

RELIGION

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VOICES OF FAITH

Rethinking the role of faith

By REV. SAMUEL A. TRUMBORE

Imagine living in Europe in the year 999 of the common era and trying to predict the way we are living today. The Industrial Revolution hasn't happened. The Earth is flat and at the center of the universe. What happens every day is not understood by universal laws of chemistry and physics but rather by the influence of magic, spirits and divine decree. Few can read or write.

This gives you a sense of the hubris on my part of formulating a vision for the year 2999. Will it resemble the science fiction of "Star Wars" or "Star Trek"? Will we have discovered and altered the gene for aging? Whether we are zooming around the galaxy at Warp 9 or are still struggling to recover from an apocalyptic world war, human nature is unlikely to have changed significantly.

There is a sense of hopelessness about human nature that dominates our age. A hundred years ago, many believed science would solve all our problems — but there is great pessimism today. We face terrifying ecological problems. We've seen the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction fueled by technological innovation.

Paradoxically, the opportunities for peace have never been more abundant. Whether you like globalization or not, the expansion of multinational business investment around the world discourages warfare as a solution to international tensions that could destroy that investment. It is likely the millennium will be a time of working toward a global consensus of values.

Do we as religious people have anything to say about all this? This century has seen an increasing marginalization of the religious voice in

the new millennium. In fact our national identity is rooted in "self-evident truths" established by constitutional law. The rise of the religious right dedicated to amending these truths to conform with a literalist Christian view can be seen as a reaction against the secularization of values.

I wish to share some images to illustrate the values in our religious faith and belief. These images symbolize the values we will need to bring into the 21st century and beyond.

The first image I wish to share with you is the image of a homeless, parentless child roaming the city streets in search of food and shelter. In this child's eyes, we witness the inherent worth and dignity of all people. In each of us there is the potential for great goodness. If we are to have any hope of co-creating a world without poverty, prejudice, racism and genocide, we must begin by affirming this value in the other as well as the self.

The second image is of the Vietnam Memorial in Washington, D.C. The memorial has tremendous power because it blends the individuals into a whole that communicates the human cost of war. The lack of an uniting whole that brings individuals together is one of the major crises of our time. We participate in a much greater reality than we can ever imagine.

But the 20th century brought an answer: the picture of the Earth rising over the moon as viewed by the Apollo astronauts and the many pictures that are now taken routinely of our planet from space. Whether one sees the glory of life as the handiwork of Jehovah, Vishnu or Zeus, existence is full to overflowing with meaning much larger than our traditions, our nations, our species, even our atomic makeup.

The final image I offer is a man standing alone in front of a tank trying to stop it from entering Tiananmen Square 10 years ago. The most important role of religion will be to counter the tyranny of government, the military, business and, increasingly, medicine. The distribution and exercise of power, the production and distribution of wealth, and the access to health care is likely to be unjust. The voice calling for justice is ours.

As we cross the threshold of a new millennium, we must recognize that none of us can face it alone. When we can share the love we find rather than judge the differences in the way we find it, we can become expressions of a greater wisdom to save this world.

► *The Rev. Samuel A. Trumbore is minister of the First Unitarian Universalist Society of Albany. E-mail him at trumbore@uua.org*

DECADE

▼ CONTINUED FROM A1

bling rise in unemployment and a so-called jobless recovery; from increasingly polarized arguments over political ideology to a difficult discussion about sustainability, renewable energy and how to address global warming.

Some of them surely were scrolling through e-mails on their BlackBerry as they spoke to us on a land line, but they gave us at least enough of their attention (not necessarily undivided) to craft a thoughtful response. Here's what they had to say:

Richard Hamm, professor and chair of history, UAlbany:

"The big story I never expected in my lifetime was to have an African-American president. Now, look at how quickly we've gotten used to that idea and a year after President Obama's inauguration, he's just another politician who's struggling. I never imagined to see the Berlin Wall fall in my lifetime, either, and now it's largely forgotten.

"If you think back to the election between Bush and Gore, true problems with how our democracy works were highlighted and they still have not been addressed. That's a huge bit of unfinished



HAMM

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2000-2009

The digital age brings us together, yet nameless decade is time of limits

BY PAUL GRONDAHL
STAFF WRITER

ALBANY — What should we call this decade? The Aughts, Single Digits and Zeroes have been suggested.

But what do those slogans really tell us? Who's got an app for that?

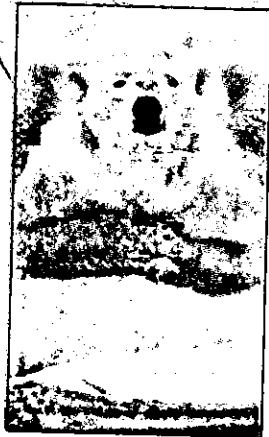
The quickest solution may be to call it the Google decade, Google the term and let a digital river of aggregated information wash over us from our computer screen's warm glow.

