

# 2016-2017 President's Report

*Unitarian-Universalist Church of Nashua*

June 4, 2017

My name is David Hudson and my pronouns are he, his, and him. I'm thrilled to be the President of this congregation and can't wait to share my thoughts with you.

I want to begin by taking a moment to thank the member's of this year's Board of Trustees for their tireless work throughout the year.

Lance Pratt, Vice-President

Mike Wilt, Treasurer

Mary Licking, Clerk

Steve Hedges

Ellen McCormick

Rick Spitz

Brenna Woods

Carol Wagner (1<sup>st</sup> half of year)

Jodie Holway (2<sup>nd</sup> half of year)

I also want to thank Mike and Mary, both of whom have reached the end of their terms. Mike has been our treasurer for TWELVE years and Mary has been our clerk for SIX. Lance is also retiring and, sadly, moving away. I hope you'll all find them after the meeting and let them know how grateful you are for their service.

I struggled a bit to craft this year's report. Sometimes annual summaries write themselves, driven by big events or pervasive themes. Last year, for example, we were wrapping up our first year with a new minister and, at the eleventh hour, putting the finishing touches on the merger of our beloved preschool.

We were no less busy this year, but I'd suggest that there were no year-defining developments. The year was marked, instead, by slow and steady progress on any number of fronts. Of course, I do not mean to diminish our successes by damning them with the faint praise of "slow and steady." Everything we do lays the groundwork for our shared future. It is the

nature of life that some days we reap the harvest while other days are spent mending fences and watering the garden.

Much of what goes on around here happens on the operational side of the organization, and I will let Allison and Sandra tell you about those accomplishments. The board's job is to represent you when decisions need to be made. That translates to a lot of listening, thinking about the future, and evaluating our overall progress against our mission and our goals. Under policy governance we're not supposed to get bogged down in the weeds of day-to-day affairs, which affords us the opportunity to take a big picture view of our church community.

Unfortunately, I'm not sure we've done as good a job with these tasks as we'd like. While the days of becoming sidetracked by the operational details are long behind us, we still seem to be tying up loose ends in our changeover to policy governance and, in addition, wrapping up our transition to a new settled ministry. We continue to tweak our organizational structure, draft missing policies, and fill the gaps in our deepening understanding of the optimum way to organize ourselves. Allison has asked us a great many interesting questions the past two years and, on a number of occasions, the board has had to do some work to provide good answers.

This year we reviewed a new Safe Congregation Policy, formally reviewed Allison against a rubric required by the UUA's Ministerial Fellowship Committee, began planning for our own ministerial evaluation process, reviewed the second round of changes to our bylaws, created policies to formalize the Invested Funds Committee, and began discussing some long range planning, which you'll hear more about next year. Along the way we temporarily filled an open board seat, discussed our enthusiastic support for the congregation's Black Lives Matter initiative, and decided to serve as a fiscal sponsor for UU Action NH. It was, as it always is, an action-packed year on the board.

Allison's questions and our continued efforts to live into the promise of policy governance seem perfectly appropriate. New hires bring fresh ideas and a new perspective to old challenges. Further they provide an excellent opportunity to wonder if the way we've always done something is still the

best way. Sometimes it is and sometimes enough has changed over the years that new solutions present themselves. I am confident that we are in a better place operationally than we have been in recent memory, but I expect that future leaders will build on our successes and find even better ways of doing things.

When I first became president I told the board that I hoped we could begin pivoting away from tweaking our operational structure in order to focus on the more thoughtful tasks of listening, visioning, and evaluating. As I noted above, we have not been able to turn our attention to those duties fully, but I am hopeful that we will be able to do so next year. Our list of urgent governance issues to address is now the shortest it's been in many years. Hopefully, our time focusing on the *way* we do things empowers us to be more effective and to get more done. After all, the promise of good governance is to fade into the background so we can direct our energies to the good works we are called to do by a world that needs us now more than ever.

As I look back on the year, I often wonder how best to answer the question, "How are things going?" When things are going *poorly* the signs are everywhere: failed budgets, obvious discontent, declining membership, falling stewardship campaigns, fewer programs, etc. One might be able to argue that when things are *okay*, we wouldn't see any of those bad signs. How, then, would we recognize if things were going *really well*?

I'd like to suggest that we are doing really well. Here's why:

- *Vibrant Community* – I see activity almost everywhere I look. I see opportunities for us to spend time with each other and opportunities to work together in the community. I see a calendar bursting at the seams and hear folks working hard to find slots for new events.
- *Growth* – We're growing! Growth isn't always a good thing to be sure, but an expanding membership is one way of knowing that our message still resonates and that we are still needed.
- *Attracting Talented Staff* – Our ability to attract a top-notch Minister and Director of Faith Formation speaks volumes about our institution.
- *Successful Stewardship Campaigns* – Your willingness to share your financial resources, in addition to your time and energy, is a measure of your commitment to our community.

