

Minister's Annual Report 2009—2010

“Through the good times and the bad times too, let it be a dance.” These words by the late Ric Masten have come to me quite often over the past church year. We’ve had some amazingly great moments during that time, even as we’ve experienced some painful losses. And in all those instances—the good times and the bad times, too—the strength and resiliency of this congregation has certainly shown through. I have been proud and gratified to be your minister over the past twenty-two years, and this past year has certainly brought that home to me.

We came together in joy to ordain Bruce Taylor to the UU ministry, to celebrate the marriage of Jenn and Michele on January 1, and to support the wonderful “Harmony at Home” concert a few weeks ago. And we stood together during the very tragic losses of Marie Kiefer, Allison Myrick, and Adam Aldrich in reaching out to their families and loved ones.

There are any number of ways of gauging the health of a congregation, some of which I’ve just alluded to. The way in which you have responded to our annual Stewardship Campaign/Pledge Drive over the past two years is yet another telling indicator. Two years ago you approved a budget with a pledge base of \$195,000. The proposed budget that will be presented to you later this evening will show a pledge base of \$235,000. The math is pretty easy; this represents an increase of \$40,000 in pledges in the past two years! It’s easy math, but an amazing accomplishment; and all the more so when we take into account the uncertain economic climate so many of you have been living with during this time.

I know that money does not tell the whole story when it comes to a congregation’s life and general well being; but I believe that your level of support, especially over the past two years, is a good indicator of the overall investment and sense of ownership you feel in this church. I commend Ellen Fisher and all those who worked with her in the last two pledge drives; and I salute Mike Wilt as well who, from his post as Treasurer, has continued his push to lessen our dependence upon our invested funds.

In addition to the level at which you support our congregation, your generosity on Sunday mornings will allow us to disperse more than \$25,000 in social outreach causes; many of them within our Nashua community and others as far away as Haiti and Afghanistan.

I also want to salute Harry Purkhiser and those who worked with him in updating and revising our By-Laws over the past year. These updates and revisions will also be presented later in our Annual Meeting. Many of the changes are meant, essentially, to ratify the policy governance model for church administration that has been evolving into place over the past 4-5 years; a process that began during Gary Lerude’s presidency.

My own ongoing responsibilities have been, well, ongoing. I lead Sunday worship most every Sunday with, on average, three sermon-centered services a month; and convene a monthly Worship Associates group to both plan our services, and reflect and advise on the overall nature of our worship experience. In the area of pastoral care, we offered a Pastoral Care workshop last February under the leadership of Rev. Karen Foley. In many respects our congregation is increasingly becoming a pastoral care team unto itself given all the ways you show love and care for one another. I led a four week Food for Thought Thursdays program on “From Jesus to Christ” using the Public Broadcasting Service series on that topic; and conducted two “UU 101” programs for prospective new members. I also continue to coordinate our Covenant Group program.

We continue to be served as well by an outstanding church staff. As I’ve said in previous annual reports, I would not be able to do the kind of ministry I do were it not for the ministry—in a very real sense—of our church staff. Sherri Woolsey’s presence in our office on weekdays as Office Administrator, and on Sundays (and other days) with her Membership Coordinator hat on, creates a warm and welcoming tone that filters through all of our congregational life. I’ve especially appreciated her maintaining of the “UU Cares” e-mailings with keep us well apprised of the joys and concerns of our members and friends.

Jed Holland continues to offer his musical magic for us with both our Adult and Youth Choirs, and by the ways he’s making of our congregation one big “choir of the whole”! The recent ROPES service is but one indicator of the fine religious education program we enjoy under the leadership of Chris Parker. Coming out of conversations I’ve had with Chris, the RE Committee, and the Worship Associates we will be seeing an increased presence of our children and young people in our Sunday services beginning in the fall. And good ministry is greatly enhanced by the presence of a well cared for and well maintained facility which our Sexton, Sandra Martinage, provides for us in a truly excellent way. Sandy, and our Property Committee—so ably chaired by Jenn Morton—make our buildings a facility we can all be proud of.

Sherri, Chris, Sandra, and I meet every other week as an Executive Team to plan and carry forth the day to day operations of the church, and make ourselves available to the various Committees that look to us for resources and guidance. On this note I offer my thanks to all of those amongst us who devote their time and energies to chairing, and serving on, our committees. I hope you will take the time to read each of their reports, and thank them for their many fine efforts. These reports are much more than words on paper; they represent hours of work and dedication by so many of our members who keep the life blood of our congregation flowing.

I especially commend the White Wing School and Committee—with Kate O’Shea as Chair—as they celebrated their 50th Anniversary this year. We’ve maintained a standard of a very high quality pre-school educational experience for a half-century in our community now. Congratulations, White Wing!

I cannot leave this portion of my report without also offering a huge word of thanks and appreciation to Laurie Goodman for the three years she's given us as Church President. It has been during her presidency that we put a ten year Strategic Plan in place in the fall of 2008, saw the aforementioned increases in both our pledges and outreach collections, and put our present governance model in place. But it has been the more intangible—and still no less very real ways—that Laurie has been the face of our congregation over the past three years as our chief lay leader. Great job, Laurie—thanks so much!

In the wider community I serve as the Second Vice President on the Executive Board of the Granite State Organizing Project; and attend the monthly meetings of the Nashua Area Interfaith Council. I also take part in the cluster meetings of the Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association Chapter of the Northern New England District.

I'll close my report for this year on a personal and family note. I began my ministry here in the summer of 1988 when our son, Gordon, was four years old and entered the White Wing School. In just a couple of weeks now I'll officiate his marriage to Crystal Cassidy here in this sanctuary. Not only is this a great place to have a ministry; it has been a place for my family to grow and be a part of as well. So it is with a sense of personal gratitude that I offer this report for 2009-2010.

Respectfully submitted,

Stephen Edington, Minister
Unitarian Universalist Church of Nashua, NH
June 10, 2010