

# President's Report to the Congregation

June 4, 2015

Last September, the Board of Trustees, our new Interim Minister, and her Transition Team met with similar members of several other UU congregations for what's called a Start Up session. This is a Northern New England District facilitated event where new church governing bodies and new interim ministers get to work with each other for the first time. Because we were entering our third year of interim ministry, Nashua was considered an old hand at many of the tasks that churches just starting the interim process were just beginning to struggle with. Nevertheless, Joe Sullivan, District Executive, held us to the same level of work that day.

One of the later exercises was to list out our goals for the coming year. Like good UUs we quickly filled the easel pad with a long list of things we thought we really needed to work on. Joe then instructed us to pick just the top three goals, cautioning us that more than three and you risk diluting your energy and focus and not accomplishing anything. Well, this was much harder, because any group of 12 UUs is likely to hold a minimum of 14 differing opinions. But we worked the list down and finally ranked our top three goals. They were:

1. Clarifying and articulating the mission and vision of the church we want to become
2. Becoming braver at dealing with stewardship and financial sustainability of church operations, and
3. Increasing minister, staff, board, and congregation facility with Policy Governance

Note that these are general goals. Each goal required the completion of individual, focused tasks to reach the goal. And, it turns out that many of these individual tasks related to more than one goal. Whether through luck or art, we had picked three goals that were closely related, so that often a task served to advance us under two or more goals. I suspect the unseen hand of our Interim Minister Janet Newman in this benefit.

It's important to note at this point that, because of the hard work of our previous Interim Minister, the Reverend Olivia Holmes, the previous Board of Trustees, and our Search Committee, and you, dear friends, this year's board was able to concentrate on more non-transition work.

So, what have we done?

## **Accepted *stewardship of our church* as a board responsibility--not just a Pledge Drive Committee problem**

During our discussions with the Negotiating Team on our settled minister salary offer, the board came to the understanding that leadership had a stewardship component; that caring

for the institution of our church meant a willingness to contribute financially and to set an example. We set a goal to increase the Board's pledges by 30%. And when we reached that goal we went to the Pledge Drive Committee and said we have an idea. From there, the plan took off. Board members took an active role in the creation of themes and a presentation to foster higher levels of stewardship through an appeal to our values and principles and that being a member of our church carries an expectation of generosity. The board then took the presentation to all church leadership and committees, modifying the presentation based on the input of each group. The board then lead an end-of-pledge-drive phone-a-thon to cap off one of our most successful stewardship campaigns ever.

In doing this work, we found that much of the reason for our success was the opportunity for each of us to speak about our vision for our beloved community and it's mission. And that the more we talked about that, the more we wanted to support it and enhance it.

The board continues to work to transition the concept of pledge drive into the concept of stewardship by supporting a special Stewardship Planning and Study Task Force being led by Ellen Fisher.

### **Instituted more communications between the Board and the Congregation as part of Board's linkages function**

Linkage is a Policy Governance term that defines the connection between a board and its moral owners. Linkage allows a board to connect to and lead from an organization's highest values and purposes. We began our work in this area by modeling the "Deep Listening" practice that we saw working so well in our "Deeper Than Coffee" sessions after church. Instead of a dialog, the board asked some questions, then simply listened to your answers, without the distraction of trying to formulate an immediate response to the comment. We've tried a couple of these sessions and have been pleased by the congregation's response. Next, we tried a more traditional question-and-answer "Town Hall Meeting" format to gather more input from you. Our proposed budget information session last Sunday was a great example of that type of board/congregation interchange.

We have also begun our own blog and used the newsletter and email as tools to enhance two-way communication, deep listening, and intentional dialogue around important issues of governance.

### **Ongoing Policy Governance Education**

We continued to work with Policy Governance consultant Laura Park (who worked with the board and Olivia last year) to help us with Policy Governance education. The board has completed a 2-hour training session on effective monitoring practices--the area of Policy Governance that seems to cause the most anxiety for the board. One outcome of this effort is

that we are looking at how to do a congregation-wide performance survey each year to gauge how we are doing as a congregation in achieving our stated ends.

Our Interim Minister and our staff also participated in training sessions covering staff work within a Policy Governance organization. These new skills were demonstrated in one of our “Town Hall Meeting” sessions. Thank you Janet and staff.

### **Thank You to Rev. Dr. Janet Newman**

One of the benefits of being president this past year was the joy of working with Rev. Janet Newman. Some say that our bonus year of Interim Ministry was a blessing in that it gave us a little more time to be a little more intentional about adapting to the culture of change that the Rev. Olivia Holmes brought. With Olivia it was “Wow! You guys are great! But here’s a bunch of things you may need to think about changing. Get on it.” Janet walked in and said “Wow! You guys are great! Here, let me adjust a couple of little things. There, that’s better.” Her wonderful sermons continued nudging us toward our goals and her quiet council often provided a solution to a problem that we just didn’t see. I personally suspect there are those sitting in the UUA Transitions Office chortling over having pulled the classic Bad Cop, Good Cop on Nashua. For this, we give thanks.

### **Thank You From the Interim President**

Since about 1980, I spent time in this church as committee and board member, and Worship Associate. All of these roles gave me a deeper understanding of what it means to be a UU. Working within the committee and governance structure of our church was a safe way for me to learn the skills and gain the confidence to accept being your President. Not that it hasn’t seemed like standing in front of the Firehose of Faith now and then, but thank you for making this a great and maturing experience—for our church, and for me.

Excelsior!

Respectfully submitted,  
Harry Purkhiser