- *Adaptability* – Change is hard, even more so in organizations with rich traditions and a storied history. I believe this congregation has surprised itself by proving to be more flexible than it expected.
- *Our Youth* – Twenty young people graduated to our Senior High Youth Group after sharing their handcrafted faith statements during our ROPES service a few weeks ago. It is one of my favorite services of the year and, if there was ever any doubt about our future, the words of those young people would dispel them.
- *Smiles & Hugs* – Money, activity, and the best staff in the world are never enough. The measure of any community is in its heart. Everywhere I turn I see smiles and hugs, which tells me we are doing something right.

Finally, I'd like to wrap up my report with a few thoughts that don't fit anywhere else.

- *Interim is Over* – It is my distinct privilege to point out that our five-year interim period will officially close when Sadie joins us as our settled Director of Faith Formation this summer. We should pause and appreciate that fact: five years, two interim ministers, two search committees, a new minister, and now a new DFF. We, my friends, are DONE searching for staff. We made it to the other side, and appear to be in one piece. Indeed, for all the reasons I mentioned above, I would suggest that we are stronger today than we were when the process started. That is cause for celebration!
- *Okay, Break's Over* – While I encourage you to continue to hold the aforementioned accomplishment in your heart, we must continue to work hard to fulfill the promise of our interim period. We must capitalize on our success and look to the future. Finding a new minister and a DFF were not the end, but a means to an end.
- *We Are A Program Church* – One of our interim minister's noted that we were transitioning to a program church and I've found that framework helpful as I've thought about our development over the years.  
NOTE: Sizes are for average Sunday attendance and include kids.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> There are several useful links and resources online. My brief summary was merely to give you a taste of the concept and drawn from the following: <http://www.uua.org/sites/live-new.uua.org/files/documents/jonassonstefan/sizedoesmakedifference.pdf>

- *Family Church (< 50 people)* – Family churches are small enough that everyone can know everyone else and the whole place runs like a large, extended family where one or two folks tend to serve as the patriarch or matriarchs of the extended clan.
  - *Pastoral Church (50-150 people)* – The minister and board play a larger role in congregational life. Staffing is generally limited and part-time. Committees grow in prominence.
  - *Program Church (150-350 people)* – Staff grows as more and more programs are offered. Boards focus more on policy and visioning.
  - *Corporate Church (> 350 people)* – Often have a second minister, more staff, and more programs. Committee work is reduced as staff involvement grows.
- *Ch-ch-ch-ch-changes* – I raised up our adaptability earlier, but it is worth noting that we must continue to be flexible. Organizations that do not adapt and change often perish. We must remain relevant and if that means making a change or two, then we must be prepared to consider it. To be clear, it does not mean we must embrace every new idea, but neither can we ignore ideas simply because they're new. We cannot be afraid to be bold, to take action when the situation calls for it.
  - *Trust & Faith* – All communities rely on trust and faith. We must believe that our fellow members are trying hard, doing their best, and have the best of intentions. I love the passion I hear in your voices throughout the year, but from time to time I hear frustration before love. Do not shy away from raising your concerns and asking why something did not work, but try to do so with grace. You may not like how something turned out, but it is safe to assume that a great deal of care and good intentions were behind the effort.
  - *Being in Community is Not Always Easy* – On a related note, it is worth remembering that being in any group takes some effort. We have much in common, but that hardly means we are of the same mind about everything. Indeed, that diversity of thought is one of the rewards of a community. If we are all living our truth, we are bound to bump into the folks on the journey with us. As an only child I can't believe I'm saying this out loud, but it's good when things don't always go our way.
  - *Thank You* – I continue to be amazed at the work you all put in throughout the year. As President I have a unique opportunity to observe the many things this church is involved in. Even from my vantage point, I know that I only see a portion of what goes on. I also

know that there is much that happens behind the scenes. For every Black Lives Matter event on the calendar, for example, I know there were a host of calls and meetings and emails. On your way out of annual meeting, you might want to turn to the people beside you and thank them. If we think of this building as a skeleton and the words in the books our DNA, then you are the blood that flows through it's veins and brings it all to life.

In short, it has been another exciting year, made possible by your many efforts on our behalf. We have much to celebrate and much still to do. Our future is indeed bright.

Respectfully submitted,

David Hudson, President