

Minister's Annual Report (2012)

Rev. Sam Trumbore

Overview

As I write this 13th Annual Report for FUUSA, I have a sense that 13 has been a lucky year. Alex Rodriguez of the New York Yankees, Dan Marino of the Miami Dolphins and Wilt Chamberlain have all had good experiences wearing the number 13. My experience this year, suggests 13 has been a number that has worked for me too.

Each year, as I prepare to write this report, I remember just how much activity I have to report. As I review those activities, I find that I continue to grow and develop in my ministry at FUUSA. I'm grateful that we can grow together as we both strive to serve the mission of our congregation to:

...welcome all men, women and children who seek a religion based on the inherent sanctity of each person's free and responsible search for truth and meaning. In keeping with our distinctive, noncreedal religion, we strive to excite the human spirit and inspire its development; to respond to moral and ethical issues in our local, national and world communities; and to sustain a vital and nurturing congregational life. (Adopted November 7, 1993)

Sunday Services

Innovations in Sunday services began for me in August. I offered a sermon based on a book on mnemonics oddly titled, *Moonwalking with Einstein*. This book on the art of memorization gave me the courage to step away from reading a written sermon and to present the sermon from memory. The positive response I got to that style of presentation emboldened me to be freer from standing behind the pulpit and to speak more spontaneously while at the same time having carefully researched and prepared my topic.

Inspired by the greater depth possible when I focus on **monthly themes**, in the fall I organized the services in October around the theme of "prophecy," "Heritage" in November, and "Peace" in December. In March and the beginning of April, I presented a five part series that defined the core of our Unitarian Universalist faith through five lenses, (1) resistance to abusive authority, (2) sustainability, (3) pluralism, (4) non-violence, (5) love and community. Some UU congregations seek to have a theme every month. That level of coordination seems more than is manageable or desired. Having four to six however seem to be workable and enhances our program.

One of the sermons I offered in December titled, "Love and Hope Beyond Belief," led me to **the Rev. Thandeka** who has worked with a similarly titled program called, "**We Love Beyond Belief.**" I asked for her ideas and suggestions for my service, used some of them and got an enthusiastic response to the service. I again used her suggestions, after meeting with her for dinner in Boston (during a supervision training I attended at the UUA) to very good result in a sermon in January. This convinced me working with her as a consultant would be very helpful as I strive to, as she puts it, "tweak" the way I do Sunday services to make them more compelling. She is stretching me to find ways to connect head and heart in emotionally satisfying ways that will lead to deeper commitment. Watch for the results of this work coming up in the fall.

Leah Purcell and I continue to strive to make our **multigenerational services** more and more appealing. We feel we've done a good job this year, with each one building on the last. Trying to reach all ages in one service that only lasts sixty minutes seems almost impossible at times. Short segments,

good music, great stories, an activity and shared singing are all ingredients that bridge the generations.

Looking ahead, I've worked with members of the Religious Services Committee and the Worship Cabinet this year to design an innovative service for next fall. We'd like to create **a young adult oriented service on Saturday afternoon**, likely 4:00pm. I recruited some young adults to help us understand what such a service might look like. Rather than a high energy rock band driven service, what we heard was interest in a more meditative, reflective service with acoustic music. Young people's brains today are saturated with words from their iPhones, Android phones and social media, from the cloud of data spinning around them. They crave a space to empty out and find some inner peace. Look for this to start in September.

Adult Education

New life and energy flowed into the Lifespan Learning Committee this year, but not early enough for me to coordinate my presentations of classes. I plan to have my classes and sermons coordinate more closely with their offerings starting next fall.

To support my sermon series on prophecy, I did a class on the **Biblical Prophets**. While I was disappointed that my enthusiasm for these malcontents who are the prototypes for Unitarian Universalist social activists today didn't sufficiently infect the congregation, the class was well received by the participants. In February I offered a class on **Buddhist philosophy** to give some depth to my weekly meditation sessions on Sunday morning. The biggest undertaking for teaching this year for me was using Rebecca Parker and Rita Brock's book *Saving Paradise* as a text for my yearly Lenten Bible Study. This class drew good attendance for six weeks as we plowed through the 420 page book. We learned a lot about Christian history from a different perspective than it is usually taught.

What I notice about teaching adults at FUUSA is the importance of doing a Sunday service to stimulate interest in a class. When the service touches people, they show up for the class, as happened with the *Saving Paradise* class. The amount of effort, though, to plow through a 420 page book and develop questions for discussion and other background resources was challenging along with my other duties, almost more than I have time to do well. This was also true of my fall class on the Prophets.