Inside

A8 ► Life changes in the 2000s.

On the Web

Top stories of the decade and photo gallery. <http://timesunion.com>



In this multitasking digital information age, when everyone has a Web site and a blog and terabytes of images and words are being generated daily, we decided to hit the pause button. We wanted something that went beyond a sound bite, a meditation as it were on the major themes, big ideas, historical trends and lasting stories of the past decade.

We interviewed a diverse and thoughtful number of local people and asked them to try to make sense of a decade that shifted with dizzying speed from the heartache of 9/11 to the elation of the first black president; from the boom and bust of the dot-com and real estate bubbles to a trou-

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big swindles and scandals from WorldCom to Tyco to Enron to Bernie Madoff. This was the most challenging and most volatile decade of my life in terms of financial matters and I'd like to see a less volatile and more stable period in the next 10 years. I don't think the scandals will end, but I hope we have fewer of them.

"Other things I think about in the past decade are globalization and the exponential progress of technology. The world has become a much smaller place and developing countries like China, India, Russia and Brazil became far more important than anyone would have guessed. The trends of globalization and technology progress are not over with the end of this decade."

The Rev. Sam Trumbore, minister of the First Unitarian Universalist Society of Albany:

"The first defining moment of the decade was 9/11, when the concept of the exceptionalism of the United States was threatened. George Bush spent his administration trying to re-establish U.S. exceptionalism, but the problem we face with al-Qaida is something you can't defeat with military might. You have to defeat them with ideas. I think the Obama administration is beginning to understand that.



TRUMBORE

"Global warming is teaching us that the 21st century is turning into the era of limits. We're getting our first taste of that with peak oil and we're hitting our limits with energy consumption and we now must talk about renewables and sustainability.

"In terms of faith, there is much less confidence in humanity and there's a growing pessimism in this country. What I see that inspires me is that religions are starting to evolve into pluralistic views and an acknowledgment that there are many paths up the mountain. We all have to work together for the common good. I have faith that we can affirm our different faiths within the context of our own beliefs. There is a lot of uncertainty, but I believe in the creative poten-

