

# Minister's Annual Report (2013)

Rev. Sam Trumbore

## Overview

The first Sunday of May, I preached about our **evolving Unitarian Universalist faith**. My ministry here continues to evolve in ways that creates a better and better fit with FUUSA, attracting new people and stimulating greater commitment and generosity. Satisfaction with my ministry continues to remain strong and grow. My satisfaction serving here also continues to grow. We've had and continue to have a great fit between our program team of Leah Purcell, Matt Edwards and myself and what people in our congregation want and need. May it continue, as it has, to get better each year. The state of our congregation is good with, as I mentioned in the sermon, much potential for growth and development.

## Working with Thandeka

The big event for our program team this year was working with our “We Love Beyond Belief” consultant, Rev. Thandeka. She met in June 2012 with Matt, Leah and me to stimulate us to work more collaboratively together. Not that we weren't working together before, but because Matt lives pretty far away and only came in on Wednesdays and Sundays, we didn't have many face-to-face meetings. Thandeka challenged us to change that, urging us to have a weekly “production meeting” to plan services together. Matt gets a lot of credit and appreciation from me for being willing to do that voluntarily as he was being asked to give more time to FUUSA without being compensated.

The results were fairly quickly apparent. We made changes in the order of service and worked very hard to coordinate all the elements of the service more closely and seamlessly. Our face to face time Wednesdays at 5pm helped make that possible. Midyear, I was able to persuade the Personnel and Finance Committees to increase Matt's compensation by two hours to cover his additional time. Something as basic as adding one meeting has made a significant difference in our Sunday services.

Thandeka's work with us was sponsored by a \$5000 grant we received from the O. Darwin and Myra N. Smith Fund of The Dallas Foundation in memory of Adina L. Smith. Thandeka came to work with our congregation five times. The first, as I mentioned, was meeting with our program staff. The second was meeting with lay leadership to introduce them to Thandeka's ideas about welcoming people who are hungry for what we have to offer. The third visit was to organize an “Evensong” program, an additional, once a month, service on the last Tuesday of the month that is 85% music with 15% spoken word. The goal of this service is to provide more emotional than intellectual inspiration. The fourth visit was a retreat for members of the congregation titled “Practicing the Heart of our Liberal Faith.” The goal of this workshop was to give our members tools for practicing “pausing.” Her last visit was for a “Celebration Sunday” to give the whole congregation an experience of how a Sunday Service can transmit the experience of “We Love Beyond Belief,” the core of her vision of Unitarian Universalist identity. This service was coordinated with the end of our yearly fundraising drive and included an opportunity for people to make or increase their financial commitment.

Overall, I'm very grateful for Thandeka's consulting. Matt, Leah and I are working even more effectively together and we've made some important improvements in our Sunday services. I'm not sure where we go from here with her, but we've definitely gotten a lot of value from her work with us. I feel confident saying that the increase in financial commitments this year tracks people's satisfaction and that satisfaction correlates with her consulting work.

## **Sunday Services**

With Thandeka's encouragement, I made a number of changes in the way I designed Sunday services, using more music and striving for more spontaneity and emotional expression in my participation. I also experimented with some different service formats. An example of this was the service on Veteran's Day titled "**Answering the Call to Serve.**" This service included a video segment that featured Chris Antal right before his unit boarded a plane to Afghanistan. I then passed out stones so everyone could write a word on the stones with a paint pen. I collected them and then sent them to Antal's unit.

I've continued with service themes started last year, but without connecting them to months. I'm doing service series that could be just two services, as the series I did on **sexual orientation and gender identity**, or the four part series that followed up on **Justice GA** that started in the middle of September. Rather than slavishly working with a monthly theme, I'm adapting the idea to what works in our congregation. Thandeka encouraged me to look at the arc of the year and construct services to fit in those segments. I think that has also been helpful.