The last class I'm teaching right now, called **Spiritual Deepening**, came to me during my January meditation retreat at the Insight Meditation Center in Barre, Massachusetts. The goal of the three month, six session class is to develop a spiritual practice grounded in our mission statement. It has four parts, exciting the human spirit, inspiring its growth and development, responding to the troubles of the world and to nurture community at FUUSA. The participant commits to do something in each of those four areas over the three months of the program. The class supports each other as they work through and report biweekly on their program.

Administration

The big transition this year for the staff was **Dave Stone's retirement**. The Personnel Committee did a great job **restructuring Dave's position into two separate jobs**. They worked with me to sort through the applications and interview candidates for the positions. We now have Stephanie Hayes in the office as our office administrator and Hadiya Wilborn working along side Olga Oja doing custodial work and building maintenance.

Olga also announced her departure to return closer to home to support her sister who has health problems. This gave us the opportunity to give both Stephanie and Hadiya more hours and **eliminate the part-time position**. Hadiya will now have responsibility for the building both inside and out.

Stephanie will inherit the set-up part of Hadiya's old position. We'll be appreciating Olga during our Annual Meeting.

In the reorganization, Amy moved out of her Church Administrator job and into a completely **new position of membership and communications coordinator**. She will continue greeting visitors on Sunday morning, organize outreach to visitors, track them as they get to know us and become members, continue her work with Windows, the Thursday email blast, and the order of service for Sunday. In addition, she will be involved increasingly in our web and social networking presence, how people are and will be finding us in the future.

Social Responsibility Work

The passage of the legalization of same sex marriage in June was the culmination of eight years of work for **marriage equality**. The first ceremony I performed (after signing marriage licenses for the two couples I married in 2004, including Lynn Lekakis and Elissa Kane) was for John Cooley and Jack Millard. The marriage was performed on the top of a hill in the Ooms Conservation Area followed by a reception at their home in Chatham.

The **Occupy Movement** was a powerful force that swept into Albany and dominated the local headlines in the fall. I participated in a number of events as part of the occupation of Academy Park in front of the Albany City Hall next to the Capital. Leah and I led a trip down to visit them with our Rite of Passage class (part of our overnight at FUUSA) that was a big hit with the youth. I also did a sermon and a follow up discussion on the Occupy Movement.

Another important effort I've supported in our West Hill and Arbor Hill neighborhoods has been the **SNUG program** to reduce gun violence. The program puts violence intervention workers on the street at times and in places when violence tends to pop up. The program saw a significant drop in violence during 2011. Unfortunately the funding ran out before the program could be fully implemented. Thankfully some funding was restored to the program with the help of a coalition of which I was a part. We did a give away the plate to SNUG in January that raised about 2,000 dollars and made an important statement to our neighbors that we care about addressing violence.

The push to address immigration issues as part of **Justice GA 2012** started out being a tough sell in our congregation. I did a service on it in the fall and organized a email discussion and a followup meeting. The **fall St. Lawrence District Social Justice Conference** in Rochester did stimulate some engagement through a presentation by the UU minister from Phoenix, the Rev. Susan Frederick-Gray. A SRC potluck with Fred and Diana Boehrer from the **New Sanctuary movement** here in Albany also helped to make a difference in stimulating interest. It will be part of the theme of our CRUUNY joint service this year along with a day of action at the Saratoga Race Track supporting immigrant track workers on Saturday June 23.

Other issues I've participated in include **speaking out against hydrofracking** in front of Albany City Hall. I also organized a lunch and presentation for local clergy by Tina Clarke as part of the **Transition Network** that focuses on the transition from a fossil fuel based economy and society to one fueled by renewable fuels creating a sustainable culture and economy. A participant in that meeting, Fr. George Brennan, director of the Capital Area Council of Churches, mentioned it as an influence at a dinner I attended and invited representatives of the Transition Network to table for one of their events.

CRUUNY

I continue to work with the Capital Region Unitarian Universalists of New York, meeting with the

ministers and congregational presidents to look for ways to be a beacon of liberal religion for our region. Our big project in 2011 was encouraging the start of the **Two Rivers congregation in Clifton Park**. Unfortunately, the congregation had some bumps and stopped having services in December, pausing to reorganize. They had been advertising for an “entrepreneurial intern” minister to work with them to be a spark plug to get them up and running. As Linda Hoddy stepped aside from working with them as their organizing minister, I got drawn in to supervise this intern if one was selected. Unfortunately, all the candidates who applied found other positions. Once it was clear I would not be supervising an intern for Two Rivers, I stepped aside and let the Rev. Lynn Ashley step in to work with them as an organizing minister. I will continue to support the growth of the congregation indirectly.

