

# Minister's Annual Report (2023)

## Rev. Sam Trumbore

### Overview

This will be my last Annual Report for Albany UU as I will be retiring as of July 1. I've included my resignation letter at the end of this report for those who may not be aware of this decision that was announced February 1<sup>st</sup>. July 1 seemed a long way away back then. Now, time seems to be rushing forward and will be here before I know it.

Once that decision was announced, this transition began to dominate the agenda and activity of the congregation as it prepared for bringing in an interim minister for two years and hopefully calling a new settled minister who will begin in the fall of 2026.

And that isn't the only significant event for this year. There is much to report from the beginning of the year for the record that Annual Reports can be.

### COVID Pandemic "Ending"

As our congregation comes to the end of our season and fiscal year, the World Health Organization has declared the COVID 19 Pandemic over. Yes, it will continue to flare up but with vaccination and new treatments, it should be managed more like other episodic infections like the flu that don't go away. We stopped asking people to wear masks in Sunday services starting April 30. We did reserve an area for people wearing masks to sit apart from those not wearing masks. We continued to welcome people wearing masks at other times and events if they so choose. We also continue our policy of having multiplatform meetings and events. This has been a way to include people in participation much more easily who are traveling or homebound in our normal flow of meetings. It has also meant fewer in-person meetings thus saving the use of fossil fuel to commute to our building. This has been especially true of night meetings. It is rare these days that meetings are cancelled due to weather!

As of this writing, the COVID case load continues to decline and fewer and fewer are having infections. When they do they typically have mild cases. After three years, life has returned mostly to the old normal.

### Internship of Jacob King

We've been very pleased to have Jacob King as our Intern this year. Growing up in Nebraska, he served in the military and found there his attraction to serving as a chaplain. He has completed his work at Starr King School for the Ministry. After completing his internship with us, he will do clinical pastoral training then meet with the UUA Ministerial Fellowship Committee to be credentialed for service as a UU military chaplain.

I have enjoyed working with Jacob and appreciated his contributions to our congregation's ministry. I've especially appreciated sharing Sunday services with him. He has contributed a great deal to the social justice work of the congregation. He has also taught classes as well. Please see his report in this document for more information.

### Getting Congregational Life Coordination

The fall began well with the hiring of our first Congregational Life Coordinator, Sherese Linnen.

Unfortunately, she found it difficult to work her hours for us due to conflicts with other employment and family responsibilities. She resigned in November. Because we had been waiting for her position to be filled to get the new Congregational Life Team going, that got put on hold through the end of the year.

When Tammy Goddard announced she would be leaving her position as Church Administrator at the end of March, the Personnel Committee and Ministry and Operations Team discussed the possibility of integrating Congregational Life Coordinator role into the Church Administrator role and increasing the Administrative Assistant hours from 20 to 30 hours. Because so much of the Church Administration job overlaps with congregational life, we thought it might be effective to do this. Our new, combined, Congregational Life Administrator position is in place and soon we'll be hiring an Administration Assistant.

### **Media Campaign & Website Redesign**

The Endowment Trust gave the Ministry and Operations Team a generous \$18,500 grant to do some professional marketing to stimulate involvement from diverse Millennial families. I had hoped it would start in the fall but we discovered our website wasn't ready nor was our messaging well worked out. Michele Desrosiers is a marketing professional who helped us understand the timeline we'd need to follow to have a successful campaign. Part of that is being prepared for the people coming to check us out on our website and in person. If we aren't ready to welcome new people we attract, then our money is wasted. The more we worked with the current website, the more unready we realized we were. We also recognized we didn't have the staff support we needed to update our current website or deal with the newcomers we might generate.

