

Minister's Annual Report (2019)

Rev. Sam Trumbore

Overview

Two decades can seem like a long time ... but in some ways my ministry in Albany still feels young and fresh. A large percentage of the congregation and some leaders are the same people as when I first arrived. During those years some moved from active employment to retirement. I'm very grateful they stayed here rather than moving to Florida (most of them). And I'm grateful that many of them have chosen to get more involved in congregational life rather than less.

And new people are here too – a fresh crop of young folks some of whom you'll be electing to office this year. This is one of the assets of our congregational life, both long serving dedicated folks for 10 to 40+ years and younger folks getting involved in their first 1 to 9 years. It is a wonderful sign of health for our congregational life.

Each year has new congregational challenges that keep my work fresh with learning and growing opportunities. The wider world keeps changing providing a never ending stream of things to discuss and confront. And unchanging themes of deep significance remain constant that I never get tired of holding up and appreciating.

I am probably healthier, more energetic (though my head is much grayer) than I was when I arrived in the fall of 1999. I am just as committed and enthusiastic about the potential for Unitarian Universalism here in the Capital Region. I believe there is the potential for at least another 500-1000 UU's in the Capital Region were we more effective in helping people understand our unique way to do religion. If the "nones" decide they want to connect with a religious organization, we are a likely choice. If Catholics and Evangelicals get fed up with their creedal, misogynist, anti-gay, anti-evolutionary/science approach, we will be one of their prime choices to consider. A huge number of Millennials are starting families right now.

This could be our time for growth, if we can help folks out there understand who we are and how we approach the religious journey.

New Office Administration

Tammy Hathaway gracefully stepped into the role of Church Administrator this year following Amy Lent's retirement from the position. Sapphire Correa was hired to fill Tammy's old administrative assistant position. Both of them came up to speed quickly and are doing terrific jobs.

Tammy discontinued our monthly paper Windows and brought a bigger focus to the Weekly Windows delivered electronically by email and web site. She also worked to put a new front page on our web site with a different layout of Josh Shea's original design. Both innovations have brought positive comments and appreciation. Our Albanyuu.org web site has also been enhanced by the work of Barbara Spink to highlight the Green Sanctuary.

Religious Services

Leah Purcell and I continue to use the Meaning Matters/Soul Matters Theme of the Month approach to coordinate with Sunday services and the religious education program. This continues to be an effective way to bring a multigenerational approach to connect the Sunday service to RE. Working within a theme, I strive to address the range of people's interests such as theology, pastoral and social issues, UUism, spirituality and inspiration.

The fall mid-term elections and anti-democratic forces at work in Washington DC encouraged me to do a sermon series on America. Dismantling white supremacy culture was a big theme at UUA General Assembly 2018 and continues to be an important congregational priority, especially in January. Two services coordinated with the Inclusivity Team.

Here is a sampling of the Sunday services this year:

Sunday Morning Service Highlights

- "Finding Truth and Meaning on the Margins," September 16

- “The American Tradition of Dissent,” September 23
- “How to Keep Our Heart Open ... In Hard Times,” September 30
- “America: The Minority Report,” November 4
- “America: The Glorious Vision,” November 11
- “America: Our Responsibility,” November 18
- “Mystery: Of the Light,” December 2
- “Mystery: Of the Conception,” December 9
- “The Evidence of Things Unseen,” January 6
- “#metoo: Stand Up, Fight Back,” January 13
- “Love and Power,” January 20 (snow day video!)
- “The Road to Jerusalem,” March 3
- “What Will You Pack?” March 10
- “Pilgrimage,” March 24
- “Encountering the Unexpected,” March 31
- “Stuck in Brokenness,” April 14
- “Finding Wholeness,” April 21

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/>

New Sound System in Community Hall

Through the generosity of Al Berzinis in memory of his late wife Sue Berzinis, we were able to significantly upgrade the lighting and sound in Community Hall last summer. The new high quality audio console, speakers and lights were significant improvements over what we had before in the ability to cover the room with sound and the stage with light.

What we have not been able to do effectively, especially for people with hearing loss issues, is make that sound clear enough for easy understanding. This is partly a problem of installation choices and of the poor tuning of the system after it was installed. This is mostly a problem of the sound reflective properties of the Community Hall that are very challenging to compensate for in that tuning process.

You minister, who is very technically adept, and who learned a great deal about how the new system works and about acoustics in the process, has worked very, very hard to optimize the sound in Community Hall and “lock in” the tuning so it can’t be broken. Most of the time it sounds okay until something new gets introduced and sound quality deteriorates. Or adjustments are made such as the volume gets set too high because someone complains and everything starts to sound like mud.

Part of the problem is the complexity of the system and the many places small changes can be made that can either make things a little better or wreck the sound. The sound quality mostly is much better than it was in the fall, but more work is needed. My hope is to get more of that work done in the coming months. *We will* get it right sooner than later. In the meantime, if you are having trouble hearing, the sound is the best in the balcony or take advantage of the excellent hearing assistance system.

Social Justice Work

A highlight of my social justice work this year was taking a trip with Philomena to Montgomery, Alabama with the group John Brown Lives. We visited the Equal Justice Initiative’s Legacy Museum (of slavery and Jim Crow), the National Memorial for Peace and Justice to remember the over 4,400 black people lynched in a campaign of terror from 1877 to 1948, the Rosa Parks Museum about the bus boycott, the Freedom Rider Museum, the Southern Poverty Law Center, and attended Sunday services at Dexter Ave. Baptist Church, where the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. served from 1955-1960.

