



The Steeple

September 2011 Newsletter

First Unitarian Universalist Society of Burlington, Vermont



In The Interim

What a warm and enthusiastic welcome you have given me! I loved having a full sanctuary for the last 2 services in August, I loved how lustily you sang and how joyfully you danced. People have been showing up, even in the dog days of summer, for initial Conversations with the Interim. I

have heard many stories about the Society that have helped me to understand why you are such a committed and vibrant group.

You have told me with pride about the many times this congregation has stood in solidarity with marginalized and oppressed peoples. Long before we UU's coined the phrase Standing On The Side of Love you were doing just that during peace vigils and marriage equality demonstrations and intentional outreach to the Old North End. You have shared your pride about this fine and iconic edifice at the top of Church Street offering radical hospitality to generation after generation of Vermonters.

I have heard stories about excellent programs: about the children and youth whose lives have been influenced by our Religious Education program; about people of all ages awed by organ music, touched by the sound of the piano, and inspired by the choir.

You have wrapped yourselves in prayer shawls during times of need, fed each other casseroles, visited each other when you were lonely or afraid.

You have so much to be proud of, so many successes to build on. And there is so much still to do to continue to bring the good news of Unitarian Universalism to a hurting world. There are two more of these initial Conversations on the September calendar. Check the weekly eblast for details.

You have also told me stories of recent losses and disappointments. In the past year and a half three ministers have left this congregation. Each for different reasons, each in different circumstances. Each made their unique contribution to the overall ministry of the Society, and each will be missed. Some of you are acutely grieving one or more of these departures. Some of you are angry about one or more of these departures.

In addition, some of you are feeling a sense of disillusionment about the events of the last year. You have told me, in different ways, that you thought that UU's would be able to find better ways to deal with differences. Some of you were hurt by words or actions of others, some of you are still angry, many of you yearn for a way to repair frayed relationships and restore a sense of healthy and positive community.

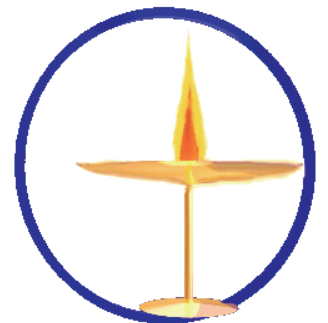
As your Interim Minister I feel confident that we can work together to heal the hurts of the past year. I will be scheduling a number of Loss and Transition Groups at the end of the month. These will be carefully facilitated experiences where you will find a safe place to express your feelings, listen to and honor the feelings of others, and explore ways to move towards resolution. If you are grieving, if you are angry, if you are hurt, if you are just plain confused – consider this an invitation to join with other members to process those feelings. Watch the weekly eblasts for times and dates. Pre-registration will be appreciated.

Come, come, whoever you are, wherever you are, however you may feel. Come, let us do the work of healing together.

In Faith and Love,
Rev. Roberta

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Board Forum Sunday, September 18th

The board of trustees invites all members and friends to an open forum to be held on Sunday, September 18th in the sanctuary following each service, at 10:15 and 12:15 respectively. The topic for this forum will focus on "Empowerment and Leadership".



A Message from Martha . . .

I write this column on the heels of Irene's wet, blustery visit. It seems appropriate that the transition from summer's slow, lazy heat can be accompanied by swiftly swirling storms. Each September brings transformation and renewal, as parents shake their heads in disbelief that their children are crossing a new grade-threshold with the start of school. This time is at once both familiar and fresh.

Last March, a storm began to brew in our religious education program: a Brainstorm. Forty-some people gathered here for dinner and shook forth ideas for how we could improve our programming by better supporting and mentoring teachers; building an emphasis on fun, social time together; and providing a broader array of learning experiences to better meet the diversity of needs in our midst.

The RE Committee has leapt into this storm of your vision, and this year we're going to try to bring forth some of the change you imagined that night! Things will feel different this year, so come stretch and wiggle into some experiments which are intended to breathe bright new life into RE!

This year, just over half the year's Sundays will be "regular" RE Sundays. This is markedly fewer than in the last several years, and should noticeably lighten the load for teachers, many who've struggled with burnout. The rest of the year's Sundays will include eight multigenerational worships, eight "Vacation Sundays" (formerly Activity Sundays) – full of games and fun play; and two fresh, new theme-based experimental kinds of Sundays (details forthcoming!).

In addition to this, we're launching a new RE steward mentoring program, which will pair experienced teachers with newer ones; we're organizing several potluck dinners throughout the year; and we're streamlining and simplifying the teacher communication forms, to make them quicker to complete and easier to respond to promptly and effectively.