1-30-00

Jan

Way to go on the letter

to the editor It sounds great

Colson Parata

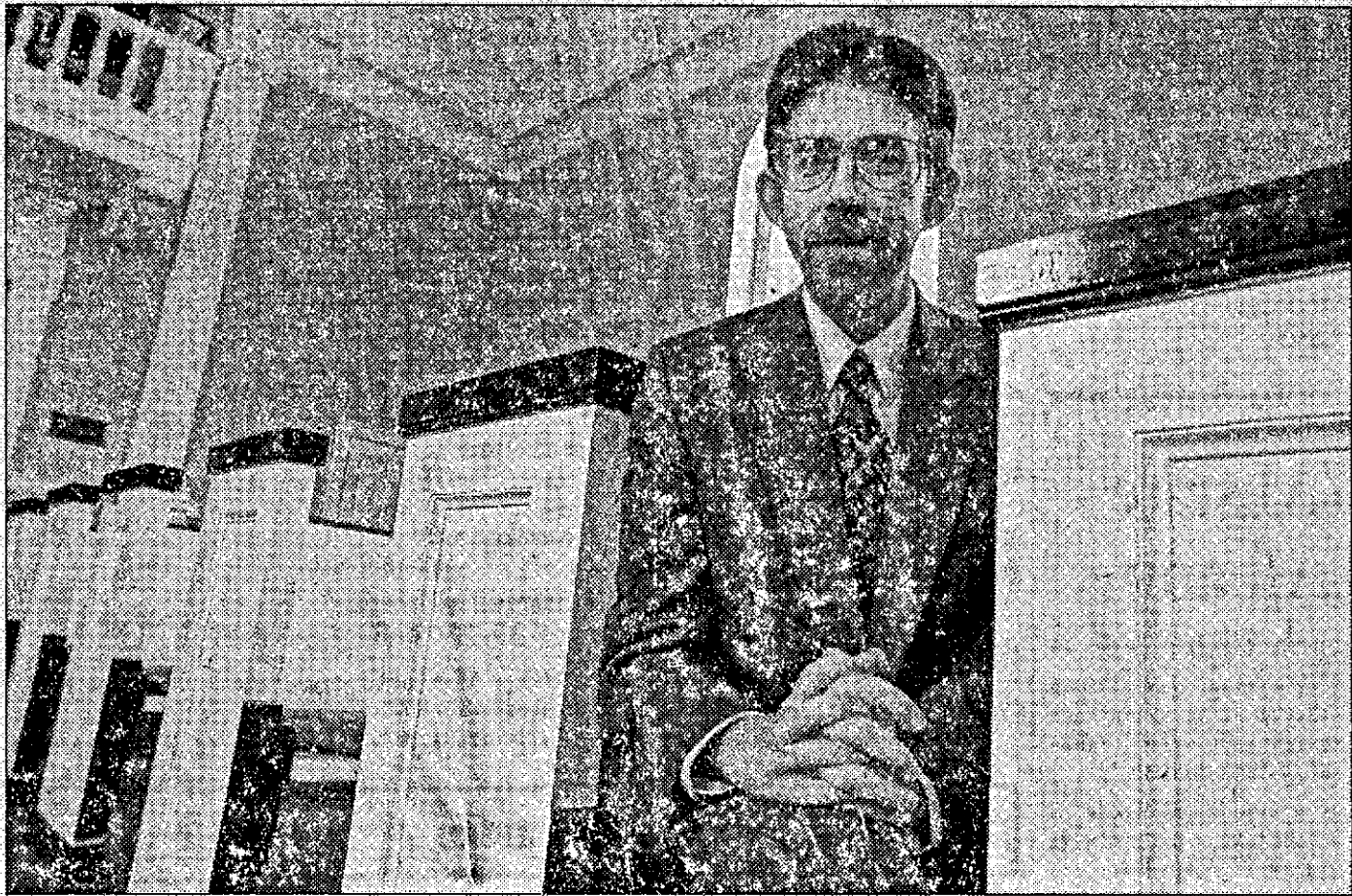
Unitarians respect each spiritual path

The title of your article on Jan. 1, "Spiritual quests take new forms," could be a fine description of Unitarian Universalism.

Elizabeth Lesser, who says in the article, "It's pretty lonely when you're seeking," would find companionship in our faith tradition. We encourage our members to look within themselves for the spiritual dimension. Each person's unique spiritual path is respected. We come together to learn from and encourage each other. We create a warm, supportive community without theological conformity. As one of our 17th-century founders, Frances David, said, "We need not think alike to love alike."

REV. SAMUELA A. TRUMBORE
Minister
First Unitarian
Universalist Society of Albany
Albany

STU 1-30-00



PHOTOS BY PAUL BUCKOWSKI/TIMES UNION

THE REV. SAMUEL TRUMBORE takes a seat in a pew, above, at the First Unitarian Universalist Society on Washington Avenue in Albany. Below, Trumbore runs through a skit for children attending the Sunday service on Jan. 30.

The Rev. Sam Trumbore

Affiliation: The First Unitarian Universalist Society of Albany, 405 Washington Ave. 463-7135.

Background: Trumbore earned a degree in electrical engineering and

computer science from UC Berkeley in 1981. He pursued a career in the high-tech industry, working as a test engineer with NorthStar Computers for five years. In 1985 he decided to change course and enrolled in the Starr King seminary. He graduated in 1989 and was ordained in 1992. He came to Albany in August.

complimentary in seeing both sides of reality. Religion has to embrace science, like evolution for example, and science has to embrace the interior development of consciousness. That's where spirituality is found. You can't touch it but most people have a sense of that in their consciousness."

Question: *How did you know that life in the ministry was for you?*

Answer: "While I was in college I had experiences that pointed me in a spiritual direction. But the real moment was in 1985 when I was offered the computing job that I had always wanted. I had to choose between the job and going to seminary. I realized that I wanted to go to do seminary rather than the job, and it was a really good job and hard to give up, so that's when I knew."

Q: *Have you found anything spiritual in a computer?*

A: "For me a computer's greatest spirituality is in the ability to communicate, so I love the Internet. ... The internet has extended our ability to relate to each other. But, when I learned how computers work on the minutest level I was disappointed. The level of sophistication of silicon is so small when compared to neurons. Computers pale beside the power of the human brain."

Q: *Can religion and science co-exist?*

A: "What religion offers is assistance in the development of the interior of the person and science can't do much in that regard. Science works well in helping you understand the exteriors of things. Science and religion can be

— Thai Jones



PERSPECTIVE

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 17, 2002

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Crossing the racial divide

A group of 12 strangers sits down to talk honestly and, just maybe, take a step on the road to a reconciled America

By PAUL GRONDAHL

Instead of trying to ignore it or hiding behind euphemisms, how can we begin to address the incendiary issue of race?

A racially mixed group of a dozen strangers and a facilitator spent the past several weeks finding out.

Our dialogue, like the topic itself, was more of a journey than a destination. We did not reach dramatic conclusions or discover any easy solutions.

Even as we wrapped up at the start of Black History Month, we asked more questions than we answered. Such as: Why does black history rate but a single month of our consideration? Why not, then, a White History Month?

We spoke honestly and at times painfully about what it feels like to be told you can't live in this neighborhood because you're black. Or about a gnawing guilt know-

ing the breaks have usually gone your way because of a cultural phenomenon we came to call "white privilege."

Our six, two-hour sessions were part of a study circle discussion format devised by a volunteer grass-roots group called Tackling Racism in Albany County, or TRAC. The organization grew out of an initiative of the League of Women Voters of Albany County.

