

Minister's Annual Report (2009)

Rev. Samuel A. Trumbore

“Building on Past Success and Catching the Breeze of Dreams for the Future”

As I complete my tenth year of ministry with FUUSA, I'm reflecting back over those days with a feeling of satisfaction. We have both grown over those years. When I arrived here in the fall of 1999 from a small congregation in Southwest Florida, I was filled with excitement at serving such a vital and energetic congregation. I was also worried about the extra responsibilities and expectations. Would I have what it takes to serve this diverse group? Would I have the stamina! By now the answer is a resounding yes. Our institutional health is great and we are poised for great years ahead.

FUUSA continues to grow and develop at all levels from individual, to committee, to leadership and to staff. We added a net growth of 10 members this year and likely will do better next year. We also invested significant energy into strategic planning through our Dream Catchers Committee. Our welcome of the stranger continues to improve as does our level of caring for our vulnerable members. Our Small Group Ministry program continues to serve our member's needs for “intimacy and ultimacy.” The adult education and enrichment opportunities were good as well. I'm aware that we have not attained perfection in these areas and even, at times, fall short of some member's expectations. Still, each year, I'm seeing steady progress and improvement.

I participated in a number of activities of our congregation that I'd like to review as part of this report. I do this partly to impress the gentle reader with how hard I work as well as leave historical documentation of my ministry. Yet there is a larger reason to document: to articulate the broader sweep of the ministry I bring to this congregation. Some of it happens here on Sunday morning. Some of it happens in the community. Some of it happens in the larger web of Unitarian Universalism. Some of it happens electronically through the Internet. Some of it happens one-to-one in a living room or at the hospital bedside. Few get to see all the different aspects of my Unitarian Universalist ministry in action.

Worship Ministry

My wife Philomena and I attended a week-long retreat on Nonviolent Communication based on the work of Marshall Rosenberg held at the Sage campus in Albany last summer. We found “NVC” to be very helpful for us to better understand how awareness of feelings, needs and making requests rather than demands can help people create peace with each other. This inspired me to do a fall sermon series on peacemaking as a core part of our congregation's identity. The start of the series coincided with the planting of our Peace Pole outside our front door September 21.

Several members of our Religious Services Committee attended an excellent workshop in November in Rochester on the latest ideas on innovative worship led by the Rev.'s Wayne Arnason and Kathleen Rolenz, UU co-ministers and authors of *Worship that Works*, and Rev.'s Scott Taylor and Kaaren Anderson, ministers of First Unitarian Church of Rochester. Some of these ideas are percolating through my brain and are likely to show up next year.

I've taken over inviting speakers for our Summer Service series at the request of the Religious Services Committee. We generated a speakers list together and I took on the job of filling the slots. So far so good! We decided we wanted to recruit ministers to speak as much as possible to make sure the quality

of these services will be high.

Teaching Ministry

Wanting to bring to FUUSA some of Philomena's and my inspiration about Marshall Rosenberg's Nonviolent Communication methods, I contacted Martha Lasley, a NVC trainer, to do a Saturday workshop November 1. We had 45 participants for a good day that led to an ongoing NVC class at the Shambala Buddhist Center in Albany (rather than at FUUSA) in which Philomena participates. My hope continues to be that we'll find ways to use NVC methods in our congregation, in our religious education classes and in our programming.

2009 was Darwin's 200th birthday. I offered a special sermon to honor Darwin and we had afternoon lectures with two Darwinian scholars, Tom Carroll and Sherrie Lyons. We had about 60 people in attendance.

After hearing Fr. John Dear speak at General Assembly last summer, I decided to use his book on *The Questions of Jesus* as the basis of my yearly Lenten Bible Study class. I did a sermon to introduce the class. A solid dozen people participated in the six week class and found it very educational.

Leah and I ran the largest Rite of Passage class we've ever had with 13 mentors and 13 mentees. Although only 23 managed to go to Boston, the program was once again quite successful. One of the innovations this year was to offer each mentee meeting time with the minister as part of their formulation of their belief statement. I enjoyed getting to know each student with more depth than our RE program usually permits.

Meditation at 9:00am each Sunday has a small group who come on a regular basis. I appreciate having that quiet time before I begin the service to get settled down and grounded in the present moment. I've been primarily working with Jack Kornfield's book, *A Path with Heart*, as a source of my readings. I offered three meditation intensives. The January one was a synthesis of Sufism and Buddhism with Sufi teacher Joseph Yaqin Aubert from the Abode in New Lebanon, New York. This retreat was quite good and is helping me envision a different, more accessible, way to offer opportunities for spiritual deepening combined with meditation practice.

Pastoral Ministry

This year saw the death of three members for whom I participated in or did memorial services: Mary Stierer, Dora Reed and Irene Kaplan. I've increased my contact with our members this year by sending homemade cards with cover photos drawn from my photo archives. It delights me to offer words of condolence or celebration with my favorite photos on the cover.

