



# The Steeple

October 2011 Newsletter

*First Unitarian Universalist Society of Burlington, Vermont*



## In The Interim

Enter, Rejoice, and Come In! I have been singing those words from Louise Ruspini's upbeat and hopeful hymn throughout this upbeat and hopeful month. Why? Because you have been doing exactly that. You have been present in so many ways as the church year has gotten under way. I am grateful for your presence. I think it might have been Woody Allen who said that 90% of life is showing up. If that is the case, you all are fulfilling your life promise to this beloved community.

You have been present at worship – filling the pews, filling the air with singing and laughter and tears, entering into rich shared silence and rich shared affirmations of your Unitarian Universalist faith. You have been present at meetings. Wow have you been present at meetings! I know because I've been to lots of them this past month. And at every one I've sat in a room filled with determined and dedicated people ready to roll up their sleeves and do the work that yields the various programs and ministries of this congregation.

"Open your ears to the song. Open your hearts everyone." What I have found most inspiring about your presence is the open way in which you have welcomed me and engaged with me in the beginning of this interim year. I asked you to talk to me and you have done so. I asked you to listen to each other and talk to each other and you have done so. The board invited you to a forum and you came, you spoke respectfully, and you were heard. You have come back from your summer sojourns and from hard times with open eyes, open ears, and open hearts. And that means that today, and tomorrow, will be joyful days.

"Don't be afraid of some change." Ah now, there's the challenge. I have heard you say over and over that you have been through so much, you need a little stability. And I agree. That is why I decided not to start work on the interim tasks, or even proceed with the appointment of an Interim Collaboration Task Team, until we had gotten the program year off to a good and stable start. I told the board I wanted to concentrate on getting the worship services going with good energy while integrating a newly configured music staff into the mix. I wanted time to get to know your very wonderful Director of Religious Education, Martha Dallas, so that she and I could learn to work together on the creation of meaningful multigenerational worship services and the inclusion of families in every service. I needed time to meet and begin collaborative work with the Worship Committee, the Care Ministry Network, Adult Programs, Membership, and so many other groups of good people tending to the core ministries of the congregation.

I wanted time to get to know the staff, and figure out how we could all work together. You are blessed with a group of people on staff who are dedicated and professional and good at their jobs. And they're fun to be with. They are grateful for your volunteer efforts as together we live out our mission.

But time moves on and the reality is that change comes even in times of stabilization. I am fond of quoting Warren Schulz, who says that change is inevitable in all living systems. This congregation, made up of all of you living, breathing human beings, is an organic and dynamic system. Change is built into your lives together. Change, Schulz writes, is neutral. Change is nothing more and nothing less than "the inevitable movement of life forces." It is going to happen. You cannot resist change. You can dislike it, feel grief about what is going on gone, or be angry or resentful. But that won't stop change from happening.

So what can you do? The good news is that you do have a choice – not to prevent change but to deal intentionally with change. Transition, according to Schulz, is defined by the way you choose, individually and together, to deal with change. I practice intentional transition ministry. You hired me. I assume that means that you want to make intentional choices about your shared future rather than letting things happen to you. In a transition you can either be a victim or a volunteer. I'm seeing lots of volunteers!

The fruit of this process – the process of embracing change and being intentional about the transition – is transformation. You are becoming a new congregation, deeply rooted in who you were, deeply committed to who you will become. Transformation is not imposed from outside. It is what evolves in an organic system that is intentional about the process of transition. Transformation is new life, new energy, a vision of new possibilities.

Keep your eyes open for invitations to enter into the process of transformation. This month I will begin a monthly Minister's Forum on the first Sunday afternoon of each month. The first three months I will focus on Sources of Hope for Unitarian Universalists. We will explore the various and diverse theological strands that have historically made up our faith, examining each source for ways to cultivate the practice of hopeful living. These sessions will be participatory and lively. You don't need to come to all three; each one will stand alone. In the next month we will also proceed to put together the Interim Task Collaboration Team. More programming will emerge out of their deliberations.