TRAC assembled our group of varied people — black and white, men and women, young and old, affluent and working-class, urban and suburban — around a conference table for straight talk.

We were a cross section of local residents who otherwise probably never would have crossed paths — a reminder of how racial and economic groups remain worlds apart.

At its best, the sessions were a mirror held up to our community that reflected a sometimes unflattering

image about our own, homegrown racial divide. It was a wake-up call, four decades after the civil rights movement, about how much work remains to be done in regard to racial integration. What follows is an impressionistic portrait.

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notes from the race front. (Because of the personal nature of the discussion, we agreed to identify participants only by first names in this article.)

Deep wounds

There are five black people in the group. Each tells a powerful, painful story of racial discrimination. Seven whites share their perspectives, getting a palpable sense, perhaps for the first time, of how deep

the wound of racism runs. Ruben, a retired insurance executive, recalls his promotion from agency manager in Albany to head an insurance office in a predominantly white suburb of Buffalo. "I went to look for a condo, but the real estate agent wouldn't show it to me because I was black," Ruben says in the low drawl of his native Mississippi, where he attended a segregated high school and black college.

Dolores, who works as an administrator, talks about growing up in the South under the Jim Crow laws and learning how to get along in a subservient manner around whites. "And it's alive and well today," Dolores says. "It's about assumptions and stereotypes, power and control."

Ruth, a retired agency director who is white, says the stories take her back to her youth in Manhattan and painful memories of getting beat up by other kids because she's Jewish. "It's so unfair the way blacks are

treated, but you feel so helpless," says Ruth, who has two biracial grandchildren and is trying to do her part as a volunteer reading tutor for elementary school students, most of whom are black.

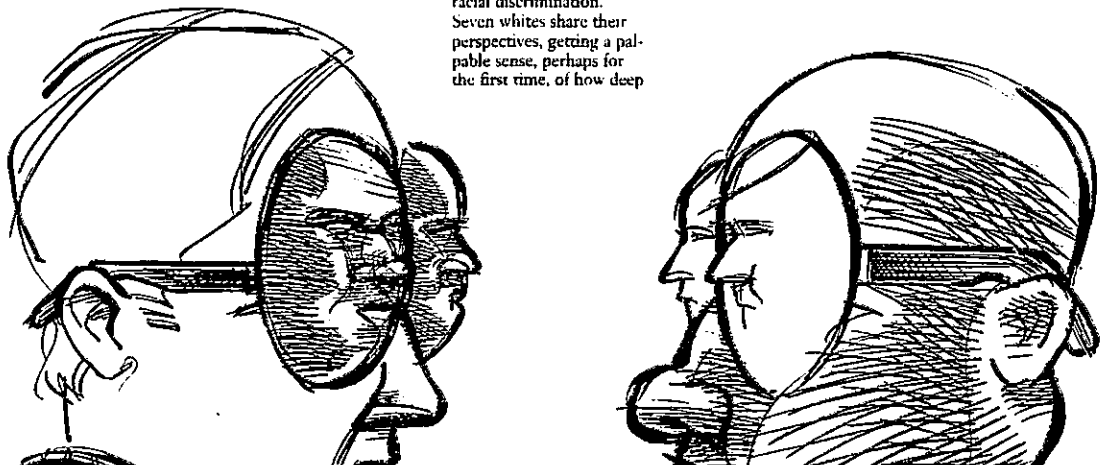
Sam, a white minister, was sent to an integrated school by his parents, who were civil rights activists. But he was fearful of the black students who hung out in intimidating packs. As a result, Sam befriended whites almost exclusively.

"My church is in a mixed neighborhood, but most of my congregation is white," Sam says. "We're trying to reach out to blacks, but we're not having a lot of success."

Edwina, a former teacher and middle-aged white woman, returned to Albany recently and lives in a predominantly black neighborhood. Her neighborhood

Please see **DIVIDE B2**

► Paul Grondahl is a Times Union staff writer.



DIVIDE: A step toward racial reconciliation

CONTINUED FROM B1
makes her sensitive to issues of race.

"I remember going home on the school bus as a kid and there was a black boy who always asked me to sit next to him," Edwina recalls. "He'd yell out, 'I saved a seat for you' and I remember getting embarrassed by that and wishing he wouldn't say it so loud. I liked sitting with him, but I worried about what the other white kids might think."

Art is a silver-haired retired pastor, a silver-tongued philosopher who speaks softly in a lilting Caribbean accent. When he relocated with his family to the area from Massachusetts, real estate agents showed him run-down urban properties with no yards. "All they saw was my color," Art says, who dismissed several agents until one found a suburban home with enough property to indulge his love of gardening.

The racial divide

The focus eventually shifts to us, the whites. We've been largely silent and listening. We don't speak the language of discrimination, haven't felt firsthand the painful high of racism. What place do we occupy along the racial divide? How explicit are we in the subtle and not-so-subtle segregation that exists in our region?