Our website was a custom design from 2015 that, while having some nice functionality, is difficult to maintain. After considering a complete redesign, Michele convinced us the right path would be to use the WordPress template that the UUA had generated in 2019. This one has been well tested and is used by many congregations. It is a way of leveraging what our UUA dues has already paid for. Jan Smith and I have collaborated to use UUA materials for our new web site, moved some of our old web site content, and got this UUA template and materials up and working. This implementation of our web site should be fully operational in the beginning of June. Thanks to our focus group, Michael Hornsby, Karen Strong, Annika Pfluger, Pascelle Saint-Luarent, Kate Peirce-Nimz, and Alison Hart who have helped us in the update process especially in inclusion and diverse visual representation of our congregation.

### **Religious Services**

Olga Martinez, our new Director of Music Ministry has brought new energy and vitality to our Sunday services. She has renewed the choir and stimulated greater musical participation of our members and friends. Olga has been a key part of our weekly Production Meeting we use to plan our Sunday services. I appreciate how hard she works to coordinate the music with my message so the whole service works together. The feedback for that work this year has been great. Our Director of Religious Education, Elizabeth Baldes, is also an important contributor to these meetings. The teamwork with Intern Jacob King, also at this meeting, has been great.

COVID has dampened our Hudson Mohawk UU Cluster collaboration. This year we did have our first in person service in four years on April 23<sup>rd</sup> at Doane Stuart. Our keynote speaker was **Leah Penniman**. She co-directs Soul Fire Farm, a group we have done a give-away-the-plate for in the past. She drew from her new book, ***Black Earth Wisdom*** and coordinated with the Earth Day theme for the weekend. Between the enthusiastic turnout for the combined choirs, the 80 or so on Zoom, and people staying late to talk during the coffee hour afterwards, it was a great day.

## Sunday Service Highlights

- “Belonging in Community,” September 18
- “Beyond Tribalism,” October 2
- “Courageous Accountability,” October 9
- “The Courage of Esther,” October 24
- “God is Change,” November 6
- “Coming to ...and Staying at ... the Table,” November 20
- “Coping with the Absence of Wonder,” December 4
- “Zoom Christmas Tea,” December 25
- “Article II Part 1: Not Enough Verbs,” January 8
- “Article II Part 2: Shared Values & Commitments,” January 22
- “Love as the Center of UU,” February 5
- “Love and Letting Go,” February 26
- “Growing Through Uncertainty,” March 5
- “A Religious Response to Vulnerability,” March 19
- “Palm Sunday: The Power of NO,” April 2
- “The Creative Process,” May 7
- “Shaping and Being Shaped,” May 14
- “Lessons and Legacy,” June 4

If you missed one of these sermons or would like to read it, you’ll find most of them archived here:

<http://albanyuu.org/sermons/>

## Adult Education

I continue to lead three Meaning Matters classes using the theme-of-the-month approach. Attendance was good and we’ve met mostly online and one group in person.

I continue to offer Meditation on Sunday mornings that has a consistent attendance of 12-20 people. It has been a side door through which people have been introduced to our congregation then become members and/or financial supporters of our congregation. I’ve also offered Friday night and Saturday Meditation workshops for people of all experience levels.

The Octavia Butler book discussion group has continued from last year reading more of her books and discussing them, chapter by chapter. We use discussion questions that come from a podcast by Adrienne Marie Brown and Toshi Reagan. After doing *Parable of the Sower*, we continued with *Parable of the Talents*, then *Wild Seed* and *Mind of My Mind*. The racially diverse group has about 12 regular participants who have bonded as a group on Sunday nights.

Due to Jacob King’s internship, I didn’t want to increase the offerings of adult education to allow him latitude to start some new classes.

I recommend the follow-up work on Adult Education that came out of the RE Consultation Report should be taken up next year.

## Personnel

This year has seen a great deal of transition in our staff. It began in the fall with Nellson Jacobs-Moore leaving the sexton position and Patience Pechette leaving the Administrative Assistant position along with Sherese Linnen’s resignation. Tim Pierce stepped into the sexton position and we were quite fortunate to have a former Administrative Assistant, Sapphire Correa, step into the position till June.

When I announced that I’d be leaving, Tammy Goddard also announced that she would be leaving her position as Church Administrator as of the end of March. We appreciated Tammy for her long and devoted service to Albany UU and then began the search for her replacement. We were able to interview three strong candidates for the job and selected **Darlene Lupe-Gotham**.

