied our new space with about 270 people at our first September service in Emerson Community Hall. What a memorable day for us! Thus began a new chapter in the life of our congregation as "building up" turned into "reaching out." I'm grateful to Dave Munro, Linda Way and all the other leaders in our congregation whose dedication, skills and hard work have made this possible.

Starting regular services in Emerson took many, many adjustments. Hymnbooks had to be handed out. More ushers were needed to collect the offering. Noise problems with doors and floors forced us to hold back latecomers (who soon could listen to the service in the hall). The balcony presented unexpected problems. Patterns of chair arrangement were experimented with. It took until the beginning of the New Year before things settled down. And we're still revising the usher and the service leader instructions. When the service flows smoothly this intense attention to detail pays off.

One of the most noticeable changes of moving into Emerson has been the increased attendance, as predicted. This increase hasn't slowed down with attendance May 4<sup>th</sup> peaking at 218. We're seeing many new faces and membership is also up to about 30 people this year. Our congregation is developing a lot of positive momentum.

#### **New Staff**

I want to honor two key people who are part of our success this year, Leah Purcell, our new Director of Religious Education, and Lynne Lekakis, our quarter-time Membership Coordinator.

Leah and I have been working very closely together this year to develop a new level of minister-DRE cooperation. From Leah's first day, we've been working on developing a break through in educational programming termed "lifespan education." I've developed a phrase that captures what this is all about: Always a learner, always a teacher. At every age and stage of life we can be both learners and teachers. The learning and teaching can happen both ways from older to younger and younger to older. Leah and I believe that embracing this approach will transform the life of the congregation and bring a new level of growth and vitality. This is pioneering work that no one else in the UUA has fully implemented. Leah and I want FUUSA to be a leader in discovering what the lifespan approach can do to enhance everyone's spiritual and personal growth and development.

Leah and I have worked closely together on Kid's Time this year, leading to a significant improvement. We have also cooperated on putting on two Saturday classes, the first titled Articulating UU Faith and the second, Negotiate Your Expectations. This Saturday format drew a good participation and allowed us to present the material that normally

would have taken several evenings in one 9am to 3:00pm format. The longer time also better facilitated community development. Look for more Saturday workshops in the future. Leah and I are also testing a new curriculum called “Spirit of Life” in the more traditional evening setting.

Lynne Lekakis in the few hours a week we have of her time has begun the vitally important work of systematically contacting and paying attention to all the visitors who move through our congregation. She works hard to find out what interests and needs they bring to our congregation and looks for ways to connect them to groups, activities and individuals that will be of assistance to them. Lynne is also an innovative person who carefully observes how we do things and makes changes to improve our welcoming process. I’m told on a regular basis how satisfied visitors are with the way they are welcomed and included here.

### Sunday Service Innovations

Another source of momentum has been the continuing increase in the quality of our Sunday morning services. One very important factor is actually the room itself. There is an intimacy to Emerson that even guest speakers remark about. Presenters can see everyone no matter where each participant is seated, even in the balcony. I find this sense of closeness actually enhances my communication and adds a dimension to my speaking I don’t remember in the old sanctuary.

I’ve taken advantage of the larger stage to use visual projection more. While the current screen and projector are far from adequate for the space, they have made the Kid’s Time more friendly to the adults. Using visual images particularly during intergenerational services helps hold the attention of the children and communicate ideas that perhaps words cannot. In a sermon about failure, Tom Mercer and David MacLeod acted out a scene from Arthur Miller’s play, *Death of a Salesman*. Acting and having a little theater on Sunday morning can greatly enhance the message of the service. We’ve had more acting opportunities this year for our children too by adding an Easter playlet.

### Sunday Morning Meditation

The decision to move back to one service from two permitted me to start a weekly meditation session. Doing two services has prevented me from sharing my long experience and skill with meditation on a weekly basis. The meditation group meets at 9:00am in the old sanctuary, keeping that space in weekly use as well. A small group of regulars (and many visitors) have been coming to hear a dharma reading, sit for 20 minutes, have a 10 minute discussion period, and dedicate the merit of our time together for the benefit of all beings. Having the chance to lead regular meditation practice, in addition to my weekend meditation retreats, is opening a new dimension of my ministry offering our members and friends training in a powerful, UU friendly spiritual practice.

### Summer Services

With an air-conditioned Emerson Community Hall, we no longer have any excuse not to have Sunday services throughout the summer without a break. The program and activities will be scaled back, but we'll be maintaining the normal Sunday format and we'll also have programming for children. While I appreciate the need for a respite for our congregational leaders, people's religious needs do not take a summer holiday. I'll be leading three of these twelve services, one in June, July and August.

### Visiting Transylvania

I wasn't planning on going to Transylvania when I put my goals together this fall. But when I read that our partner church in Szókefalva was having a 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration, I volunteered to represent our congregation at the event and our Partner Church Committee was willing to send me. I spent eight days there under the wing of their minister, Sandor Kovacs. To read a detailed narrative of my trip with many pictures, please visit my blog at <http://blogs.timesunion.com/trumbore>. We'd been having troubles communicating effectively with the members of their church. My visit was able to break through those problems and establish new connections and means of communication much to the delight of members of the Partner Church Committee.

### Other Activities & Events

UU Leadership Team Institute – Leah Purcell, Donna Doran and I attended “UULTI” last August. UULTI is a four district leadership training program with multiple tracks. Leah, Donna and I drove down and back together further facilitating team building that paid off as a way to bring us together before the September 2007 fall kickoff.

Still Forest Pool – I serve on the board of Still Forest Pool, an organization promoting Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction and Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy. The fledgling group hosted its first workshop in April led by MBCT teacher Susan Woods. The demand for applied meditation techniques for everyday problems seems to be steadily increasing. The people attracted fit the UU profile.

### Summary

April 2<sup>nd</sup> was the day that I beamed with pride as Emerson Community Hall fulfilled a key purpose we had in mind when it was still a dream in our imagination. That Wednesday morning we hosted a U. Albany conference titled Public Universities and Neighborhood Revitalization. Five experts from other public universities made presentations about how they had helped lift the neighborhoods around them. That evening, a panel including Gloria Steinem addressed a packed house on contemporary women's issues. Our vision of being a beacon to the community was being actualized.

The energy continues to build as more people are exposed to Emerson Community Hall. I have yet to show it to someone and not have them impressed by it. Emerson has become the incubator of a whole new level of activity with many new people being

drawn in. May this beacon we have built continue to brighten each one of our lights so we can be sources of love and life for a troubled world.