Deborah, a white woman in her 40s, a state worker who considers herself a "thinking, liberal person," describes a scenario so common a term's been coined: white flight. She lives in a predominantly white suburb now. She moved from a racially mixed urban neighborhood when her daughter reached school age. The city schools didn't meet her standards. Her daughter's in a top-rated suburban public school where she encounters only other white faces.

This writer's personal experience parallels Deborah's — along with several of our friends and former neighbors, whose move out of four racially mixed city neighbor-

hood and into the suburbs preceded ours six months ago.

"I'm not going to risk my child's future" was an oft-repeated sentiment, and one I heard escape my own lips.

And so, instead of staying put and fighting for a better, integrated urban public school for our children, we flee the problem and the struggle. Because we can. Because we possess the economic wherewithal to sell our house in the city and buy a more expensive one in the suburbs.

Is this racism, I directly ask the black members of our group? Should we feel guilty, as many of us do, about joining in the "white flight"?

The answer surprises me.

"You shouldn't feel guilty," says Art, the retired black pastor. "I moved to the suburbs, too, because I wanted a place where I could grow a garden. And I wanted the best school for my daughter. What really matters is what's in your heart."

"I still live in Albany, but I sent my kids to private schools," says Ruben, who is black and a retired insurance executive. "You have to do what you feel is best for your family. And then do what you can in your community to fight racism."

Daily divisions

But sharp divisions in treatment between blacks and whites during everyday activities remain.

We whites say we feel confident we'll be wanted on at a department store and can open items and try

them on without incident. Blacks say they'll be followed, watched closely and sometimes stopped and interrogated.

Whites describe a kind of racial invisibility and they rarely give their race a thought. Whites say they are rewarded for being average. Blacks say they are continuously conscious about their race and feel they have to perform at a level of 150 percent compared to white co-workers in order to earn praise and promotions from their employers.

The more we talked, the deeper and more stark the differences seemed.

Sam, the white minister, tells of a survey he and a group of community activists undertook in which several black kids in Albany's inner-city said they believed they'd be dead by age 30 from gang violence.

"That's very disturbing," Sam says. "How do you motivate a kid like that?"

Someone suggests we can begin to instill hope and racial harmony through our churches.

"Do you know what the most segregated hour in America is?" Ruben asks. "Sunday at 11 a.m."

There is a murmur of assent. We talk about the churches we attend. All mentioned are either predominantly white or predominantly black. Nobody can think of an example of a fully integrated church in the area.

"Except on Martin Luther King Day," Ruben adds wryly.

Subtle, insidious

Racism is not that blatant around here, all agree. It's more subtle and, perhaps, more insidious.

"I hear a lot about integration, but I wonder if that's just a code word for pushing white culture on blacks," Sam says.

"I'm on a lot of boards and the buzzword is talking about wanting to diversify the board," Ruth says. "I think it really means bringing on board blacks who believe in our set of white beliefs."

It's all a matter of opening our minds and hearts to make change. We've got to get rid of that fear in our hearts about other races before things will get better. That openness can be a spark that catches on. A candle of hope.

ART

"I've agreed to go on boards, got there and realized I was just window dressing, someone to make their quota," Art says. "So I quit."

Archie, a retired working-class black man, compares his youth in the South to Albany today. "You knew where you stood in the Jim Crow days. It was open," he says. "Up here, I find there's actually more prejudice. They just hide it better."

We give Art, the accidental philosopher, the last word.

"It's all a matter of opening our minds and hearts to make change," he says. "We've got to get rid of that fear in our hearts about other races before things will get better. That openness can be a spark that catches on. A candle of hope."

"I feel hopeful for the future," Art says. "Maybe this is how it will start. Sitting together and talking, one to one, black to white. If we reach out and say follow me, I believe others will join in."

He sums up with a kind of parable about race.

Art was living in Springfield, Mass. His neighbor was a white man, a gruff Italian-American fellow rumored to be a former member of the Ku Klux Klan. Art noticed blacks usually steered clear when they passed the man.

One day, Art stopped at the man's house. The man was on his porch, tending to a Christmas cactus plant. "That's a beautiful Christmas cactus," Art said. They started to talk about gardening.

"I'd like to see that Christmas cactus when it blooms," Art said, mentioning maybe he'd stop back at the holiday season.

Shortly after their meeting, the man brought Art a Christmas cactus as a gift.

Art and the man became good friends.

When Art was leaving Springfield to move to Albany, the man stopped by to wish Art well.

"I'll miss you," the white man told the black man.

"Me, too," Art said. "Me, too."

TO LEARN MORE



For information on Tackling Racism in Albany County, call 471-9669 or e-mail the organizers at trac@nycap.ir.com



Group expands racial dialogue

More than 100 people have participated in study circles on racism in the first year of Tackling Racism in Albany County, TRAC, and several action groups have emerged to address racial inequities in education, criminal justice and home buying.

