

Minister's Annual Report (2011)

Rev. Sam Trumbore

I'm just a little bit exhausted this year as I write this report. As I reviewed my year, I began to understand why. This has been one of the busiest years of my ministry here in Albany. And I'm pleased to say it has also been one of the best years of my ministry. I've turned my focus away from my work outside the congregation in our community and in the larger Unitarian Universalist movement. I've focused primarily on the needs of our members. And that is paying off. We continue to have a strong and satisfying shared relationship between ministry and congregation – a remarkable achievement after twelve years. The reason is we are both challenging ourselves and growing together.

New Initiatives

I monitor what other congregations are doing watching for evolving trends that might be valuable to our congregation. I also keep alert to ways I can grow in my ministry. These are the initiatives that I started this year to help increase satisfaction and promote growth and development in me and in our congregation.

Sunday Service Theme of the Month

I've been frustrated in the past that I'll have a great topic for a service and then we'll be on to another topic the next Sunday. I'll have only just opened the topic before having to move on to another topic. This limits my and our congregation's ability to go deeper into the topic. So this fall I took inspiration from other congregations doing “theme based ministry” and decided I'd choose a theme of the month for the fall then evaluate the initiative in the winter or spring. I chose to work with themes that came directly out of our strategic plan: **community, diversity and justice**. I did three services associated with the theme then had a feedback session Sunday afternoon. The feedback session on diversity got the best turnout and the most discussion.

The last Sunday in November and the first Sunday in December I focused on **peace**. At the end of January and the beginning of February I presented to services focused on “**ethical eating**” to connect with the Statement of Conscience that will be considered at General Assembly this June. The special meeting of the UUA Commission on Appraisal held in our congregation in March stimulated a series on **authority**. The topic the COA is working on is “Whose in Charge Here? The Complex Relationship Between Ministry and Authority.”

Overall, I've been pleased with the response to the series and plan to continue them. I don't believe I'll be able to do them every month but rather five to six a year might be manageable. I'd like to have more integration of children's programming, adult education, guest speakers and programs to offer broader consideration of the theme for those motivated to go deeper. I'd also like to choose more topics that have religious content.

Worship Cabinet

The Worship Cabinet was a program I initiated to broaden feedback about our Sunday services. This “cabinet” is an ad-hoc group of people I've selected to represent a diversity of attitudes and desires, including those serving on the Religious Services Committee. This group meets after the Religious Services Committee every other month. The first meeting did an appreciative inquiry into what was working in the Sunday services, what wasn't and what could be improved or eliminated. This led to several changes in the service, including moving the Introducing Guests and Visitors to after the announcements. This change worked well. The cabinet also surveyed the congregation about their

Sunday morning experience. Overall, there is general satisfaction as well as an openness to innovation. Look for some innovative and experimental services coming from this group in the future.

Pastoral Care Associates Program

One of the stresses in a congregation our size is pastoral care. I'm often limited in the amount of time I can offer in support of our members who are not in crisis. I can get to the hospital but may not have much time for follow up once someone is home.

The Pastoral Care Associate program's design was inspired by visits I made to larger congregations during my sabbatical in 2006. I recruited Bobbi Place who works as a chaplain for Ellis Hospital to work with me in developing the program. We selected the participants over the summer and trained them in the fall, starting the program in full swing in December. We started with nine people when we began the training, that number whittled down to seven by the time we commissioned them during a Sunday Service. They are: **Randy Rossette Jensen, Sharon Babala, Jon Newell, Jean Bolgatz, Phil Rich, Jan Satin, and Mark Yolles.**

Two Pastoral Care Associates are "on duty" on Sunday to respond immediately to any sorrows shared during the service. I often cannot respond to a sorrow because I'm greeting people after the service and responding to peoples questions and concerns. Our members are free to directly approach any Pastoral Care Associate. They are trained to offer emotional support through active listening. They may also make recommendations and referrals, particularly to me for follow up if appropriate. The PCA's and I meet once a month for ongoing training and to review their work and their contacts during the past month.

So far, my level of pastoral care hasn't dropped, rather has probably increased as I'm more aware of the needs of our members and friends. What is different is much more pastoral care is being offered to our members and friends through the PCA program. For this I'm very grateful and I believe is contributing to the well being of congregational life. So I can say without hesitation, it has been a very successful program.

Wellspring

The Wellspring program came to us from First Unitarian in Rochester, the brainchild of the Rev. Jen Crow. Wellspring is a year long spiritual deepening program that develops one's Unitarian Universalist identity. The Rev. Priscilla Richter from Schenectady and I ran the program for our two congregations with seven participants. The participants from Albany this year are Dave Munro, Linda Way, Tom Mercer and Dawn Dana. Next year Tom Mercer and Linda Way will be offering the program for our congregation.

Minister's Lunch

The Minister's Lunch was a way for new-comers to spend some time getting to know me. I devised it as a way to have more contact with new-comers that would help them discern their interest in joining. I had several of these in the fall and a couple in the winter. All of them have been well attended and the conversation has been very good. I'll be continuing this program next fall.

Worship

Two important things to note here. I gave the **sermon** for the **Capital Area Council of Churches Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Memorial Service** on January 15th. My sermon was well received and raised the profile of our congregation in the religious community in Albany.