Anti-racism work is a continuing focus for me working with the Inclusivity Team. I visited Soul Fire Farm, saw Tim Wise speak at Sienna, and attended NYS Writers Institute presentation by black author Ibi Zoboi. I attended dismantling white supremacy trainings sponsored Didi Delgado and the Troy YWCA with Debbie Irving. Our

Unitarian Universalist Buddhist Fellowship Convocation 2019 in April at the Garrison Institute in Garrison, New York's theme was "Making the Invisible, Visible: A Multi-media Exploration of Race and Racism in the U.S. through a Buddhist Lens," with a retired Black Tibetan Buddhist scholar Dr. Jan Willis. I am committed to learning and growing, striving to keep up with the latest ideas about how to engage white folks in doing this work and being effective at dismantling white supremacy culture both inside our congregation and in the world at large.

On the Open Question front, being a good neighbor, I have done some community outreach arranging a meeting with Catholics who work in Mary's Closet and visiting Catholic Charities director Jenn Hyde looking at the social services situation in West Hill.

I continue to serve on the Board of Interfaith Impact and participate in its advocacy day.

Hudson Mohawk UU Cluster

This was a challenging year for the Cluster as we realized that we had spent a lot of money last year on our tenth anniversary joint service and didn't have much left for this year. We were also not able to secure a high profile speaker as our featured presenter for our joint service. Our home brew service worked very well and stabilized our finances a little bit. Still, our income has not been sufficient from the other congregations besides Albany UU to support our joint advertising program on WAMC. This has meant that we brought that program to an end.

With new ministers in our Cluster and new leaders, it is time for the Cluster to reassess its direction and priorities. I have stepped back and let go of the vision of the Rev. Linda Hoddy (former minister of Saratoga Springs and driving force behind the organization) of the Cluster to plant new congregations. The HUUU Cluster must decide where it wants to go next. I expect the four core ministers in Saratoga, Schenectady and Albany will be stable for a while. We need to build that new vision of the work we want to do together to advance UUism in the Capital Region.

Lifespan Religious Education

I continue doing **Meditation Workshops**, five this year, to introduce people to mindfulness meditation. Attendance continues to be strong. It continues to be a way I offer for people to deepen their growth and development process through the development of concentration and mindfulness of moment to moment experience.

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. It continues to be a very helpful way to integrate new people into our congregational life.

The three classes I ran were:

- **Metta or Loving-kindness Meditation** – Two classes on the basics of Buddhist heart-centered meditation that cultivates a non-specific love-for-all that becomes specific in caring for and serving others. Cultivating a sense of goodwill toward all beings has many side benefits in our personal lives. In fact, cultivating metta can greatly sharpen the mind as it assists us in staying with difficult situations that tempt us to run away.
- **House of Hope** – The purpose of this class was to go deeper into Unitarian Universalist progressive theology with a former Starr King School for the Ministry President Rebecca Parker and former UUA President John Buehrens using their book of this title. I used audio recordings from a UUMA workshop of the two of them teaching to allow the class to hear them talk about what they discuss in their book.
- **Letting Go** – Instead of just giving something up for Lent, this class provided an alternative by diving into the process of letting go itself. A companion book for this class was Dr. David R. Hawkins, *Letting Go: The Pathway to Surrender*. Dr. Hawkins (who died in 2012) was a psychiatrist who did deep

exploration into the nature of human suffering. His work connected with both Christianity and Buddhism and was guided by his own intense personal experience.

Institutional Development Work

My primary institutional development work has been with the Governance Working Group. It was tasked by the Board to come up with a way to revise our governance system using the modified policy governance model as advocated by Dan Hotchkiss, UUA CER governance consultant David Pyle, and our former District Executive Joan Van Becelaere. The Working Group came up with a model then did presentations to committees, councils and congregational conversations to introduce our congregation to the model and make modifications based on the feedback. We also consulted with the Athens, Georgia UU congregation that uses a model very similar to the one we came up with to further tweak our work.

The Board has approved the working group's final draft at the April Board meeting and began the transition to the new model starting with the "Program Team." Stay tuned for further progress this coming year.

Passages

I've done more weddings this year than I usually do for members and their families. I've done more child dedications than memorial services (as of this writing). I think these are very positive signs for the future that I hope to see continue!

Intern Selected for Next Year

After reviewing a smaller number of applications than two years ago, the Intern Search Committee (Jean Poppei, Winston Hagborg, Linda Hunt) settled on Dan Miyake who will be here in the coming budget year from August until the middle of June. Dan brings maturity, pastoral skills and musical talents as well as being engaging in the pulpit. We are excited to have him joining us.

Concluding Thoughts

We are a healthy, exciting and attractive congregation. New people who visit with us consistently say we do a great job of welcoming them and making them feel at home. Unfortunately, our membership numbers have been plateaued for the last few years and for the first time since I've been here, our estimates of congregational giving have declined.

As I began, I believe we have a great congregation and program to offer. We are not a congregation for everyone just as our UU approach will not be widely popular. For the people who are interested in our approach to religion, there are few other places to find what we offer.

What is missing, in my assessment, is outreach. The one part of our strategic plan from 10 years ago we haven't been effective at is becoming a beacon of liberal religion in the Capital Region. We need to put more energy into helping the people who would be UU and join us if they knew about us and understood who we are and what we do. My hope is we can make that a priority in the coming year.

Rev. Sam