

Minister's Annual Report
June 7, 2012

One more time....

By the time I offer this report I will have delivered my final sermon. Consider this an addenda.

We may well have worn out the word "transition" this year--and, no doubt, you'll be hearing it again over the next two years--because that's what we are dealing with. The end of my ministry here is also a new beginning, and a time to think of new possibilities for both this fine congregation, and for me, as our respective journeys go forward.

Part of my time this year was spent in preparing us for this parting; a parting with sadness, to be sure; but one that I believe is coming at the right time for all of us.

I'm grateful for the positive responses I've received to the "Meanings of Ministry" sermon series that I offered over the course of this year. This allowed me to offer a retrospective on my ministry here; and, I hope, left you with some things to ponder as you move towards a process for calling and settling a minister two years hence.

I especially appreciated the presence of Rev. Keith Kron, Director of the UUA's Transitions Office, here this past January 8. The sermon he delivered to the congregation that morning, and his follow-up meeting with the Board Trustees and the Special Committee on Ministry was helpful, I believe, in getting you to think beyond my ministry, and it put us on a good course for securing an interim minister.

While I purposefully refrained from the process for selecting an interim minister I was delighted with the choice of my colleague and friend, Rev. Olivia Holmes. Olivia is one of our Association's Accredited Interim Ministers; I am familiar with some of the interim ministries she has done; and I have every reason to believe you will be well served by her.

However unique this year may have been--for minister and congregation alike--certain things remained constant. Once again it was my honor and privilege to serve in the ongoing roles of minister: Leading in worship, offering counsel and care, leading adult education opportunities, representing our values in the wider community, and attending to the overall operation of our church with the help and support of our fine staff/Executive Team, as well as our extremely dedicated lay leaders.

I was especially pleased with the congregational initiative set forth by our Board of Trustees for our Ending Hunger and Homelessness project. I've worked with the Executive Team in helping to identify how many of the various components of our congregational life can come together on this very worthy undertaking, which will go forward over the upcoming church year.

I've had yet another year of benefiting from the help and assistance I receive from the Worship Associates team as the offer feedback and conversation about our worship experience. I thank Anya Zakiewicz once again for coordinating our summer services.

In the area of adult education, I am pleased with the leadership offered by Frona Avery in coordinating this aspect of our congregation's life. I offered two "Unitarian Universalism 101" series--in the fall and spring; and in the spring led a four week series on "Writing Your Spiritual Autobiography." I also had an enjoyable evening leading a viewing and discussion of the film documentary "Magic Trip" as a prelude to a sermon on the 1960s.

A personal highlight for the year, this past May 5, was the "Tribute to the Life and Spirit of Woody Guthrie" which I organized and which was produced by our Simple Gifts Coffee House team. The event was a benefit for the Huntington's Disease Society of America, and our contribution to the 2012 Woody Guthrie Centennial. A big words of thanks to musicians and singers Dan Murphy, Kathy Grossman, and Harry Purkhiser--with fine back-up help from Jed Holland, John Burkitt, and Billy Parker. While on the subject of Woody Guthrie, I did complete and have sent to a publisher my book *Bring Your Own God--The Spirituality of Woody Guthrie*.

We continue to be blessed, as noted, by a very dedicated Staff and Lay Leaders. Thank you Sherri for yet another year of being our congregation's heart and soul as Office Manager and Membership/Volunteer Coordinator.

Thanks to Chris Parker for another good year of religious education for our children, young people, and adults, as well as to all who make that program go--RE Committee, teachers, and teachers aides. And a special word of thanks here to our Covenant Group Leaders for the important role they play in our congregational life.

Thanks to Jed Holland, and the Music Committee, for another year of outstanding, inspiring, and uplifting music in our services--from our Adult and Youth Choirs alike. Thanks to Sandra Martinege for keeping our facility very attractive, well maintained, and well cared for; and thanks to the Property Committee for their kind attention to the ongoing upkeep of our buildings.

As I've said on other occasions, and in previous Minister's Reports, I could not have been engaged in the ministry I've had here with you were it not for the ministry of our Staff and Lay Leaders. I continue to believe that the many tasks they undertake and the responsibilities they fulfill are indeed a ministry that supports and advances our mission and vision as a congregation.

In this respect I hope you will give special attention to the Committee Reports as submitted for this Annual Meeting. They are far more than words on paper. They describe much of the life blood of this congregation. They are an indication of the depth of commitment of those who chair our committees, lead our programs, and promote our values in the larger community. Their names are numerous and I thank them one and all.

Yet more words of thanks are in order for our Board of Trustees, and our Church and Board President, Ellen Fisher. She has been an especially steady hand in moving us into our ministerial transition phase. I thank also the Special Committee on Ministry, with Gary Lerude as Chair, for being my sounding board and offering me advice and counsel as I've brought my ministry to a close. I'm especially indebted to the SCOM who with the fine help of Jenn Morton organized the Farewell Party this past Saturday evening. I'd run out of words trying to say what a wonderful occasion that was for me!

I think it speaks well to the spirit of our church, that even as a ministry comes to an end and as you prepare for another one, the ongoing life of the congregation continues apace. I have every confidence that you have a promising and exciting future before you, even as you have an admirable and honorable past. As I noted in my sermon last Sunday, all ministers in our Free Church tradition are interim ministers in that we are entrusted with a portion of the greater and ongoing life of a Church.

Thank you for your trust in me over these past 24 years; and I trust that the beacon of religious liberalism will continue to shine forth from her for many, many years hence.

Respectfully submitted,

Rev. Stephen D. Edington