

President's Report for the 2010-2011 Annual Meeting
Unitarian Universalist Church of Nashua
June 9, 2011

The job of the church president, along with all the other members of the Board of Trustees, is to represent the Congregation. The Board sets church policy and monitors the execution of that policy. The president is also an *ex officio* member of most church committees and represents the church on all appropriate occasions. This is what it says in the Bylaws, Articles 4.2 and 6.2. In my first year as president I have felt that I was on a steep learning curve about just what that means. I knew that I would be presiding at Board meetings and the Annual Meeting, but last year at this time my full role was kind of hazy. I have come to believe that one of the most important jobs of the president is to know what is going on with as many individual church members and church-related groups as possible. Someone filling this role can do a lot to facilitate inter-church communication and efficiency, and I feel like I am still learning the job. You, the Congregation, have been amazingly helpful this year because so many of you have talked to me and welcomed me into your groups. Thank you--it is a great privilege for me personally to hear your concerns and thereby to get to know each of you a little better.

Following are the major topics which the Board of Trustees worked on this year.

Use of the Endowment in Budgeting

One of the first decisions that the Board of Trustees made this year was to ask the Investment Review Committee to recommend a prudent amount to take from the endowment to include in the coming year's budget. Long before the budgeting process began this year, the Board decided as a matter of policy that it would abide by that recommendation. The way that a "prudent" amount would be determined as well as the figure itself was left for the Investment Review Committee to decide.

Statement of Priorities for 2010-2011

At its October 12th meeting the Board of Trustees adopted the following specific priorities (in italics) for the 2010-2011 Church year. Following each priority is a brief report of the results.

- *Community Involvement* Increase the visibility of existing community outreach activities and seek & highlight new possibilities for members to become involved in such activities. This especially includes volunteering time (as well as contributing money). Be on the lookout for a larger outreach project that could involve a large portion of the congregation.

This priority was announced and discussed at our Summit Meeting on October 18th. Our Outreach Collections, including the Sunday Service presentations by representatives of the groups which the collections support, have continued this year. The Social Justice Committee also continues to staff an information table in Coffee Hour and to sponsor and/or publicize events at which the congregation

can learn about or participate in social justice issues, and numerous announcements have been made in the newsletter and the order of service about opportunities to volunteer in the community as they arise. I feel that more can be done in this area, however, and hope to continue working on it with the Board next year.

- *Governance Process Improve communications and mutual support between the Executive Team, the Board of Trustees, and the various church groups and committees. This especially includes supporting church leaders and encouraging widespread participation in church activities within the congregation.*

The church staff and the Board of Trustees have learned that “policy governance,” the model we have adopted for running the church, is not necessarily an obvious system. In our culture we are more used to seeing top-down bureaucracies. In policy governance the Board of Trustees sets policy but leaves the implementation of those policies to the Executive Team (presently the Executive Team is Steve Edington, Sherri Woolsey, Chris Parker, and Sandra Martinage) and the church committees. This allows the Board to focus on the future and to assure that the church is living up to its mission and vision.

With the encouragement of the Board, Steve presented an excellent review of policy governance and how it affects committees at our October 18th Summit Meeting. I am sure that both the Board and the Executive Team will need to regularly provide education about policy governance to church leaders and the congregation in general for the foreseeable future.

- *Youth and Young Adults Investigate programs which have been successful in other churches or organizations to retain youth members and attract young adults.*

The first step in addressing this priority was to assess how our youth programs were doing. The Board met with Chris Parker, the Youth Group leaders, and one member of the High School Youth Group in December for general discussion and listened to a presentation from Gary Lerude entitled, “Thoughts About Youth” in January. It would be hard to summarize all the ideas the Board considered, but, in summary, we felt that our Youth Group is working well for the students who are participating. Continuing challenges include engaging a greater number of the high school students whose families are part of the church as well as attracting more post-high school young adults. It is interesting to note that some non-participating youth have expressed a longing for a hands-on outreach project to get involved in (see the *Community Involvement* priority above). Gary’s presentation emphasized the intense involvement of many young people in social media and encouraged us to think about a virtual as well as physical church presence.

