

# Minister's Annual Report (2017)

Rev. Sam Trumbore

## Overview

**The election of Donald Trump** to the presidency has had a dramatic effect on our congregation and the Unitarian Universalist Association. Stress levels went through the roof for many of us worrying what the Trump administration might be like and what he might do. Researchers have linked increased stress in people's lives with the shaking up of institutional life. People are much less comfortable with their status quo and start making changes.

Big changes are happening at the top of the Unitarian Universalist Association with **the resignation of Peter Morales as President** three months before his term is up. Three co-presidents have been selected to replace him, Rev. Bill Sinkford, Rev. Sofia Betancourt and Leon Spencer. Two senior white male staff have resigned and two people of color have moved into leadership positions. The UUA will be doing an audit to discover any covert white supremacy practices that have interfered with the hiring and promotion of the staff leadership. At the end of June, a new UUA President will be elected at General Assembly in New Orleans who will have their work cut out for her to follow through on the changes we are currently seeing developing.

These are challenging times that are ripe with opportunities for growth and development for both individuals and institutions. May we take full advantage of them in a way that makes us stronger, more committed to one another and the work of creating a Beloved Community among us.

## From Obama to Trump

The election of Donald Trump was a shock to many in our congregation. It has reordered some priorities for us, increasing protest activity for many and advocacy for our values that are at risk. We had **several dozen members and friends who went to the Women's March** the day after Trump's inauguration. Many participated in the March for Science and the Climate Change March both in April. Our advocacy for Planned Parenthood became more urgent with the appointment of Neil Gorsuch to the Supreme Court and Trump's promise to strip federal funding from Planned Parenthood.

One surprising result of Trump's election is **the influx of people to our congregation**. Our attendance numbers and Sunday morning giving are up. And we are starting to get a younger cohort of people coming. Not only are they coming, they are networking with each other in the halls after the service. This is a great sign for the future health of our congregation.

## Confronting Institutional Racism / White Supremacy

As you'll read in Dick Dana's President's report, the **resignation of Michael Hornsby from our Board** was a big wake up call. He challenged us to take ownership of our diversity work rather than delegating it to him. An immediate result of his resignation was **a trip to a UU workshop in Weston, Massachusetts titled Navigating Whiteness** by five members of the Board, another member of our congregation and me. Several of us also attended a local workshop on using personal stories. As Shirey Archie puts it, "Getting sick is not our fault. Getting well is our responsibility." That is a great summary of the anti-racism, anti-oppression work we are called to do.

## Social Justice Work

While I haven't led a lot of work this year, I've attended many events including a protest against the hateful and disrespectful past words of Franklin Graham who spoke at the New York State Capital in the fall. We started the fall with a Moral Monday event but it lost steam when Trump was elected as activists reassessed where to focus their efforts.

Trump's deportation executive orders have increased **the priority of immigration issues** for many of us. I've attended demonstrations at the immigration offices in Latham to protest the increasingly threatening actions to undocumented immigrants who are in the process of seeking legal status. I attended a workshop in Schenectady by an Albany Law School professor that discussed the ways people can legally stay in our country and how they are prosecuted. There is much talk about being **Sanctuary churches** as we did in the 1980's. The law here is very unclear as is the potential liability. And the President has sweeping executive power when it comes to immigration policy.

On an up note, I participated in the **playground build for Sheridan Preparatory Academy** this fall that went extremely well. It was a great success for our congregation and partners. Much appreciation goes to Martha Musser and Chuck Manning for their leadership in making this happen.

### **Hudson Mohawk UU Cluster**

We've had good cooperation between our five congregations this year (Schenectady, Albany, Saratoga Springs, Glens Falls, Kingston) and interest from the congregation in Great Barrington, Vermont, Pittsfield and Great Barrington, Massachusetts.

In October we had a **"Fall Gathering" with the Rev. Dr. Joan Van Becelaere** as our theme presenter talking on the "Future of Religion." About 45 people gathered for her presentation, lunch and workshops.

We had our **joint service March 26<sup>th</sup>** again at the Golub Interfaith Chapel in Doane Stuart School. The sermon was given by **Tom Andrews**, the Executive Director of the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee. The Cluster hosted him for a reception at the Schenectady UU congregation the day before. Attendance was strong, the choirs overflowing the risers, and the sermon solicited a standing ovation. Even with a boil water advisory, the reception afterwards went off well.

Another new project for the cluster was to **connect our social responsibilities committees** in our congregations by adding a list serve for them on our web site. This increased joint activity, like marching together at the Albany Pride Parade each year, can increase our voice to project our values in the public square.

### **Religious Services**

I continue to use the Soul/Meaning Matters themes being used by other UU congregations as **our themes for the month**. This year they were: September: Covenant; October: Healing; November: Story; December: Presence; January: Prophecy; February: Identity; March: Risk; April: Transformation; May: Embodiment; June: Joy. While I didn't preach specifically each month on the topics for all the sermons, I did touch on and connect with each theme regularly. Sometimes more, sometimes less. The integration of monthly themes with the RE program for the children and my monthly column continues to support people going deeper with their personal growth and development. Having support material supplied for us by the Soul Matters organization is very helpful to Leah and me in preparations.