The volunteer organizers of TRAC also met recently to begin filing applications for the group to become a 501c3 not-for-profit organization.

"We've succeeded in building momentum and we want to take it to the next level," organizer Carol Saginaw says of not-for-profit status.

Being an all-volunteer group without permanent funding or paid staff has limited TRAC's growth and reach, she says. If it achieves 501c3 status, TRAC will have a better chance of securing grants and other funding. In March, TRAC is holding a fund-raiser at a performance of Capital Repertory Company's production of "A Raisin in the Sun."

Discussions are under way to bring TRAC study circles to students at the University at Albany and local high schools.

"The future rests in bringing TRAC into the school system and getting young peo-

ple talking to race," Saginaw a solution.

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ENRONOMICS: Collapse will lead to cha

CONTINUED FROM B1
The mantra of cheerleaders for the American economic system is: "A rising tide lifts all boats." But the Enron crash demonstrates that, when the tide goes out, corporate big shots can get into the lifeboats before worker bees even recognize the humming of shredder machines. Enron's execs cashed in their stocks even as the shares in their employees' retirement accounts were being reduced to approxi-

to go, according to a rival school of thought. In the 19th century, it went by the name of liberalism; today, it's called conservatism. It argues that, if bigness is the problem, why would you want to increase the size of government to the proportions of socialism's blueprints? If holding the reins of power is corruptive of the political process, it wouldn't seem to matter if the hand on the reins belongs to a Rocketteller, a union officer or a government official.

thousands have become routine news items.
The Enron disaster proved that laissez-faire capitalism doesn't inevitably produce the greatest good for the greatest number — the goal announced by its 19th-century prophets. The fall of the energy-trading colossus produced the reverse: happiness for a few, misery for many.
It's a good bet that by the fall

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Remembering a shooting victim



STEVE JACOBS/TIMES UNION

For every killing in the neighborhood, the West Hill Ministers Fellowship conducts a prayer vigil. On Saturday, they led community members in prayers of remembrance on Judson Street near Second Street in Albany, above, where Pat Johnson, 25, was shot and killed Dec. 27. About eight churches belong to the fellowship, which has conducted the ceremonies for almost 10 years.

As season gives way, seems we're left in the dark



LUANNE M. FERRIS/TIMES UNION

Only nine hours of daylight today as the winter solstice marks the start of, well, that time of year...

By **TRINA MEAD**

Special to the Times Union 12-22-03

The winter solstice — the day on which the Northern Hemisphere is tipped farthest from the sun, producing the shortest period of daylight of the year — arrived at 2:04 a.m.

A WARNING trend this first week of winter will make short work of icicles on a wreath at the Vanilla Bean cafe in Latham.

According to Hugh Johnson, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service, astronomical winter begins Dec. 22, but climatic winter — when the most noticeable changes in temperature begin to occur — runs from Dec. 1 to March 1.

“Climatic winter works for me,” Johnson said. “That way, we are already one-third through winter, instead of just beginning.”

Today will bring only nine hours and one minute of daylight.

The arrival of the solstice and the accompanying long dark days of winter can be depressing, he said, but for many others it represents a season of celebration.

At Albany's First Unitarian Universalist Society, the Rev. Samuel Trumbore celebrated the diversity of our holiday traditions. By a quirk of calendars, Hanukkah, solstice and Christmas festivities converge this time of year,

“There is no one way to celebrate the holidays,” Trumbore said. “Every holiday is an amalgamation of the holidays of other cultures.”

Please see **SOLSTICE B7** ▶

SOLSTICE: And now, official start of winter

▶ CONTINUED FROM B1

burning of the yule log and a visit by Father Yule, who, like Santa Claus, leaves candy and toys in the stockings of children.

At the Holistic Studies Institute on Central Avenue in Albany, a Christmas candlelight service and a winter solstice seance were held Sunday evening to celebrate the season's arrival.

According to the Rev. Charlene Robbins of the Holistic Institute, the winter solstice is a time of enhanced spiritual communication.

“There is more energy during the change of seasons,” Robbins said. “This energy helps us connect more clearly.”

As for a solstice prediction for our Christmas weather, Johnson said it's hard to tell.

“Last year, we were in a classic weather pattern,” he said.

“This year, the weather pattern is chaotic, which makes long-range forecasting nearly impossible.”

But Johnson went out on a limb to forecast a wet holiday with above-normal temperatures at about 40°.

For example, Trumbore discussed the tomb at Newgrange, Ireland, to illustrate the archaic origins of our solstice celebrations. The tomb's passage and chamber, built about 3200 B.C., are dark year-round except for the 17 minutes each day it is illuminated during sunrise from Dec. 19 to 23.

Additionally, in order to replace the pagan rituals of the winter solstice, historians say Pope Julius I, in the fourth century, chose Dec. 25 as the date to celebrate Christmas.