So enter, rejoice and come in. To Sunday worship. To volunteering in service to congregation and community. To teaching our children and nurturing our youth. To caring for each other in vulnerable times. To learning together. There are many ways to enter. No matter which you choose, know that today will be a joyful day. And tomorrow. And tomorrow. Enter, rejoice and come in.

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**Rev. Roberta Finkelstein**  
Interim Senior Minister

**Martha Dallas**  
Dir. of Religious Education

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Facilities Manager

**Kathleen Kemp**  
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**Lisa Wolff**  
Music Director

**Bill West**  
President,  
Board of Trustees



## A Message from Martha . . .

Today I woke up knowing I had to turn in this column, but having no idea what I would write about. Several deep thoughts have developed in my imagination the last few weeks; I remember thinking to myself: If I had a blog, this would be a good thing to blog about. But today I could remember none of them. Working from home this morning, I grabbed a pad of paper and pen and headed out to the back yard to see what might spill onto the page while I sat in the sun. But before getting out there, I thought better of it and reasoned that it would be more efficient to just stay inside and write at my computer. So I went to my desk, turned it on and without thinking, went into my personal email and then opened Facebook. Then I checked my work email, skipping over messages I didn't want to deal with. Then, resigned and a little exasperated at my inability to get writing, I turned off the computer, again got my pad and pen and went outside.

And sat. And began to write. And to see my yard. And to cry.

A Monarch butterfly fluttered by. So did a little white butterfly, and later, a yellow one. My old cat, Buttonup, paused his delicate sunshine amble to watch the yellow one, too. The elderly Box Elder whose boughs partly overhang our shed dropped crinkly old leaves onto the shed roof, a few at a time, and puffs of breeze blew them along the scratchy shingles in a light, skippy way. That same breeze swirled coolly into my ears and brushed my cheeks. A small spider ascended my leg. September's sky blue light reflected off the greenness of the grass I'd cut Saturday and off various crazy-grown climbing vines covering everything. At first, those colors were almost blinding. No wonder the leaves have to fall away when the sun gets lower and lower in the sky each day. We barely contain ourselves as it is, when they go all fiery.

I gave praise for spacing out. Because that's what my soul needed to do. Not meditate. Not be explicitly and generously thankful for everything (though I did not take for granted the warmth of the sun and the sense of security I feel in my yard). Not make plans. Not write, unless I wanted to.

No, I sat in the sun, spacing out and looking about, as every few moments a new small batch of sobs would shake themselves forth from within me. It was what I needed, clearly, and my deeper self brought this need through my body to the attention of my cerebral cortex, saying: You just rest and be quiet. We need some sunshine. We need to sit here in the world long enough to soften up and let the world seep in and to let us seep out. I was too tired to argue, so that's what I did.

In her poem, "The Summer Day," Mary Oliver wrote:

I don't know exactly what a prayer is.  
I do know how to pay attention, how to fall down  
into the grass, how to kneel down in the grass,  
how to be idle and blessed, how to stroll through the fields,  
which is what I have been doing all day.  
Tell me, what else should I have done?  
Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon?  
Tell me, what is it you plan to do  
with your one wild and precious life?

May we all heed the insistencies of our deeper selves. Truths come from such depths; truths we need.

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Martha Dallas  
Director of Religious Education  
First UU Society of Burlington, VT  
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## You Can't Do Too Much of This!

To improve communications, the board has set up a new email account: [board@uusociety.org](mailto:board@uusociety.org). If you wish to submit a comment or suggestion to the board, please send an email to this address. ALL board members will automatically have your note forwarded to them and it will be reviewed at the next executive committee meeting and/or board meeting. Please contact a board member directly if you have an issue that is time-critical or urgent.

In addition, board meeting minutes will now be reviewed and approved via email so we can post them on our website in a timely manner. Once approved, we will include a link to them in an EnewsBlast. We hope to have the board meeting minutes posted by the end of the month in which the meeting took place.



