

President's Report  
Unitarian Universalist Church of Nashua  
Annual Business Meeting  
June 10, 2010

Tonight brings to a close my three years as president of this congregation. It has been an honor and a privilege to serve in this role, and I'm grateful to have been given the opportunity. It isn't something I sought, or ever imagined for myself, but I know it will remain one of the major high points when I look back on my life. I love this church, this congregation, and the people here I have come to regard as my second family. In my first annual president's report in 2007, I wrote about some of what I most valued here: "the level of discourse, the manner in which we accomplish our business, the consideration and respect we show toward our fellow parishioners in word and deed, the degree to which we base our decisions on our shared values, the wisdom, skill, intelligence and insight that is freely offered and demonstrated in everything we do to make this a beloved community that is extraordinary, even by U.U. standards." These words were true then, and still today and I have experienced the blessings of this in every interaction as president.

I have been fortunate to have had very engaged, committed Executive Board members during my term as president, and I have truly appreciated the thought and commitment that has infused our lively discussions, and sometimes debates. Our Board Covenant reminds us that though our work together is serious, we shall not take ourselves too seriously, and we did our best to inject some fun into our proceedings.

We are the most recent in many generations of this congregation to come together in faith and good conscience to conduct the business of this church. We do this in order to provide a spiritual home for our members, a beacon of liberal religious thought and action for the community, and a mutually supportive environment in which to share our sorrows and our joys. Each generation, including this one, takes the responsibility of stewardship very seriously.

For the past three years the Executive Board has worked on creating a vision to bring us forward into the future in a way that honors our ancestors, respects our present church members, staff, and minister, and also lays the groundwork so that the generations to come can to build upon our efforts in a way that will have one foot grounded in our history yet with the freedom to take the next step in the future direction of Unitarian Universalism. True to our Policy Governance model, once this vision and related goals were established, and in this case by a broad cross section of our members in the strategic planning process, we turned it over to the Executive Team and Committees to determine the means to reach the goals. You will see the progress of our Strategic Vision for 2018 reflected in the committee reports tonight.

Also this evening, you will see the very intentional integration of our mission, vision, and values in the agenda of this meeting. We will give attention to those areas that are most important to our lives as members of this community, addressing both our important business, such as bylaws, budget, and committee reports as well as our spiritual and human need for connection and shared experience. We began this format with last year's annual meeting in recognition that this very important event on our yearly calendar should reflect a more holistic picture of who we are and what is most important to us as a congregation.

The praises of our elders have been sung many times in many ways, and rightly so. They have wrestled with many of the same kinds of choices we are facing today, and with the benefit of their experience, they have moved us along to higher levels of understanding. Over the past few years, in very tangible ways, several of our long term members have spent countless hours digging deep into core of who we are as a congregation and what we need to do in order to carry out our

important daily work in a manner that honors the contributions of our members and staff and provides long term sustainability. In addition to the updated bylaws that will be presented this evening, these same members worked diligently to develop both fair compensation recommendations that respect our staff for their contributions, *and* a comprehensive Personnel Manual to guide our staff in their work. I'm reluctant to name names for fear of leaving someone out, but I do want to acknowledge Bob Sampson, Jon Lasselle, John Sanders, Burns Fisher, Harry Purkhiser, Ellen McCormick, and Gary Lerude for their enormous contributions in these areas and many more during my time as president of the Executive Board. In addition to their work on these key projects, these revered members, along with Ellen Fisher and Steve Edington gave freely of their wisdom and expertise whenever I needed to consult with them, and for this, I will always be grateful.

In addition to acknowledging these esteemed members, I want to also show my respect for the intellect, insight, and innovation of our younger members, our emerging leaders who will guide our congregation into the future of Unitarian Universalism that we are only beginning to imagine. I have been blessed to work with some of this up-and-coming generation on the Executive Board, on committees and in projects, and I'm here to tell you that our future is looking very bright. This is a generation that has been brought up learning not by rote memorization, lecture and repetition, but with inventive learning strategies that encourage creativity, bold originality, and critical thinking. They are passionate in their commitment to Unitarian Universalism, and they are not going to settle for 'good enough' when they know greatness is within our reach. I am asking all of you to pay careful attention and listen to their ideas and their vision as we move together into our shared future.

Recognizing that the best way to set a course for the future is to gain an understanding of what we as a congregation want to accomplish through our efforts, in 2008 we gathered a great cross-section of church members together to participate in a very intentional process for envisioning ourselves in ten years time. The result is our Strategic Vision for 2018. *In our future*, we see our congregation as larger, more diverse in every way, actively participating in both a wealth of church sponsored activities and in social justice work in the community; with visitors who feel warmly welcomed and members who feel respected and supported in their search for truth, meaning, and happiness. In the year 2018, because our members' spiritual, intellectual, and altruistic needs are being met, we are also thriving financially and paying our full operating expenses out of our pledges and fundraisers. This frees up the income from our generous endowment to put toward good causes outside our doors that support our mission and Unitarian Universalist Principles, thus encouraging our members to provide generously to support our endowment through our Planned Giving Program.

We can look to the Strategic Vision for 2018 as a road map to help us get from here to there. It lays out goals, objectives, strategies and more for helping us reach our highest aspirations. It is a living, breathing document that requires our constant attention to keep it alive and moving in the direction of our dreams.

About five years ago, we moved from a traditional, top-down form of governance under which a small group of individuals made the many and varied decisions that keep this fine institution on course and moving forward into a new model of governance. Our current governance model charges the Board of Trustees with discerning the needs of the congregation and the larger community, setting the framework of policies and goals, and then respecting the dedication, wisdom, intellect and creativity of the staff and committees by turning over to them the responsibility for devising the means to carry out those goals. Our church has thrived under this system. Evidence of this can be found in the ways in which we as a congregation have become

more intentional in reaching out to the wider community, and distinctly more welcoming to visitors when they cross our threshold. We see it in the unprecedented success of our recent pledge drives which show that our members embrace the concepts of personal financial ownership and responsibility in the support of our mission. We see it in the ways in which we have come together this year to both celebrate triumphant joys and support each other through devastating losses.

Tonight, we will vote to accept new bylaws that will align us with our current practices, and allow us the flexibility to move forward into the coming era of Unitarian Universalism. These bylaws will sustain us for decades or even centuries to come. As UUA President Peter Morales said in his letter to Unitarian Universalists upon his election in June 2009, *"Together, we are answering the same call heard by Servetus, Ballou, Channing, Parker and Susan B. Anthony—a call to leave behind what is outmoded and to let compassion guide us as we shape a future together."* Over the past several years our congregation has become very intentional in our commitment to planning for our own future recognizing that change is coming in our Unitarian Universalist faith, but secure in the understanding that it is a change grounded in our mission, vision, values, and principles.

Thank you all for participating tonight in this expression of our commitment to our Unitarian Universalist principles: the inherent worth and dignity of every person; justice, equity, and compassion in human relations; acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations; a free and responsible search for truth and meaning; the right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large; the goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all; and respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.

Respectfully submitted by:

Laurie Goodman, President  
Unitarian Universalist Church of Nashua  
June 10, 2010