Leah and I continue to get better at doing **multigenerational services**. Attendance, while depressed in previous years has started picking up. This year we did a "**wheel of life,**" in October, a **Marti Gras** service in February, and an **Easter** service at the end of March that were all well received.

## **Adult Education**

The "**What Moves Us**" curriculum designed by Thandeka didn't attract anyone in October which was rather discouraging. I think part of the problem was I didn't promote it through offering a Sunday service that stimulated interest in it. When an October sermon I did that featured **Jonathan Haidt's book, *The Righteous Mind***, got a lot of interest, I decided to do a class on it that attracted 24 people to attend. The lesson for me was very clear. If I present a topic in a sermon that is stimulating for a class, people will show up!

I continue to offer **meditation on Sunday morning** with a core group of about 12-18 people who come. I also offered several Friday night and Saturday retreats for people to learn more about the basics of mindfulness meditation practice. I have steady interest in mindfulness meditation and it continues to bring people to our congregation. I could probably do a better job promoting it.

Once again I co-led the **Rite of Passage program** with Leah. This year we had 9 students and 9 mentors who completed the program. We've refined this program so we got a good design that has good satisfaction. Much as I enjoy the trip to Boston that is the culmination of the program, I didn't go this year again as it means I'd have to miss one more Sunday here at FUUSA. Because we've had to run the RoP program for three years in a row, not going wasn't much of a problem.

## **Administration**

The transition continues with Dave Stone's retirement in March of 2012. Amy took over supervision of Hadiya Wilborn which created a bit of a reshuffling of responsibilities. That transition is ongoing and uncertain. We lost our evening custodian, Olga Oja, who moved back to Syracuse. Her replacement didn't work out so we're considering working with an outside custodial service to make up the difference. Stay tuned as this all has yet to settle down. My goal is to move things step by step toward resolution.

## **Capital Region Unitarian Universalists of New York**

The big change this year for CRUUNY has been the hiring away of our leader, Kathy McGowan, who

became a Southeast Regional Group consultant in 2013. That left us without a convener. I've stepped in to convene the group to keep several of our activities moving forward as well as continuing to serve as our fiscal agent. I don't think I can remain in this role, but I am very supportive of increasing the role CRUUNY can play to bring our congregations closer together and support our common work.

One such common effort was to purchase **Mark Hick's Beloved Conversations** program for use by our four congregations. I wrote and received a \$2000 grant from the New York State Convention of Universalists to pay part of the cost. Mark came in February to initiate the program for us. 13 people participated in the initial training for the presenters who will then offer Beloved Conversations in each of our congregations. The follow up to this initial training is 8 sessions. I participated in this program so I could assess it. I found it to be a very valuable program and look forward to seeing it used this coming fall.

### **Intercultural Competency**

Because I was involved in Hick's Beloved Conversations class, I decided to also attend the **UU Allies for Racial Equity's** meeting in Rockford, Illinois in March. The theme presenter who I wanted to hear was **Beth Zemski**. Her presentation was on the theory of Intercultural Competency developed by Milton Bennett. It describes the process of individual and institutional movement from denial of incompetence, to defensiveness, through minimization, then to acceptance and finally adaptation. In her presentation I saw a useful map for helping our congregation become more interculturally competent.

I think working to become more interculturally competent is of great importance for our congregation because of endemic racism here in Albany. Not overt, and nasty like during the civil rights era, but expressed quietly and passively. When I talk with people of color about Albany, they shake their heads and say it is much worse here than even in the south. It isn't "in your face" but the effects are just as powerful.

We have an opportunity to be a leader here and agitate for systemic change that could make a big difference in the community. But I believe can't do that work until we become more interculturally competent as a congregation. We've dipped our toe in but there is much, much more to do. Mark Hicks Beloved Conversations program is a good step in that direction. But far more work is needed to get where I think we can go so we can make a difference.