### 2010 - 2011 Loose Plate for Charity

During the last fiscal year our Society was able to contribute \$13,892.46 to organizations that reside in and/or serve the Old North End of Burlington. These agencies do an amazing job of helping our community; thank you all for your very generous contributions!

Vermont Center for Independent Living	\$324.20
Special Services Transportation Authority	\$204.42
Run for JUMP	\$688.32
Boys & Girls Club	\$675.42
Mercy Connections	\$545.70
Women's Rape Crisis Center	\$662.94
Noyana Singers	\$645.91
Chittenden Food Shelf	\$708.34
Committee on Temporary Shelter (COTS)	\$802.84
Spectrum One Stop	\$510.30
Greater Burlington Multi-Cultural Center	\$535.96
Association of Africans Living in Vermont	\$504.95
Joint Urban Ministry Project (JUMP)	\$694.12
Women Helping Battered Women	\$602.41
Vermont CARES	\$442.80
Center City Little League	\$472.00
Japan Earthquake Relief	\$1,721.30
Vermont Refugee Resettlement	\$228.65



### September's Unsung Heroes

The Unsung Heroes Award for September goes to Bridget Myer, the Worship Committee, Sapere Aude & Mondays at Martha's small group ministries, guest musicians, guest speakers and whoever else worked so, so hard on delivering an outstanding program of summer services this year. Congratulations to everyone who helped and pitched in on this stellar series!

Each month the board will recognize individuals or groups that performed above and beyond the "call for shared ministry" in this Society. If you see some unsung, heroic work taking place, please let us know by sending an email to [board@uusociety.org](mailto:board@uusociety.org).

### Two Year Plan Developed

The board of trustees has completed a plan of activities for the next two years that outlines the major tasks that we must complete to keep this Society running smoothly, while also preparing to call a new settled minister. It will be posted on our website under the "member section" and links to it will be sent via EnewsBlasts. We will also be posting the plan in the Meeting House in visible locations for all to see. We promise to keep it current so people may see our progress and changes to the plan (which will be inevitable.) We welcome your feedback and questions.





## **IT'S... ALMOST... SILENT AUCTION...TIME... AGAIN!**

The fundraising committee is pleased to announce the third annual FUUSB Silent Auction to be held in November. As a major fundraiser for the society, the *Dining for Dollars* and *Services for Sale* Auction raised over \$9,000 in 2009 and over \$12,000 last year to help support programs within the society. This year, with a significant decrease in member pledges, this added source of income is more important than ever.

In addition to the fundraising component of this event, the offerings from the Silent Auction have provided many opportunities for community-building, and thus play a major role in supporting the mission of the society. At a time when some members feel sad, angry or disillusioned, gathering with other UU members over a good meal can do much to nurture our connections, restore a wider sense of community, and bring new friends into the fold. During the latest round of Silent Auction offering events participants expressed their enthusiasm and gratitude for these experiences in thank you notes and in entries in the society's book of Joys and Sorrows. Here are some of their comments:

*"Such a nice party you had at your house. The food was fabulous, the music amazing and the company fun. Never had met some of those folks before.... Thanks so much for a good time!"*

*"Joy for the Silent Auction and the events that help us connect. And for the amazing dinner and delightful company."*

*"Gratitude for another joy-filled Silent Auction event.... It was a quirky and funky evening spent with FUUSB friends, with lots of ... fooling around."*

*"Joy and Gratitude for a truly wonderful evening.... An evening of music, good food and delightful company, all brought about by the Silent Auction."*

The success of this year's Silent Auction, in both fundraising and community-building, depends upon the support of the FUUSB members and friends. There are two ways you may help: 1) by contributing dinners or services to be auctioned off, and/or 2) by bidding on and purchasing items that are offered for sale. Last year, some of the offerings included a cabaret, a dinner and charades, a tapas dinner, a cocktail party, an April Fool's dinner, a Sunday brunch, a Vietnamese dinner, and a pizza and game night. Some of the services offered included kayaking lessons, voice lessons, hand knit items, computer support, landscape consultation, building inspection, gardening, bicycle repair, knife sharpening, plaster/sheetrock finishing, tutoring, and massages.