However, pagans in the Capital Region continue to celebrate the solstice as one of eight Sabbats, or Sabbath days, of the year. Winter solstice, or yule, represents the death of the old sun and the rebirth and celebration of the new.

According to Stephen Ekey of the Hudson Valley Pagan Network, solstice celebrations Sunday night included a ceremony and celebration at Trinity Temple on Whitehall Road in Albany,

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Celebrating the Inauguration of
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and

Lieutenant-Governor David A. Paterson

January 1, 2007

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Bishop,
Diocese of Albany

Community Minister,
Churches of Albany

the New York Synod,
Church of America

Director and Imam,
the Capital District

Rabbi,
El, New York City

Pastor,
rian Church, Albany

Community, Albany,
Church, Rensselaer

Rabbi,
Beth Emeth, Albany

Pastor,
ppal Church, Albany

Minister,
st Society of Albany

Blessing Bishop Howard J. Hubbard

Organ Postlude Toccata Joseph Jongen (1873-1953)

**Denotes congregation standing.*

Worship Participants

Most Reverend Howard J. Hubbard Bishop,
the Roman Catholic Diocese of Albany

The Reverend Debra L. Jameson Community Minister,
FOCUS Churches of Albany

The Reverend Marie C. Jerge Bishop, Upstate New York Synod,
Evangelical Lutheran Church of America

Imam Ahmed N. Kobeisy Director and Imam,
Islamic Center of the Capital District

Rabbi David M. Posner Rabbi,
Temple Emanu-El, New York City

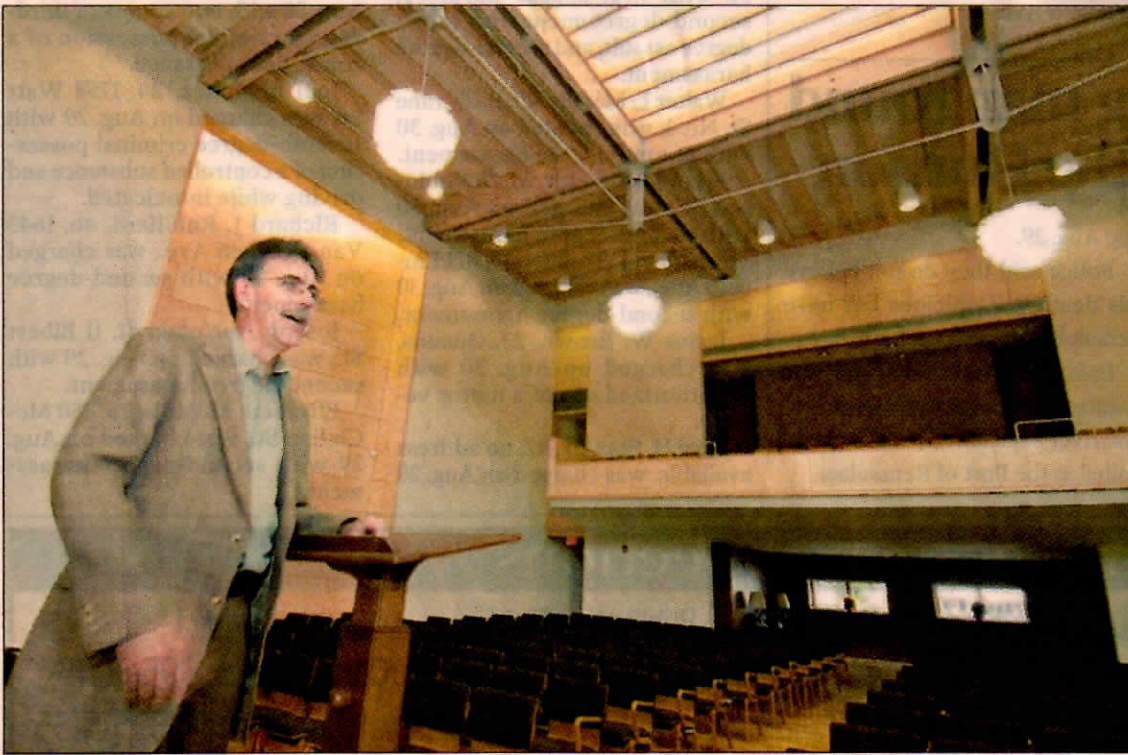
The Reverend James L. Reisner Pastor,
Westminster Presbyterian Church, Albany

The Reverend Mariana A. Rodriguez Pastor, Emmanuel Faith Community, Albany,
and First United Methodist Church, Rensselaer

Rabbi Scott L. Shpeen Rabbi,
Congregation Beth Emeth, Albany

The Reverend Edward B. Smart Pastor,
First Israel African Methodist Episcopal Church, Albany

The Reverend Samuel A. Trumbore Minister,
First Unitarian-Universalist Society of Albany



MARC SCHULTZ/GAZETTE PHOTOGRAPHER

Sam Trumbore of the First Unitarian Universalist Society of Albany talks to a reporter Friday in the new Emerson Community Hall at the society, located at 406 Washington Ave. The hall was built from environmentally friendly materials and seats 342 people.

