

President's Report

Unitarian Universalist Church of Nashua

June 2, 2019

I notice there's been a couple of changes in this church since I last stood here to give the President's report in 2000. You know, just a sprinkle of changes here and there. So what I'd like to do today is to time-travel with you, because I think that might be the best way to bring us to the wonderful, exciting, and also somewhat terrifying opportunity that awaits us. Let's go back in time to the fall of 2013. Then, for the first time in 25 years, we were without a settled minister. The previous 53 years had seen only a single year of interim ministry. Think of that for a moment. That 53 of the previous 54 years were with a settled minister. We celebrated 24 of them by making Steve Edington our Minister Emeritus in honor of his love and leadership for us over those years. In 2013, we found ourselves starting three consecutive years of interim ministry, one of which was a bonus year, a gift indeed to all of us.

Those of us on the Ministerial Search Committee spent a year in active discernment, listening carefully to the hopes, dream, wishes, and fears of all of you as we started the process to call a new minister. We surveyed you, we cottage meetinged you, we gave you multiple choice questions, we gave you open-ended questions. What you all courageously shared with us became our search map. We understood more fully where we were as a congregation at that moment in time and you helped us articulate a vision of where we wanted to be going forward. The map you helped us create was so clear and so inspirational that it allowed the Search Committee to know exactly what qualities we were looking for in our new settled minister.

Rev. Allison finishes her fourth year with us this June. During that time, I see us as having developed more deeply our aspirational vision for the future: who we want to become as a congregation and what we want to embrace as our sacred mission. Sacred mission. I have to admit here that I arrived at the church 28 years ago having no need of a spiritual life. I was largely drawn to the social opportunities among like-minded people and I found the sermons interesting and I liked standing up and singing hymns, and I was proud that we did good deeds. I fit in perfectly. But as time went on, something seemed missing to me, something vague that I couldn't identify, couldn't put my finger on, couldn't articulate. Until I was given the honor of serving on your Search Committee. Then my eyes were opened. Wide. And now I talk about things like sacred missions. And I don't think I'm the only one here who has made this journey.

The vision of who we want to be as a congregation was further sharpened during the incredible work of the Long Range Planning Committee. Your responses to the LRPC's cottage meetings breathed new life into our vision of what we can become. During a weekend retreat, the Board of Trustees brought your 1,119 thoughts and hopes through an intense process of discernment, led by Laura Park, a Policy Governance consultant from Unity Church. Your responses gave light to the ways in which we could challenge ourselves to become a truly transformative church and formed the basis of our new Values and Mission, which we just read together. This is our sacred work. And the *conceptual* of the Values and Mission becomes the *action* of our Ends Statements.

The Board has also focused this year on maintaining our movement into a more fully developed policy governance model. To this end, we have placed increased focus on our responsibility to monitor the workings of the church to ensure that they are in compliance with our policies. For example, we addressed

the inherent conflict in having the Executive Director be responsible for a set of personnel policies that govern the Executive Director. Rev. Allison's having attained Final Fellowship meant that we no longer had a Shared Ministry Team (which is required by the UUA prior to the attainment of Final Fellowship) to complete a yearly performance review, necessitating that the Board develop its own minister evaluation format. The Monitoring subcommittee of the Board did a fabulous job developing a new format that was used for the first time this past spring to evaluate our Executive Director, using input provided from the Board, staff, and committee volunteers. We also finally officially removed the hyphen from our name with the NH Dept. of State!

Our new Ends will guide us and challenge us as we enter a process that I believe will be transformational for us as a congregation. But to build, we need a strong foundation. Our foundation, however, has had major maintenance deferred for so long that we now have to address the essential health of our physical home. We have long struggled with the question of "For whom do we exist?" Do we exist to meet our collective needs or do we exist to make the world a better place, as though we had to choose between the two. I think this is a false binary choice, and I am reminded of the safety instructions to parents traveling with children on an aircraft. If the oxygen masks descend, put yours on first, so that you will be strong enough and functional enough to help your children. I think that's an apt metaphor for our church. We need to be a strong church to have the kind of impact on our world that is embedded in our Ends statements. We need to have a committed congregation, but we also need a strong facility. We have a beautiful, historic church that has nurtured us for almost two centuries and she needs us now to nurture her.

We will soon be laying the foundation for a Capital Campaign which can, among other goals, secure the funds to bring our building back into good repair so that it can sustain us in our good work in perpetuity. We have in the past made some half-hearted campaigns to raise funds for certain building or equipment needs—the elevator, the new piano, the last painting of the sanctuary, but all have fallen short. Now is the time, not for a half-hearted campaign, but for a full hearted Capital Campaign. So much will be resting on its outcome. I hope that all of you will participate in the conversations we will be having about this campaign through the coming church year.

When I complete my time-travel from the start of the Search Process back to right here and right now, I can see how we've been preparing over the past few years to launch ourselves to become the life-changing transformational church we can truly be. It's an exciting time filled with so much potential and I hope you'll join me, the Board, Rev. Allison, and the church staff in this journey.

Respectfully submitted,
Carol R. Houde
President