
NUUSLETTER

NORTHWOODS UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST FELLOWSHIP

A Beacon of Light in the Northwoods

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Special Edition

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2004Dear Friends:

The more information a democracy has, the more informed and thoughtful its choices can become. A discussion at the last Board meeting yielded the thought that this summary might provide a bit more grist for the mill, by way of providing Some Facts Regarding What Your Minister Did for the last 2+ years. The Board suggested sending out a special edition of the NUUsletter; so here 'tis!

Four areas of ministry in our Letter of Agreement have guided my work. That Letter reads:
The Minister will:

- a. "Work with membership to continue the development of the congregation as an interdependent, cohesive religious institution where all people are actively support and encouraged to participate."
- b. "Strengthen the Fellowship's presence in the community as a liberal-religious and socially-responsible organization."
- c. "Promote Fellowship growth in the areas of membership, commitment, and deepening understanding of our faith."
- d. "Enhance the Fellowship's relationship with the broader UU movement."

In my first year with you, I spent a preponderance of time on working with the membership and promoting growth, while the second year brought community presence and denominational involvement to the fore. I do not know under what category it goes, but I also performed two memorials and three weddings.

In terms of **growth**, a workshop that I led in January of '03 encouraged discussion of four major aspects of growth: (1) deepening of our personal understanding of Unitarian Universalism, (2) deepening our practice of congregational polity, (3) increasing people & facilities, and (4) strengthening our social witness.

- You have had a "great gulp" of **new members** since I came, particularly with my cohort group which joined in a clump. This called for tiny oil- in- the- gears sorts of things, and sometimes I even found myself in the role of "the other" -- a role that ironically can help a group bond among itself! In cooperation with the Membership Committee, I met with new and prospective members -- a truly joyous task.

- In terms of **polity**, between us we've raised a host of thoughts and questions about the interpretation of UUism in this historical era and our Northwoods context.
- Regarding **understanding of our faith**, I have offered sermons once a month, and for a while monthly workshops on aspects of UUism including topics on:
 - a. The Last Man Jailed for Blasphemy (a Universalist, Abner Kneeland)
 - b. Group Leadership & the Dynamics of Groups
 - c. A History of the Fellowship (Irma spoke, and people added)
 - d. A Thumbnail History of UUism, from pre-Jewish & Christian roots on.
 - e. A History of the UU Fellowship Movement in the U.S.
 - f. Credos of Historical UU's (in cooperation with Building Your Own

Theology).

- g. Unitarian Universalism and Pacifism
 - h. Unitarian Universalists Relate to Christmas
- **Social Witness** was furthered when with Joyce, Candace & Jerry, I facilitated the Welcoming Congregation curriculum.

The job of **strengthening the Fellowship's presence in the community as a liberal religious and socially responsible organization** has been a real gift to me! There are a number of organizations I've worked with: Intercultural Leadership Initiative (on the Advisory Council, as trainer, doing curriculum work); the State Initiative Grant (\$300,000+ over 3 years to address issues of drug & alcohol use among kids with emphasis on the quality of community life expressed by all ages); the Lakeland Minister's Association (Vice President for two years); member of the Howard Young Mission and Values Task Force (charged with evidencing the Catholic identity of the hospital in the context of respect for diversity!); membership in Rotary (served on Program Committee – brought in Tim Kratz, for instance); co-officiating World Day of Pray; as well as amazing and wonderful conversations with community members regarding how the Fellowship is viewed – and a host of other topics.

Other activities include speaking on the Kathleen Dunn show (which was arranged by Audrey Williams); three newspaper pieces: on UU's and Christmas, on our Welcoming Congregation vote, and a letter protesting anti-Semitism signed by 8 area religious leaders; a Ministerial Association evening on Martin Luther King Jr. Day; and supporting events sponsored by the Social Justice Committee

Working with the membership to continue the development of the congregation as an interdependent, cohesive religious institution where all people are actively supported and encouraged to participate.

I perceive pastoral care to be a real need within this, as in any, congregation. I have provided counseling, phone calls and visiting. A series on Grieving and Loss is scheduled for May and June, with Joyce Barnes.

For two of your soon-to-be 15 years I have participated as your minister in the hearty & zestful liberal religious life of the Northwoods UU Fellowship. During this time I've seen the Fellowship struggle with many important issues: the very nature of this religious/philosophical movement; developing a long range plan; the meaning of congregational polity (including the authority of the Board vis a vis committees); assimilating new people; developing an understanding of the range and scope of having a minister; and --

underlying it all – carrying the flame for the endangered democratic process and its utter dependence on the participation of all voices. To you, one and all, for this sacred work: hats off!

A postscript: working with the Youth Group has been a wonderful experience, the highlight of which was the 16-kid overnight at the Fellowship last fall; this winter has not seen Youth Group activity, and I hope to have a Bridging for the graduating seniors in the spring.

Denominational involvement included attending District and national annual meetings. These events not only provide the energy and the excitement of meeting truly wonderful people, they also offer good solid training in aspects of social justice and in congregational life. During the last two years I have seen the denomination grapple with challenges of being a truly welcoming denomination (in the largest sense) in the context of a pluralistic – and often deeply divided -- society.

I also attend the pre-meeting ministerial trainings as well as other ministerial retreats, in which we strive to keep up with denominational and theological developments, and with one another, often offering worship (once for the District), workshops (4) or speeches (once at GA).

My personal involvement increased dramatically when I formed a nationwide committee of UU ministers and was later invited into membership on the national UUA Socially Responsible Investment Committee. My participation there now involves holding and interpreting the screening data as we review our ethical criteria for managing the UUA Endowment.

Going to Conserve school monthly (last year) to share worship with a host of teens and some teachers there (arranged by Wenda Sheard) and enjoying the potluck with Houghton and Marquette were denominational connections which were heartfelt for me, reminding me of how honored I feel to be able to be a UU minister.

Since the evaluation/feedback we agreed upon in order to look at our mutual ministry and our relationship (including specifically my work) did not occur, I've worked a bit in the dark here. I feel positively about our time together. Although it seemed at times as though there was a desire to defend the Fellowship against the minister, I also saw that cooperation and collaboration flourish between secure & mature parties whose issues of identity and authority are relatively clear. As a person returning to the ministry, I have had the chance to find myself anew in our movement and in the discipline, for which I am immeasurably grateful to you.

I sometimes experienced frustration with being 1/3 time. However, I should not underestimate the pull of my other employment, project and family demands. There were times when I felt that more consistency (even with fewer hours!) would better meet your needs as a congregation.

While I have had occasion to wonder whether some really wanted those words (“religious” for example) I feel that there has been so much to celebrate in the achievement of tasks given to our mutual ministry in our Letter of Agreement. We have **lived into** the hopes and questions raised by our Agreement:

“The Minister and the Fellowship share responsibility for the leadership and ministry of the Congregation. Both parties enter into this agreement with the understanding that the relationship between the fellowship and the Minister is complex and requires an environment of open communication, mutual trust, and cooperation. It is the intention of both parties, therefore, to work together in a spirit of good faith to make the partnership as effective as possible.”

The work of striving to live into our principles is sacred work indeed.

In peace,

Sydney