So start tapping into your creative juices in order to make this the best auction yet. Do you have a service or skill that you could contribute? Or do you enjoy cooking and/or entertaining others? Can you join forces with other UUs to come up with an offering? Let your imagination run wild and the fun begin! Plan on setting your dinner date or service offering anytime from December 2011 through summer 2012.

Members of the fundraising committee will be soliciting donations from Sunday, September 25 through Sunday, October 16, and will be available in the parlors after both services to answer any questions you may have.

Submission forms will also be available in the parlor and need to be completed for every event or service. You may also sign-up to contribute on the bulletin board outside the church office. For those who will not be attending services during this time, feel free to call or email a member of the fundraising committee: Hope Swanson, Carolyn Munger, Kristin Kany and Barbara Benton. We look forward to hearing from you.



## UU Society Directories

In our continued efforts to “Green Up,” we have made the decision to no longer have stacks of printed Society Directories available to members. As many of you have already discovered, there is a searchable Directory available for your use in the “Member’s Only” section of the website, [www.uusociety.org](http://www.uusociety.org). In this Directory you can type in someone’s name and instantly get their address, phone number and email address! On this page you will also find a link to a Printable Directory. If you find that you really just need that hard copy, here is where you can print your own directory with the click of a mouse.

For those of you who do not have computer access, do not worry! We would be more than happy to print a Directory for you. Just contact either Christina or Kathleen and we will print a copy for you and either pop it in the mail or have it available for you to pick up on Sunday morning.

We understand that this is a huge change, and we truly appreciate your support. Please let us know if you have suggestions on other ways we can use less paper and make better use of our resources.



## Do You Feel It?

Dear UU members and friends,

It seems to be the time of year where football metaphors start getting used so I can't resist the temptation to use one for what I see happening around our Society: The positive, can-do, attitude towards our work and mission is gaining momentum!

Momentum is defined as “mass in motion” or, simply speaking, how much stuff is moving and how fast the stuff is moving. Lots of stuff is in motion at the church and its velocity is increasing: fall worship and RE programs have started; our interim ministry work is visible, active and engaging; new hymnals are now sitting in the pews alongside our more familiar ones; our new music director, Lisa Wolff, has arrived; and the board held its first in a series of forums with the congregation.

Yes, I declare, “we have the big MO on our side!” In this newsletter you'll find updates on other changes underway. Your board is excited to be a partner in our work ahead and welcomes your continued participation as we move forward and gain even more momentum.

In faith,

Bill West, Board President





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**RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED**

## Sundays in October

**October 2 - Rev. Roberta “*On Turning: A Reflection on the High Holy Days*”**

The Days of Awe in the Jewish liturgical calendar are a time of reflection and repentance. What can we UU's learn from our Jewish sisters and brothers about the human need to acknowledge our very human limitations and failings? How do we turn back towards our ideals? How do we make amends for missing the mark?

**October 9 - “*Listen to Your Inner Drum*”** Chip Patullo of the Worship Committee will be speaking.

**October 16 - “*Better Together*”** Across the nation Unitarian Universalists are celebrating Association Sunday, an opportunity to reflect on the ties that bind us to other UU congregations and to the larger movement. Rev. Roberta will explore the ways that we could be better together.

**October 23 - “*The Spirituality of Autumn*”** Reverend Roberta and Director of Religious Education Martha Dallas will collaborate on this multigenerational service, one of a series throughout the year that will focus on the spirituality of each season.

**October 30 - “*The Gift of Presence*”** How do we, together, fulfill our mission to care for each other? Reverend Roberta will collaborate with members of the Care Network Ministry to present a service that invites us to reflect on what it means to care, and to allow ourselves to be cared for.