Check out these sites for more information on the developmental approach to intercultural competency:

- Good overview: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bennett\\_scale](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bennett_scale)
- <http://www.library.wisc.edu/EDVRC/docs/public/pdfs/SEEDReadings/intCulSens.pdf>
- her website to look at: <http://www.bethzemsky.com/>
- IDI information: <http://www.idiinVENTORY.com/>

### **Mentor and Teaching Pastor**

A member of the Schenectady UU congregation, **Viola Abbitt**, started at the Meadville Lombard UU seminary in Chicago as a part-time student. As part of her program she needs to be in relationship to a minister and a congregation. We discussed this and I agreed (with our Board's consent) that I will be her "teaching pastor," and our congregation will be her teaching congregation. Initially this has meant that I've met with her monthly as she has worked with the FOCUS breakfast program as a community site this year. She is going to seminary part-time so she will not be working with our congregation until 2014-15. As part of this program, I traveled to Chicago at the beginning of January to meet with other

teaching pastors and learn more about the program. I'm enjoying sharing what I know with Vee and helping her shape her journey into our ministry.

Last year, I was also trained to serve as a mentor to a settled UU minister to help him/her in her/his growth and development. I was assigned one person whom I have supported with a call once a month. So far this year, my monthly meetings for this purpose have been very helpful to my mentee.

Both as a teaching pastor, and as a mentor, I have been able to share some of my knowledge, experience and even a little wisdom. I find this teaching role very satisfying, passing on the craft that has been passed to me by so many of my ministerial colleagues.

### **Organizing Events and Convocations**

One of my skills is organizing events. In September, Buddhist mindfulness teacher **Sharon Salzberg** came to Albany to lead a Friday night talk and Saturday retreat here at FUUSA. These events brought 175 people Friday night and 60 people on Saturday into our space and into contact with me and members of our congregation. In April, I led the **Unitarian Universalist Buddhist Fellowship's Convocation 2013** in Reisterstown, Maryland featuring Buddhist mindfulness teacher Tara Brach that attracted over 90 people. **Mark Hicks** was the presenter for our UU Ministers Association conference right before District Assembly and I had a hand in organizing that as well. Thankfully, I didn't have any organizing role in the UUMA's Convocation 2013 that was down in St. Petersburg, Florida at the end of January. This was an excellent continuing education experience. I spent 15 hours in class with Rev. Scott Tayler, co-minister in Rochester, New York, learning about some of their innovative ideas and methods in their congregation.

### **Buddhist Voices in Unitarian Universalism**

As I mentioned in my report last year, the Rev. Wayne Arnason and I have been working on a **book of essays** by mostly UU ministers on Buddhist themes to be published by the UUA's press, **Skinner House**. As this annual report goes to press, so is our book. Hopefully copies will be available at General Assembly in June. Very exciting to become a published author! You'll soon have a chance to get an autographed copy for just \$14!

### **Other Activities**

Just in case you think I am not busy enough, I also serve on the **Interfaith Impact Board** and attend meetings once a month as well as participate in their advocacy day. I serve as chair of the **Open UUA Committee**, a subcommittee of the UUA Board. This committee advocates for transparency and open governance within the UUA, implementing a bylaw that was passed to enforce such behavior. I also serve on an **Institutional Review Board (IRB)** with Mary Applegate for the Center for Disabilities here in Albany. I attend the **West Hill Ministerial Fellowship** meetings as a way to connect with the local community. And I continue to show up at **SNUG** actions, pride and transgender events and any other demonstration or action that aligns with FUUSA commitments and advocacy areas.

### **Personal**

In June 2013, we'll have lived a year in East Greenbush. The move has been wonderful. Our new home is warm in the winter and cool in the summer. Being 10 minutes from FUUSA and commutable by bike has been delightful for me. Philomena's work with Bick Wank and Assoc. as a therapist keeps her as busy as she wishes to be. Andrew is finishing up at Hudson Valley and will attend SUNY Potsdam as a junior in the fall. Life is good for our family and I'm grateful to be serving such a vital and vibrant congregation as FUUSA for another year.

Rev. Sam