I also attended a **preaching seminar** as part of a continuing education program put on by the Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association at the Asilomar Conference Center near Monterrey, California. The **Rev. Dr. Kay Northcutt** led the seminar. She gave me an exciting vision of a different way to preach that I've used this spring with very positive responses. I'll be doing more research on the ideas she presented for use this coming fall. Stay tuned!

Memorial Services

So far this year I've done three memorial services for **Bill Webb**, **Beryl Drobeck** and **Jack Hotchkiss**. All three were vital members of the congregation when I arrived. I'm sad to see them go and know they will be missed.

Adult Education

The Wellspring program has been my primary focus of Adult Education this year. I've also worked with Leah in our **Rite-of-Passage program** with nine youth and nine mentors. My **Lenten Bible Study** worked with Marcus Borg's book, *The Heart of Christianity*. I offered a sermon on the book then ran the class for six sessions in March and April. A total of 18 people participated in the class with an average attendance of 13. This was one of the best Lenten Bible Study classes I've done to date!

Membership

I continue to support the Membership Committee by attending their meetings, participating in the "Getting to Know UU" sessions on Saturday morning and interviewing all new members. I find this to be an important part of integrating new members into the congregation. It also keeps me connected to what the new people joining our congregation are looking for on Sunday morning and their involvement interests. Not surprisingly, the new members aren't that much different from our current members in interests or theological orientation.

Larger Unitarian Universalist Involvement

I serve as treasurer for the Capital Region Unitarian Universalists of New York (or CRUUNY). This group is made up of the four Ministers and Presidents of the local congregations (Glens Falls, Saratoga Springs, Schenectady and Albany).

We have three big projects right now. The first was our **joint advertising campaign** this fall sponsored by a **Chalice Lighter Grant** with ads on WAMC, a targeted postcard mailing, some advertising on the Times Union web site (and my blog!) and "**search engine**" **marketing**. I worked specifically on the search engine marketing, picking the key words that would trigger one of our ads to show up on Google, Ask, Bing and Yahoo searches. I found the "hits" and the "page views" very revealing about what people are most interested in that draw people to consider us. "Volunteer opportunities" are what many people are looking for and click on us.

The second major project is the launching of the "**Two Rivers**" congregation. I offered a multi-generational service for them in March. They currently meet in a YMCA that may not be the most agreeable place to have a service.

The last project is **our joint service** that will be happening this year on June 5th. This year, our theme speaker will be the Rev. Scott Alexander, our evangelist for the growth of our movement. We'll have a dinner here the night before to raise funds for our CRUUNY initiatives with Rev. Alexander.

Another joyful moment for our congregation was **Chris Antal's ordination** in March. Chris is the second intern we've launched. I've got high hopes for him as he serves in our military, striving to make

a positive difference in their culture. I'd really like us to have another intern soon!

In the fall, I met with the **UU RPI student group**. Bruce King, FUUSA member and RPI senior this year, has kept this group going. Not sure who will lead it next year. My hope is FUSS RPI sophomore Leah Simpson will take it over.

The last major initiative for me this past year was helping to put on the **Unitarian Universalist Buddhist Fellowship Convocation 2011**, April 8-10. This year it was at the Garrison Institute in Garrison, New York. Our theme speakers were the Rev. James Ford and David Rynick. Both are Zen roshis. Our theme for the event was exploring the connections between Buddhism and Unitarian Universalism. About 50 people attended the event. I recorded the audio and video for the event and will be generating a DVD of the presentations.

Wider Community Involvement

Our congregation hosted our **Union Thanksgiving Service** this year. This is a joint service put on by Congregation Beth Emeth, Westminster Presbyterian and Trinity Methodist churches and our congregation. This year our guest presenters were Joseph and Jesse Bruchac. Attendance was very good as was the program this year.

Our **War Healing Ministry** work started by Chris Antal has continued under the direction of Ryu Roshida. In October we hosted a presentation by Soldier's Heart that brought together veterans and three visitors from Vietnam. I attend the continuing war healing circles that Ryu leads. I received an award for our congregation at Camp Smith for our work serving veterans from the Army Reserve.

I've also been involved with the **Capital District Transition Network**, offering a sermon about their work in November and attending a meeting. If we do have a peak oil crisis as they are predicting, our congregation could be an important part of responding during an economic emergency.

Some other areas of community involvement include support for **ARISE** as they consider how to reorganize and restart the organization. I offered opening words for **Transgender Remembrance Day**. I participated in the **Troy Wedding March** in the fall. I'll be lobbying and serving as a spokesperson for **Marriage Equality**. I also advocate for **Family Planning Advocates** and **Interfaith Impact**. I serve on the Interfaith Impact board.

Blogging

I continue to blog for the **Times Union**. I put up my sermons, newsletter columns and I comment on current events that have religious angles. My blog posts get reposted to my Facebook page and to our congregational Facebook page. I see this as a way to increase the visibility of our congregation as I'm listed on the Times Union's blog list. Periodically my blog is featured in the paper and on their web site. It is yet another way to entice people through our doors that I believe is worth my time investment.

Conclusion

If you've read this far, you'll recognize that I'm a busy fellow in a very active congregation. While my involvement in all the things mentioned varies, my commitment is strong to the growth and development of our congregation and its members. I expect things aren't going to slow down next year as we ramp up our **Threshold Congregation** work. Stressful as this can be at times during the year, I thrive on being busy helping our congregation fulfill its purpose. It is gratifying to see the positive response we've seen this year. Let's have more of the same next year!