**Darlene comes to us with a lot of experience** working in an academic setting supervising work study students and transfer students to U. Albany. She has master’s degree in education. Her experience working with Gen Z and Millennial students over the last 20 years will be invaluable in our outreach work to that

population as the Congregational Life part of the job. She also has a lot of experience working with the software tools we work with. And she is quite friendly and personable. We are happy having her working full time since May 1. She is now organizing our efforts to add a new Administrative Assistant. Thanks to Amy Lent for all the staffing gaps she has filled in the past year.

As of this writing we have a new opening for sexton. We are grateful to Mark Schrodtt for filling in while Tim Pierce was out being trained for a new job. He no longer expects to come back to work for us so we need to fill that position too.

One source of stability and high performance has been Religious Education. Elizabeth Baldes is completing her first year as Director of Religious Education ably supported by RE Assistant, Paula Brewer and Adrian Cattell, youth advisor.

All together, we have assembled a strong staff ready to take the work of our congregation forward. Special thanks goes to Olga for all the technical support she offers with software organizing tools and methods. Both Elizabeth and Olga are helping the staff get more organized and efficient and communicate better.

### **UUA Board work**

**I was asked to serve as the Financial Secretary of the UUA** and elected to that position by my fellow Board Members. This is an oversight role without a lot of effort besides reading some financial reports monthly looking for anomalies and ensuring the UUA Staff keeps the Board abreast of the UUA's financial health. I'm the one who raises the flag if there is a financial problem with the Board. This is a good fit for me with my business background, ease with spreadsheets and enjoyment of numbers. I also get to work with a very competent UUA financial staff that will make the job even easier.

A grassroots led business resolution has qualified to go before the UUA General Assembly delegates in June to divest our UUA Common Endowment Fund of all fossil fuel infrastructure companies including banks and insurance companies. The UUA Staff analyzed this resolution and recognize it might destroy the Fund due to the way the resolution is constructed. I've been studying the process of divestment and learned a lot about how we can accomplish the goals of the resolution without using this resolution.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

It has been an honor and privilege to serve as the minister of this congregation for the last 24 years. I felt very fortunate back in the winter of 1999 when I was called to be the candidate to be your minister. That feeling hasn't left me. The years have passed quickly and we've done so much to support the growth, development and well-being of our congregation. The congregation is in a great position to begin a new chapter in its ministry starting from a place of institutional strength.

Yes, there will be challenges ahead, but you have excellent leaders and staff in place to help move you forward and through them. We have a beautiful facility. I still get emotional every time I stand in the pulpit and look out at the congregation in Community Hall. It has been such a pleasure to share my words with you from that pulpit.

I'm so grateful to share the years we've had together. I hope the next ministers who follow me will be able to help our congregation realize the potential that already exists in our membership and in the beloved community that can grow from our Unitarian Universalist faith and heritage.

Rev. Sam

February 1, 2023

Dear Members and Friends of Albany UU,

Part of me doesn't want to write this letter. I've been struggling with a decision that started to become clear to me this fall. It felt a little odd because my ministry is going well right now. The services in November, December and January have been well received, our membership decline has stabilized and perhaps may be turning up. People are being generous in supporting the congregation. I've delighted in working with Olga Martinez, Elizabeth Baldez and Jacob King. Their vision for the growth and development of our congregation is very exciting.

Yet I know deep within that my ministry here must begin to come to an end. Much as it breaks my heart to step away from serving so many of you whom I've come to love, my sense is this is the right time.

I've decided to retire July 1, 2023.

Here is the background for that decision.

In the winter-spring of 2019, Albany UU did an extensive evaluation of my ministry as I reached the 20 year mark. The longest serving minister in our 179 year history was the Rev. Nick Cardell who served for 12 years. The biggest concern people had in the survey were not performance issues. People wondered what my plans were going forward. I responded then that I continued to feel called to Albany UU serving in ministry here ... and I realized it would be appropriate for me to retire in the next 1-4 years.

