

Minister's Annual Report June 11, 2009

Each year in which I've been minister here has provides me with at least one special moment, or more, that lets me know that we are indeed getting it right when it comes to our being a vibrant liberal religious community. This year I can point to several such markers:

*The production of the play HONK at our Sunday service on March 21 was a joyous occasion, and a tribute to the fine work of our Music Director, Jed Holland. Jed, Martha Holland, and a sizeable production crew provided us with one of the more uplifting Sunday services we've had in the course of my ministry here. As fine as the play itself was—with a wide age range from children to adults in the cast—it was also an indicator of the depth of spirit and commitment that exists in our congregation today.

*Another such marker was the appearance of our Association's President, Rev. William Sinkford, in our pulpit on January 25 to launch our UU Association's participation in the Campaign for a Living Wage. This is an effort by a coalition of religious groups in our country to push Congress to raise the minimum wage. Here again, beyond the issue being dealt with, was a tribute to our congregation. We were chosen for President Sinkford's appearance because of our reputation in our wider UU family as being a congregation especially focused and active on social justice issues. I commend our Social Justice Committee and its Chair, Ellen Barr, for the great work they do—which is gaining notice beyond the bounds of our church.

As a sub-clause here, I commend this congregation as well for the role we were able to play in securing the passage of legislation in our New Hampshire State House for full marriage equality. Representative Paul Hackel, a member of our church, was especially gratified at the large number of petition signatures he got from the congregation in support of the same-sex marriage bill. We are already planning a New Years celebration, culminating with a marriage ceremony for some of the same-sex couples we have in our church.

*The third marker I would cite has been the amazing response to our pledge drive this year. One of the backdrops we were acutely aware of as this year's drive got underway was the trying economic climate we were operating in. Many of our members and friends were facing a job loss, or the uncertainty of their employment. Couple this with the declining value of our invested funds due to the workings of the stock market, and some roof repairs that could no longer be delayed—and the overall picture looked rather grim. Your response, as a congregation, was to provide us with the most successful pledge drive we have ever had in terms of total dollars pledged. You raised our pledge base by over \$15,000 at a time when it could not have been more crucially needed. I'll leave the actual crunched numbers to our fine Treasurer, Mike Wilt, and his reports. Here I especially want to thank our Pledge Drive Chair, Ellen Fisher, all of those who worked with her, and most of all, each and every one of you who responded to our pledge appeal in the way you did.

It continues to be my honor and privilege to serve this congregation as your minister, leading in worship, offering counsel and care, participating in adult education, representing us and our values in the wider community, and attending to the overall operation of our church with the help and support of a wonderful staff.

About our staff: By your response to my remark in my sermon on May 31st about Sherri Woolsey, our Office Manager and Membership/Volunteer Coordinator, being the “heart and soul of our congregation” I must have gotten it right! Chris Parker our Religious Education Director of 23 years now, and the Religious Education Committee, have given us another year of excellence when it comes to the Religious Education we offer to children and young people. Sandra Martinage, now designated as our “Sexton” continues to keep our facility very attractive and well maintained and well cared for. I’ve already noted Music Director Jed Holland’s leadership in the HONK production. This was but one indication of the many gifts, talents, and energies he brings to our outstanding Music Program. Jed is ably assisted by a hard working Music Committee, Chaired by Kathy Grossman, as by Geri Davidson as she handles the many administrative tasks and duties needed for this program to go forth.

As I’ve said on other occasions, the ministry I’m blessed to have here would not be possible were it not for the ministry of our staff as well.

Along this line I’m particularly pleased at the opportunities we’ve offered this year for adult education and enrichment. Barbara Berrios has become a member of our Religious Education Committee, with a special emphasis in this area. I thank her for her good work, for all who took leadership roles in our ongoing Food for Thought Thursdays program, and our wonderful Covenant Group leaders.

In addition to the Staff and Executive Team I feel blessed as well to have a dedicated and hard working Executive Board—under the very capable leadership of Laurie Goodman. It was largely through Laurie’s initiative and effort that we were able to put a long-range Strategic Plan in place for our congregation last fall. Many of you—Board members, Committee Chairs, and dedicated members and friends—spent two Saturdays with our consultant, Larry Lemmel, as we charted a course for the future direction of our church. I’m gratified with all the good work that was done on this, and feel we will do well in the Plan’s implementation in the coming years.

It is our many Committees, and the huge number of volunteer hours they represent, who do so much of the work of this congregation. I hope you will take the time to read the Committee Reports. They are much more than words on paper. They, too, indicate a depth of commitment on the part of our members that we are very fortunate to enjoy.

Our Worship Associates group was a great help to me in both assisting me in worship and offering feedback and conversation about the quality of our worship experience. This year, with Worship Associate participation, we tried an occasional “shared sermon” at our Sunday services. When my sermon topic was one that would be particularly inviting

of more than one perspective (like mine) another member of the WA Team—or from the wider congregation—was also invited to speak to the subject. Also in the vein of worship leadership, I thank Anya Zakiewicz for coordinating our Summer Services once again.

Along with all of our joys this year was our sorrow in the passing of our wonderful and long-time members: Bliss Woodruff and Jeanne Scheer We bless and honor their memory. In the midst of our sorrow, I was pleased with the spirit of each of their Memorial Services as we celebrated lives truly well lived—and lives that contributed much to the greater life of our church.

In our wider community I continue to serve as the First Vice President of the Executive Board of the Granite State Organizing Project. I also serve on the Executive Committee, as immediate past President, of the Nashua Area Interfaith Council.

In our New Hampshire/Vermont District—soon to be the Northern New England District—I am the Good Offices Person for New Hampshire for our Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association Chapter. Along with Rev. Olivia Holmes I have served as the District Co-Coordinator for the campaign of Rev. Laurel Hallman for UUA President. On June 26, at our UUA Annual General Assembly, the election of our Association's next President will take place in what has been a very spirited campaign between Rev. Laurel Hallman, minister of the First Unitarian Church of Dallas, Texas, and Rev. Peter Morales, minister of the Jefferson UU Church of Golden, Colorado.

Before leaving matters of our District matters I must add a note of pride and commendation for the work of our member and former Church President, John Sanders, as he completes his first year as President of the newly formed Northern New England District of the UUA.

What more to say other than thanks for another busy, and gratifying year! I close this year on an especially upbeat note, while knowing that we still have work to do, and challenges, to meet when it comes to growing our congregation, and keeping our fiscal house in order. When I see the energy and vitality that continues to characterize this fine congregation I have every confidence that we will keep on our positive path.

My very best to all of you.

Respectfully submitted:

Rev. Stephen D. Edington