

Unitarian Universalist Church of Nashua
President's Report
Annual Meeting, June 7, 2012

This has been a very good year. It has not been without worries and stress, at least on my part, but when I think back on all that we accomplished together, I feel proud, and, frankly, amazed. We stand in a very good place to move forward into next year.

Policy Governance & Priorities

I did not check on this beyond last year, but I would wager that most President's Reports at Annual Meetings for the past 6-7 years have begun with an explanation of the "new" method by which the Board is governing the church, Policy Governance. Last year in my report I carefully planned both an explanation of how it works and what its advantages are. You probably know it by now: the Board of Trustees delegates the management of day to day church business to the Executive Team. (Presently that is Steve, our CEO, and his team: Sherri, Chris, and Sandy Martinage.) The idea is that this frees up the Board to look at our over-all direction, to assess whether we are doing all we can to be the church we want to be, to set policy and priorities, and to make long-term plans for improvements and new initiatives. Unless you are a corporate manager, that still might not be clear. Another way to say it could be that the Board spends most of its time considering whether we are truly living our mission and how we could do it better.

The Board spent many hours on this work, both in meetings and outside. To maximize our effectiveness, the Board members worked on educating ourselves. I brought back ideas from last summer's General Assembly. Board Member Mary Licking and I attended a Northern New England District training workshop titled, "Harvest the Power," last fall. All Board members read an excellent book, Governance and Ministry, Rethinking Board Leadership by Dan Hotchkiss. Then, as a result of careful consideration informed by our study and input from the congregation, especially from the Church Summit held in October, the Board set 3 church priorities for the 18 months from January 2012 through June of 2013. You will be hearing about each of those priorities from Board members this evening. Here is a key point about the priorities: yes, we are at the beginning of a period of ministerial transition. Yes, we have much work to do to discern what qualities in a new settled minister will lead us best into the future, but the key point is that while we are involved in that transition, the general work of the church will go on as well. We are not stopping everything to search for our next minister: we will continue living our mission while looking for a new minister. For each of you, this will continue to be your church, your beloved community.

Sound System

Last year at the Annual Meeting I announced that we had received a challenge—a donor had stepped forward and offered to pay a significant portion of the cost of a new sound system for the Sanctuary, in honor of Nathaniel Brooks. There was a catch: we had to get it up and running within 4 months. The AV Committee worked very hard, through the summer, and had the system selected, designed, installed, and ready for our first service in September. Not only that, but the congregation responded to a special fund-raising campaign and generously contributed what we needed to cover the additional cost of the system. With all of the other happenings this year, let's not forget about this significant achievement. Let's not take the new sound system for granted. It helps all of us hear better, especially the people with hearing problems, and allows us to stream our services off the church website. This is a big deal—we have literally made our message as a church more widely available. And the new sound system is helping us to live our mission.

Transition

We are just completing what will be the first year of a 3-year process to find our next minister. The slightly-more-than-one year since Steve announced his retirement plans has been a year of looking back to say good-bye and thanks to the only UU minister a majority of us has ever known. Many people contributed to the successful accomplishment of a good good-bye. Probably the greatest contribution came from Steve himself. He continued to advise and encourage us in our activities, including the process for hiring an Interim Minister. He highlighted our services this year with thought-provoking ideas that both guided us in looking back and showed us ways to glimpse the future. He was and is our “non-anxious presence,” even as he prepared himself for his own major life transition. Thanks, Steve.

Guiding most of the saying-good-bye events this year was the group that Steve first called the Council of Wise Elders, later re-named the Special Committee on the Ministry. It includes all the people who are still active who have served as President of the Church while Steve has been our minister: Bob Sampson, John Sanders, Carol Houde, Gary Lerude, Laurie Goodman, and me. It was this group that was responsible for the visit and sermon from Rev. Keith Kron, Director of the UUA’s Transitions Office, at our service on January 8th, the January 21st All-Church Dinner and Small Group Discussions, and the Good-Bye Party on June 2nd. They also deserve our thanks.

The actual process of hiring an Interim Minister was handled by the Board of Trustees. The Board worked with the UUA Transitions Office and the staff of the NNE District to prepare for the selection process from January through April. Then in a 12-day whirlwind, after receiving a list of 7 possible candidates, packets were reviewed, references checked, and interviews conducted, resulting in an offer to our first-choice candidate, Rev. Olivia Holmes. Fortunately for us, she also chose us as her first choice. She will be beginning her work with us on August 1st.

Financial Matters

Mike will be providing more details on this subject in his Treasurer’s Report, but I want to say that I continue to be gratified by the way that we are conducting our financial affairs. Again at the beginning of this year, the Board voted as a matter of policy to ask the Investment Review Committee to recommend a prudent amount to take from the Endowment for the coming year’s budget—and to only take that much when formulating our 2012-13 budget. This is consistent with our policy about use of the Endowment in recent years, and even though our Pledge Drive did not meet our goal this year, we are able to stick to our policy, largely because of careful management in the past few years that has allowed Mike to accumulate a Cash Reserve for the Church, separate from the Endowment, that allows us to smooth over bumps in the road from year to year, at least in the short term.

I am a glass-half-full person, however, not without reason in this situation. Counting our pledge drive, our outreach collections, our stupendous auction this spring, and our special contributions for the sound system and Steve’s gift, this congregation has raised more money this year for support of this church and its activities than ever before in our history.

I have faith that this year’s shortfall in the Pledge Drive is a blip on the graph, not the beginning of a downward trend. We have to make sure that is true in our giving next year—I don’t want to minimize the seriousness of that message. What each of us gives to our beloved church, both our time and talents, and our money, contribute to living our mission. The more we participate, the more we contribute, the more the church becomes our “third place,” as Steve has said. It is a win-win situation.

Respectfully submitted,
Ellen Fisher, Church President