Here is a sampling of the Sunday services this year:

#### **Sunday Morning Service Highlights**

- **"The Occupy Movement: 5 Years Later,"** September 18
- **"Healing Through Repentance,"** October 9
- **"American Fear of Islam,"** October 23
- **"Reconciliation Through a Fuller Story,"** November 20, 2016

- **“A Path of Presence,”** December 11, 2016
- **“The Thread That You Follow,”** December 18, 2016
- **“Tongues of Fire,”** January 8, 2017
- **“Our UU Prophetic Message,”** January 22, 2017
- **“Strong Identity Supports Diversity,”** February 5, 2017
- **“Faith in Group Selection,”** February 12, 2017
- **“Rescuing a Jesus for Liberals to Love,”** February 19, 2017
- **“The Altruist’s Dilemma,”** March 5, 2017
- **“Honoring Agnosticism,”** March 19, 2017
- **“Money Changers in the Temple,”** April 9, 2017
- **“Seeking Other Worlds,”** April 30, 2017
- **“Making the Water Visible,”** May 7, 2017
- **“Honoring our Foremothers: Margaret Fuller,”** May 14, 2017
- **“National Bird: The Automation of War,”** May 28, 2017

If you missed one of these sermons or would like to read it, you’ll find most of them archived here:  
<http://members.albanyuu.org/wp/services/sermons/>

### **Lifespan**

**Meaning Matters** continues to be a way I connect on a monthly basis with those who want to go deeper into their spiritual lives by contemplating the monthly theme. I distribute a packet I receive and edit from the Soul Matters network just before the beginning of the month. This twelve page packet has a couple of short essays on the theme, deepening exercises, questions for reflection, quotes, electronic media and podcast links, books, movies, music, all to assist the participant to go deeper into the theme. This year I ran three groups that had about thirty people signed up and about twenty regular participants.

The classes I ran were:

- **Exploring the Bible (three six week sessions)** –This was a major effort that began with a discussion organized by the Massachusetts Bible Society in Albany between their Executive Director who is a Protestant, a Catholic priest, and a Humanist on the Bible. The first series of six classes were an exploration of the Bible itself. The next two were first the Old then the New Testament. We pretty much covered the whole thing! Most appreciated it as a great biblical literacy class. About 20 total people participated in all the classes finishing with about 15 participants.
- **Third Reconstruction**, a book by William Barber, class – This book was the common read for the UUA this year. We did the three session version of the curriculum put together by the UUA with about a dozen total participants.
- Organizing support for Rabbi Dennis Ross one-shot class **“When Lying is Not a Sin”**

### **Too Many Memorial Services**

This might be a **record year for memorial services** that ran the Reception Committee a little ragged.

By our Annual Meeting, we will have conducted memorial services for **Mark Butt, Bob Thomson, Cathy Perkins, Heidi Newberg's father Peter Henner** (Heidi Newberg's step-father), **Jim Gerou, John Meid, Ramona Weissbard, and finally** (I hope) **Jan Satin**. For the elderly, death is a blessing but for many in this group, death came before they were ready to go. Whether it was accident, illness or old age, we mourn the passing of them all.

### **Search for a New Music Director**

It was a very sad start to our fall season to accept **the resignation of Matt Edwards**, our beloved music director. After moving to Bennington, an opening came up down the street and he took it, getting four hours a week of commuting back for his busy life. We were lucky to have his talent and skill for so long for our music program. His last Sunday was September 25<sup>th</sup>.

I convened a **Music Director Search Committee** that included Ann Brandon, Kathy Harris, Randy Rosette, Chris Jensen, and Annika Pfluger. Chris conducted and Ann accompanied the choir for the fall leaving January to try-out candidates. As it happened, we only had one candidate we all liked and still wanted the job: **Kathy Bawel**. It was a perfect match ... until her husband got a job in Rochester, where they have their home. Thankfully Kathy accepted the position from February through May and has done an excellent job.

The search continues as of this writing for someone to start in the fall.

### **Staff Report**

This year has been a fairly stable one as regards to staff. With the exception of Matt Edwards leaving, the rest of the staff continues in employment and is working well together.

### **Partner Church Work**

Dave Metz and I continued again to collaborate on a **Partner Church trip to Szökefalva**, Romania for this coming August. To stimulate interest, we invited the minister of our partner church, **Rev. Tünde Szász , to come visit in October**. She came with two young adults who grew up in the church. They had a delightful visit with us and Rev. Szász gave a sermon for the congregation.

We planned a trip for the beginning of August, but our numbers dwindled down to the point it didn't make sense to go. This is the second year we've failed to get a group together for a trip. Back to the drawing board for 2018.

### **Intern Selection**

The Board approved my long term desire to have another ministerial intern starting next fall last June. With Board approval, I pulled together an Intern Search Committee, posted the internship on the appropriate UUA site, and received a dozen or so viable applications. The committee sorted through the candidates, interview several electronically, and selected **Eileen Casey-Campbell** to be our intern for the 2017-2018 church year. If you'd like to see and hear her, she provided us with video that I've uploaded to YouTube here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZOPoV7GVGiE&t=232s>

Eileen will be starting August 21<sup>st</sup> and working through till the middle of June.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

I took a survey to detect my level of burnout. I was interested to see how low I scored. My energy and enthusiasm for ministry and for the work we do together hasn't diminished after seventeen years together. Part of the reason comes from the inexhaustible challenge of this kind of work which is never finished. Each new person who comes to our congregation creates new opportunities for growth and change. Each person we memorialize leaves a hole where they had been we can't replace. Yet

somehow, together, the whole is so much greater than the parts. And that wholeness I experience here continues to feed and sustain me as we walk together toward an uncertain future. Rev. Sam