ALBANY

Unitarian Society to dedicate its new \$3.5M community hall

BY BOB CONNER
Gazette Reporter

The First Unitarian Universalist Society of Albany considered moving out of the city in the 1990s, its minister, the Rev. Sam Trumbore, said Friday, the day before the dedication of a new \$3.5 million addition on its Albany property.

There was a strong Delmar contingent that wanted the congregation to move south, Trumbore said, but it ultimately decided to stay put and expand where it is, on a fairly narrow lot between Washington Avenue and West Street, across from the University at Albany's downtown campus.

Regular Sunday services will be held in the new Emerson Community Hall, named after Ralph Waldo

Emerson, the 19th century American writer. The current sanctuary — which was built in 1925 in classic New England style, Trumbore said, with white pillars and steeple and a pipe organ — will still be used on some occasions, including a regular 9 a.m. mediation service before the main 10 a.m. service in Emerson Hall. The new space, he said, although larger, is more intimate, and less authoritarian-seeming, with the minister in closer touch with the people. "We're kind of an antiauthoritarian religious tradition," he noted.

The new room holds 342, as opposed to 160 or 170 in the sanctuary, and 290 were in attendance at last Sunday's inaugural service, Trumbore said.

The new building at 405 Wash-

ington Ave. replaces four decrepit houses, he said, that the congregation bought and demolished. The boxlike side facing Washington Avenue is of red materials, mostly brick, while the West Street side is built of a smooth grey material. A corner "beacon" window on Washington Avenue goes up from the basement almost to the top of the second floor.

There are only two other windows on that side, high on the wall, horizontal and relatively small. But the inside is also lit by skylights and chandeliers that Trumbore said look like artichokes. The wall faces south, he noted, and the small window space is "so people wouldn't

See **SOCIETY**, page B3

Society

Continued from page B1

get blinded by the sun.”

The renovation project has included some work on the 1962 addition, between the sanctuary and Emerson Hall. The new hall has a balcony, with a library in back, and, on the ground floor, a small kitchen

space. The basement has conference rooms and bathrooms — complete with a water-free urinal in the men’s room. Environmental consciousness is a priority for the congregation, Trumbore said.

The wooden floors and the balcony seating were recycled from two demolished Albany public schools.

Trumbore said he expects the new space to be used by the community, including for UAlbany lectures and by a theater group that

he has been in negotiations with. Members can park on Sundays in a UAlbany lot.

Construction began in April 2006, and about \$2 million of the \$3.5 million cost has been raised so far. At today’s 4 p.m. dedication ceremony, the keynote speaker will be Gini Courter, moderator of the national Unitarian Universalist Association.

*Reach Gazette reporter
Bob Conner at 462-2499 or
bconner@dailygazette.net.*



CINDY SCHULTZ/TIMES UNION

DAVE METZ, who spoke at the dedication for the project, uses the library at the First Unitarian-Universalist Society's new community space. "Our motto with this project was Building Up and Reaching Out," he said.

A place of worship with a 'wow effect'

By **DAVID FILKINS**
Staff writer

ALBANY — The First Unitarian-Universalist Society unveiled its new community space Saturday afternoon, welcoming the public to a modern structure that looks as much like an upscale hotel as it does a place of worship.

The 2,500-square-foot building cost nearly \$3.5 million and took 16 months to complete. It boasts 28-foot-high ceilings, white walls separated by wooden columns, exposed beams, two skylights, a balcony, gleaming hardwood floors and four suspended artichoke lamps that retail for \$6,500 each.

The Rev. Sam Trumbore said architects were going for the "wow effect" when the building was designed.

The space will be used as a worship area for the 350-member society, as well as a venue for hosting celebrations, conferences, recitals, theater performances, weddings, memorial services and community meetings.

"It's a great material space that will serve great human purposes and aspirations," Trumbore said during a 80-minute ceremony.

While the finished product had members smiling, the process

hasn't been easy. Conversation about a new community space began 17 years ago and fizzled out a few times before the project hit full stride eight years ago.

Longtime member Dave Metz spoke at the dedication and said the project has been going on "for the last ... as long as I can remember," drawing a laugh from those in attendance.

The room, called "Emerson Community Hall" in honor of 19th century author and Unitarian minister Ralph Waldo Emerson, is made up of a number of recycled items from Albany public

schools that have been demolished.

Basement doors and more than 50 chairs on the balcony came from Public School 16, and more than 4.8 linear miles of hardwood floors came from Public School 18.

Metz said the new structure represents half of a completed goal.

"Our motto with this project was Building Up and Reaching Out," he said. "We raised money, hired an architect, built the building, now we're done. Now we have to reach out to the community. It will take years to complete that goal. That's the hard part."