

Minister's Annual Report June 9, 2011

This past April I was invited by my ministerial colleagues in our Northern New England District to share my Life Odyssey at our annual Chapter Retreat. I was honored to be asked, even as my first thought when I was approached about it was, "Don't they usually ask an older minister to do this?" Okay, I didn't really think that at all. I knew that such invitations are generally extended to ministers who are at or near retirement, as an opportunity for them to offer a retrospective on their years in the ministry along with any other aspects of their lives they wish to recall. The idea is not that you have one foot in the grave, but that you are at a point in your life and ministerial career where some summing up can begin to take place.

Interestingly enough my Odyssey presentation came just a few days after Ellen Fisher and I shared the pulpit on a Sunday morning to let you know that I would be concluding my ministry here in the summer of 2012--and what that meant for the short and long term future for this congregation. While my coming to this decision and letting you know about it, was one of the marks of this past year it was hardly the only one. It has been another good year in our life as a UU congregation; and I offer my take on it here.

While each year brings its unique happenings, opportunities, and challenges many things also remain constant. It continues to be my honor and privilege to serve 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/Executive Team and extremely dedicated lay leaders.

I continue to benefit from the help and assistance I receive from our Worship Associates as they offer feedback and conversation about the quality of our worship experience. This past year, in collaboration with the Religious Education Committee, we moved to have our church school children and young people in for the first part of all of our Sunday services rather than the once a month schedule we'd been on previously. I feel this has worked very well and has given heightened visibility to our Religious Education program. Also in the manner of worship leadership I thank Anya Zakiewicz for coordinating our summer services once again.

Last fall I led a four week adult education series on "Writing Your Spiritual Narrative," drawing upon some of the experiences I've had in some recent writers workshops I've taken. I also led two "Unitarian Universalism 101" series aimed at new and prospective members for our congregation.

At the direction of the Board of Trustees, Sherri Woolsey and I--with our Executive Team hats on--convened a task force to assess our audio/visual needs and opportunities, primarily here in the sanctuary and with respect to our worship experience. This team has offered a preliminary report to the Board with recommendations for upgrading our sound system and the costs involved. You'll be hearing more about this in the months ahead.

We continue to be blessed, as noted, by a very dedicated Staff and Lay Leaders. Thank you Sherri for another year of being our heart and soul as Office Manager and Membership Coordinator. Thank you Chris Parker for another year of fine religious education for children, young people, and adults, as well as to all who make that program go. Thank you Jed Holland and the Music Committee for another year of outstanding and uplifting music in our services. Thank you Sandra Martinage for keeping our facility very attractive and well maintained and well cared for.

As I have said on many other occasions--and it remains no less true no matter how many times I do say it--I could not be engaged in the ministry I have here with you were it not for the ministry of our Staff and Lay Leaders. I truly believe that the many tasks they undertake and the many 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 that are a part of the packet of information you have for this evening's 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 those who chair our committees, lead our programs, and promote our values in the large community. Their names are numerous and I thank them one and all.

I and we have been particularly blessed once again this year with a dedicated and hard working Board of Trustees. I thank Ellen Fisher for her leadership as she took the helm as Church President one year ago and look forward to working with her in the coming year as well.

One of my biggest "thank yous" is reserved for all of our congregational members and friends whose financial support continues to grow from one year to the next. Once again we have raised our pledge base significantly, while lessening our reliance upon our invested funds for our operating expenses. We have grown our pledge base remarkably over the past several years even in a climate of economic uncertainty. Our Treasurer Mike Wilt will offer some more defined numbers in this respect later in our meeting, but I am very encouraged by the maturity you have shown in recent years when it comes to forthrightly understanding and addressing our financial needs and responding to them.

With our many gains of this past year we also experienced the loss of one of our most long time and dedicated members when Naomi Lyon passed away this past winter. Her service was a celebration of a life indeed well lived and one that was truly devoted to the greater life of our church.

In our wider community it has been a year of stepping back from me from some of my involvements while still being supportive of those organizations with which we as a congregation have a relationship. After being one of its founding Board Members I completed my service on the Board of the Granite State Organizing Project last November. While no longer serving on their Executive Committee I continue to be involved with the Nashua Area Interfaith Council.

I've also managed to keep up my research and writing projects as time allows. Following on my books about Jack Kerouac and Ric Masten I've now shifted to Woody Guthrie. Doing a music and narration service here a couple of years on "The Spirit of Woody," got me going on my writing project which is a book I've tentatively titled *Bring Your Own God--The Spirituality of Woody Guthrie*.

Looking ahead, our next year together will be the beginning of a time of discernment; a time that I feel will be both productive and exciting for you as a congregation and for me as well as I consider the next chapter in my odyssey in ministry and life. We have much to reflect on and much to look forward to. I trust it will be time well spent.

As for now, what more to say than thanks for another busy and gratifying year! I close this year on a positive note, knowing that we still have work to do and challenges to meet as we continue to be a beacon of liberal religious thought and action in this part of our world. The energy and vitality I see in this congregation give me much confidence in your future that will keep us on a positive path.

My very best to all of you.

Respectfully submitted,

Rev. Stephen D. Edington