I have also had responsibility this year for organizing the **joint CRUUNY service**. With the suggestion of Chuck Manning, we recruited **Kim and Reggie Harris** as our theme musicians. We will also be honoring Linda Hoddy for her leadership without which I doubt CRUUNY would have come to life.

Veteran Ministry

In the wake of Chris Antal's intern ministry with us, I've been more involved in reaching out to veterans. After being contacted during the summer, I ran a “**spiritual resources**” **group for the Loyola Recovery program** housed at the VA hospital in Albany from August through March every two weeks. The program helps veterans dealing with addiction and substance dependency issues. I also participated in a “**Stand Down**” event held in October at the Elks Lodge in Latham.

Organizing Mindfulness

After being approached by Judi England, a local yoga teacher and blogger for the Times Union web site, I offered to host an event in September with mindfulness meditation teacher **Sharon Salzberg**. We were able to make it a free event through the generosity of donors we recruited. To our amazement 300 people showed up for the event. Judi and I called a group of people together to figure out how to serve these people who had donated 800 dollars for a future event to be held. Thus came to birth a new organization called, “Organizing Mindfulness” or OM. This led to a second event in February to **premiere the video, “Happy.”** Another 300 people showed up for that and gave money again. I'm very excited that there is an enthusiastic audience interested in mindfulness and its benefits.

Personal Notes

Busy as this year has been, as should be evident by the length of this report, I did set aside time for a **meditation retreat for the first ten days of January**. These retreats are very important to help clear my mind, release stress in my body, and provide the mental space for the muse to strike.

Skinner House books, an in-house publisher at the UUA, agreed to **publish a book** proposed by the Rev. Wayne Arnason and myself about the intersection of Buddhism and Unitarian Universalism. Our publication date is expected to be sometime in early 2013 (if all goes smoothly).

Finally, after working diligently since the summer of 2010, Philomena and I finally **put our house on the market in March and accepted an offer**. We've also made an offer for a house in East Greenbush that is 10 miles closer to FUUSA and much closer to Philomena's job in Rensselaer. If all goes well, we'll be relocating in June. There is even a bus line at the end of our street! We expect this move will be a significant reduction in our carbon footprint!

In conclusion, I continue to feel stimulated, challenged and appreciated in my ministry to FUUSA. The **Threshold Congregation** work is helping prepare the way for significant growth and development at FUUSA. I look forward to doing my part to bring that work to fruition.

Pastoral Care Associate Program

The Pastoral Care Associates Program of the First Unitarian Universalist Society of Albany, began in the fall of 2010. It grew out of the Minister's concern that his many responsibilities made it difficult for him to keep watch of the happenings of all of his congregants.

A Pastoral Care search team was assembled consisting of the President, the Minister, and another minister. The candidates had interviews, and everyone who wanted to be in the program was accepted.

The Pastoral Care Program is designed to give support to congregants through active listening based on the work of humanistic psychologists Carl Rogers and Marshall Rosenberg. Associates are trained to listen with empathy, not to judge and not to do psychotherapy.

This past year the PCA's helped to develop a program of financial support and counseling along with the Board of Trustees. This program helps those FUUSANS who are struggling economically. There is a support group along with financial aid when practicable.

The Associates are: Sharon Babala, Jean Bolgatz, Jon Newell, Phil Rich, Randy Rosette, Jan Satin, and Mark Yolles. The advisers are: Rev. Bobbi Place and Rev. Sam Trumbore.

Respectfully submitted by Philip G. Rich

Religious Services Committee

Chairperson: (open)

Members: Rev. Sam Trumbore, Peter Meixner, Don Odell, Mark Yolles and Linda Way

Responsibilities: The Religious Services Committee (RSC) provides input into the Sunday Services, invites ministers and lay leaders to lead services on Sundays when Rev. Trumbore is not in the pulpit at FUUSA, and coordinates the schedule of service leaders and ushers.

Activities: This has been a bit of a rough ride this year for the RSC due to Irene Saulsbery's illness and transition out of leadership of the committee without a new chair. Rev. Trumbore stepped in to fill the pulpit with guests in the fall, Dr. Dan McKanan in October and the Rev. David Weissbard in November, Diane Cameron Pascone and Jacqui Williams in January, a guest minister in search at the end of February and the Rev. Lynn Ashley in March. In April the High School class did it's annual service titled, "Listening," and our annual This I Believe service followed it with Sharon Babala, Lee Newberg and Elissa Kane presenting. May will see the Rite of Passage service, a joint Threshold Congregation Team service with Rev. Trumbore and a Memorial Day service led by Don Odell and Mark O'Connor. We will have our fourth joint CRUUNY service the first of June and conclude with a Bridging Service for our graduating youth.

A full series of services is planned for the summer once again. Look for details in the June Windows.