- *Audio-Visual System* Assess needs, set goals, and seek design for an integrated multi-media system, including the sanctuary sound system.

The Board of Trustees asked the Executive Team to do this task. The Executive Team organized a committee which has been working on it throughout this year. Our Property Committee budget for next year includes money which we anticipate will be used to begin an upgrade of our systems. Depending on the final estimates of the cost to implement the final plan, we may need to have a campaign to raise funds, similar to the piano campaign held several years ago.

- *Membership* Grow our numbers and strengthen the bonds within our membership. The Board of Trustees believes that all of the above-listed priorities will contribute to this final priority.

Numbers can be counted, and our Clerk's Report shows a modest increase in our membership this year. Strengthening bonds are harder to measure. It is hard to say why or how this priority has worked. There are many possibilities. The advertising undertaken by the PR Committee, holding two Open House Sundays during the year, and our many Social Activities events may have played a part in attracting new members or retaining more existing members than might have happened in the past. Our excellent existing programs, such as Religious Education, Community Outreach, and Music, undoubtedly contribute heavily. Personal connections made between individual members or small groups as we go about our institutional business may be the most important factors. On the whole, this church has a lot to offer, and we owe it to ourselves, as well as others who may wish to join us, to keep this priority front and center in the future.

The Board of Trustees' Statement of Priorities ended with the following statement.

These priorities are consistent with the objectives in the Strategic Plan for 2018, adopted by the Executive Board in 2008.

The Strategic Plan for 2018, formulated in 2008 by a super-committee of more than 30 church members and friends, has been an excellent format for the Board of Trustees in their policy work on behalf of the congregation. We will continue to use it in the coming years to guide our path. It is an evolving document and needs to be added to as we move along. Working on the Strategic Plan will be a centerpiece of the Board's work in the coming year.

Stewardship Campaign

Because no chairman for the Stewardship Committee had been identified by the time that the work of organizing the Pledge Drive needed to begin, the Board of Trustees agreed to form a committee of the whole to accomplish this important annual task. While this year's Pledge Drive has been largely successful, nearly meeting the ambitious financial goal the Board set for itself, and while actually doing that work has been a good experience for those members who had not been involved in it in the past, it is not, in

my opinion, in the best interest of the church for the Board to also be the Stewardship Committee on a regular basis. Co-chairs of the Stewardship Committee for next year have already stepped up (a huge thank-you to David Hudson and Kate Messner!!), and while I expect that Board members will help out as much as they can, it will not be a focus of the Board's agenda as it was in the past year.

Ministerial Transition

While Steve's announcement of his retirement at the end of our next church year (that is, in the summer of 2012), was the most monumental single event of the year, it is ironic that the Board's responsibility in this matter was to make sure that the congregation not take action, at least not prematurely. While it is understandable that we may wish to "get this settled and get back to normal" as soon as possible, it is too early to form a Search Committee, for example, or to consider specific candidates if we want to ensure that our next settled minister and the congregation are most likely to smoothly transition into a lasting relationship.

Board members have been educating themselves about the UUA's resources and recommendations about ministerial transitions, as well as devoting our entire April meeting to this topic, but the Board agrees with Steve that the last year he will be with us is one in which we will largely focus on our on-going church activities (see our priorities above!). Next spring the Board will be hiring an Interim Minister to work with the congregation for the 2012-13 and 2013-14 church years on the challenging task of selecting a future focus and a new settled minister to guide us in that direction. Especially in the case of the retirement of a long-term minister, this is the process strongly recommended by the UUA, and the Board of Trustees has voted, as a matter of policy, to follow the UUA's recommendations.

I thank all of you for your help and consideration in the past year and look forward to another church year. May we continue to support one another and grow in our commitment to our church and our principles.

Ellen Fisher
President