Pam Collins took the leadership of Small Group Ministry this year. She encouraged the facilitators to have their own SGM group that met once a month in which I participated. She graciously offered her home as a meeting place. The Facilitators Group worked well. I worried that three meetings a month would overwhelm the facilitators. It didn't – an important lesson learned!

Institutional Ministry

This fall saw the kickoff of the Dream Catchers work. My focus on the committee was to work with

Dick Dana and Molly Daniels to interview community leaders looking for unmet needs in the community our congregation could address. This interview process reintroduced me to more community activism, something I'd stepped back from during my sabbatical in 2006. It felt very good to re-engage with the community.

One unexpected area that took a good deal of time this year was objections to our new Toward a Safe Congregation policy. Concerns about background checks and how to deal with implementing the policy given we had these objections led to philosophical email exchanges and research to understand better why we might want to have background checks. With the decision to convene a new task force to review the policy areas in dispute, I hope to return resolving this dispute to the congregation's hands.

The stress on staff members due to changes brought about by our building expansion and adding two staff members last year led me to be more engaged with supervision this year. This has included writing staff performance reviews. As the Dream Catchers present and the congregation ratifies a vision for our congregation's future, I expect it will have ramifications for our staff's priorities and assignments. I hope to work with the Personnel Committee to coordinate the work of our staff with our vision of where we'd like to see our congregation go in the future.

Service to the Unitarian Universalist Association

What we called last year, "UU Metro," has been renamed: Capital Region Unitarian Universalists of New York, or "CRUUNY." I worked very hard with Leah Purcell, Kimberley Debus of Saratoga Springs, and music director Garreth Griffith of Schenectady, organizing our first joint worship service at the Saratoga Hilton April 26th. The event was a huge success with over 600 people in attendance and 100 in the choir! The theme of the celebration was Building Bridges. The service modeled what we can do when we build bridges between our congregations.

The first joint CRUUNY project will be a marketing campaign for this coming fall. At the time of writing, already \$16,000 has been raised by lead donors with a follow up fund raiser to begin soon.

I continue to be involved in the Unitarian Universalist Buddhist Fellowship as its Secretary. We organized our third Convocation which was held in Oceanside, California at Mission San Luis Rey. Our theme presenter was Shinzen Young. About 55 people attended this weekend event in March.

I concluded my three years as President of the Iroquois Chapter of the Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association at our spring retreat held this year in Latham before the Saint Lawrence District Assembly that was held at FUUSA. I did the opening worship for this event with the assistance of the Helderberg Madrigals.

I continue to serve on the UUA Openness Implementation Committee. This committee is a little at sea right now as it has completed its original mission. It works to bring openness to the way the UUA Board and its committees operate. I'm happy to be part of this group as they pay my way to General Assembly!

Community Ministry

ARISE has struggled the last few years due to having too many projects and not enough volunteers to lead them. I decided to get more involved to see if I could bring revitalization to the organization. My

role has been to work on bringing in new clergy and religious organizations. I've limited my involvement to daytime meetings with clergy. This suits me well to limit my time commitment. As with doing interviews with community leaders for the Dream Catchers, I see work in the community as an important part of what I enjoy in my ministry. It is an important role I can play to raise the profile of our congregation in the community as well as create opportunities for our congregation to make a positive difference in the community.

I continue to meet monthly with the West Hill Ministerial Fellowship and serve on the Interfaith Impact Board.

Although I'm not as active in posting as I'd like, I continue to blog on the Times Union web site. I don't know how many people read me but the TU reports my submissions get a lot of attention. I just wish I had more time to put into all these activities!

Conclusion

I continue to be deeply grateful to be serving this congregation. My ministry here in Albany is very satisfying to me as I hope it is to you too.

The challenge of realizing the dream of being a beacon of Unitarian Universalism lies before us. Our congregation will struggle to realize the greatness of what we can become without fully embracing the architecture of the Beacon Window in Emerson Community Hall. I've stood outside on Washington Avenue and looked through that window when someone is speaking from the pulpit. I've driven past our building at night with the single light illuminating that window. We are ready to let our liberally religious light shine out to the larger community. We have a saving message 90% or more of the people around us don't comprehend.

I'm dedicated to getting our Unitarian Universalist message out to every man, woman and child in Albany. I want everyone to correctly understand who we are and what we stand for. Most will reject us and I can accept that. There are many good ways to be religious. But far more than attend here currently will gratefully want to join us, even feel saved by our religious approach.

Our far-sighted, pluralistic way of doing religion is still growing and maturing. I believe the best is before us and I hunger for the day when Unitarian Universalism comes into its own and gets the appreciation and recognition it deserves.

I look forward to realizing this dream of being a beacon with you. So may it be!