We all know what happened in March of 2020. My priorities aligned with the congregation's priorities to hold us together as we locked down in our homes. I worked hard to keep offering high quality programming through Zoom. As COVID-19 mutated into the less deadly Omicron version, our next step was figuring out how to broadcast quality programs from Community Hall on Zoom. I was able to share my technical skills to create a set up a broadcast system with three PTZ cameras to allow multi-platform programming. And in the middle of this, Leah decided it was time to retire so we did a year with Elizabeth Baldez in an acting role as Director of Religious Education and evaluated our RE program with Michele Grove. Last spring, we did a search for a Music Director and hired Olga Martinez. This fall Elizabeth and Olga got their feet on the ground and Jacob King joined our team as our Intern Minister.

And all during this time our governance change was taking place. The Ministry and Operations Team was getting established as the Board was discovering its new role as it backed away from programming and operations work.

So from 2019 till now, I felt there was important work I needed to do to help the congregation pass through COVID, hire new staff, and get our governance changes established.

In February, I'll be 66 and I can take full retirement in August. I believe I am now ready, and the congregation is ready for ministerial transition as we begin rebuilding our congregation after COVID.

Here are some of the factors that are **not** driving my decision to retire July 1:

- My health is good right now and I have plenty of energy and stamina.
- I have no other congregation or job offer waiting for me.
- I anticipate my work on the UUA Board will continue for at least the third year of my three year term.

Here are some of the factors that **are** driving my decision:

- The death of the Rev. Robb Eller-Isaacs at the age of 71, my minister in Oakland, California who inspired me to go into ministry, has deeply affected me.
- My soon to be 92-year-old father's health is declining with slowly metastasizing bladder cancer. He is one kidney infection away from death, as he pointed out to me.
- My wife Philomena's two falls and surgeries last spring and her 70<sup>th</sup> birthday in May also has reordered my priorities. We'd like to do more traveling than would work with full-time ministry.
- For about 30 years, I've wanted to do longer Buddhist mindfulness meditation retreats than are advisable while serving in full-time ministry. I'd like to be able to do them while I have the physical ability for longer meditation periods.
- I've got some creative ideas and projects that wouldn't be possible to pursue while serving in full-time ministry.

If I could sum all this up, I'd say this: My first act was being a computer test engineer in Silicon Valley. My second act has been my call to ministry. I sense there is yet a third act for my life. Time is short and the freedom to make that move is within reach.

I also realize there is never a perfect time to end a ministry, especially when things are going well. Yet my sense is this is just the right time for me to step aside to make room for a new, younger minister to come and bring in the next generation of Albany UU members.

I have deep gratitude for your call to serve as your minister for these 23 years. We have done some great work together. We were instrumental in A Regional Initiative Supporting Empowerment or ARISE and its successes doing community based congregational organizing. We were able to create a building addition together. We contributed to and advocated for marriage equality together. We've created our Pastoral Care Associates program. We've been transformed by the Wellspring's program. Small Group Ministry and Meaning Matters, programs that have created ways for people to get to know each other in small groups, stimulate their growth and development, and build community. And some have found some peace together meditating on Sunday morning. I have deep appreciation for what we have been able to do together. We both have grown in so many ways that I cherish. And we are both better able to step into positive futures.

You have helped me grow into my ministry and my ability to support shared leadership and ministry. I have helped Albany UU learn how to work with and trust the leadership of a minister. We've learned how to be mutually supportive in a way that has helped both of us flourish.

What I sense we've learned more than anything else is how we can work together and love each other. It doesn't mean we have not had conflicts or disagreements. What we've learned is how to stay in relationship as we grow and develop together.

I'm ever so grateful to have had the opportunity to serve here in Albany and hope that my legacy will be the ways we've learned to grow together as we expanded our capacity to love each other.

Yours in the Spirit of Life and Love,

Rev. Sam Trumbore