These are winds of change blowing into RE!

When winds of change blow, it can be tempting to stiffen up, resist the gales, and hold on to what we know and what we helped to create. When change blows, we might forget that destruction is a necessary precursor to creation. We need, therefore, to be willing to release old patterns and expectations from our grip, so that our hands and hearts are free to embrace new ways.

Storms are ultimately generative: when we relax and let go, the stiff, brittle, shallow-rooted, and hidden-dead are exposed and blown away. When the storm has passed, light streams into new spaces, revealing new shapes and possibilities. Collectively, in these new spaces, we can play with releasing old ways of doing Sundays, and pick up and try on some new ways.

Come, friends, breathe in September's air. See how this year's freshness feels at First UU!

Welcome!

The Music Director Search Committee is happy to announce their choice for this position as Lisa Wolff who has 20 years experience as a church music director and is well acquainted with choral literature.



She is also a classically trained singer and has taught voice privately for many years. She taught one semester at UVM as a sabbatical replacement for David Neiweem. She met with choir members in June and is keen to work with us. We look forward to her being with us and keeping our fine tradition of good music.

Going Electronic!

Although our paper newsletter has served us well for many years, it's time to re-evaluate and find ways that we can save resources. One way we can do that is to send things electronically. We have already begun this process by sending the Enews Blast every week. Beginning with the October Newsletter, the default option will be to receive the newsletter via email and paper newsletters will only be mailed by request. We have already begun the process of collecting email addresses and creating a new snail mailing list for those people who do not have email.

Between changing our newsletter from bi-weekly to monthly, and only printing copies for those who cannot access it by email we will be using around 4,000 fewer sheets of legal sized paper per month or 36,000 sheets per year! That's a lot of paper.

Thank you for enthusiastically welcoming this change!

More from the Minister

"I am only one but still I am one. I cannot do everything but still I can do something. And because I cannot do everything I will not refuse to do the something that I can do." Edward Everett Hale.

One of the challenges of this year will be for all of us to adjust to the reductions in staff necessitated by the results of the pledge drive. Your pledges are a form of congregational decision making. Fewer pledge dollars translates into fewer services provided by paid staff.

Those tough decisions have been made; one minister instead of two, fewer administrative hours, elimination of the campus ministry coordinator, restructuring of the music program.

The next decision you will have to make collectively is whether all of that translates into more volunteer effort or a reduction in programs this year. So far, I see lots of you making the decision to step up and fill in where needed. That is so gratifying.

For me, an immediate reality is that I am the one minister where there used to be two. That can be a scary reality! I obviously cannot do what two people did before, and I wondered how you would respond to the need to change the expectations for professional ministry.

To my great relief, all of the groups I have been in conversation with about changing the balance of shared ministry have been open to different approaches and enthusiastic about taking on more of their share of the overall ministry of the Society. The Board and I met last Sunday, during the hurricane, with Mary Higgins our District Executive, to clarify the appropriate role of one minister in a congregation of this size during a transition. We will be reporting in more depth on

the results of that conversation soon. I was very grateful to the board members for being willing to give up an entire Sunday afternoon in the middle of a pretty dramatic weather event to make this conversation happen.

In the meantime, here are answers to some of your more practical questions.

What will happen on Sunday mornings? I will take one Sunday off per month, and the Worship Committee will take responsibility for those services. They were so gratified by your proactive responses in filling the summer services, and so

pleased with the quality of summer worship, that they see this as a further opportunity for the gathered wisdom of the congregation to express itself in worship. I will

work closely with them, assisting them in identifying guest speakers on occasion.

What about pastoral care? I have met with the Care Network Ministry and we have come up with a plan that will allow this ministry to expand without creating undue stress for the current volunteers. A decision was made to clarify that the Care Network ministers to members of the congregation only. They will not be able to take referrals to help people in the outside community. The staff and I will try to redirect these requests to appropriate social service agencies. I will, respond in person to anybody in crisis. Please, please don't hesitate to call me if you or a member you know is experiencing illness, challenging life changes, grief, ending of a relationship, stresses, or other losses. The Care Network will continue to provide friendly visitors to those who are unable to attend services— shut-ins, nursing home residents, etc. I will not be part of that visitation program.

Your part in this will be to let us know what you need. Don't sit

around hurting and hoping somebody will notice. Be proactive about getting ministry care for yourself and people you know and love. And please know that we are all trying our best. Response times may be slower than they have been in the past. This doesn't mean we don't care. We do.

In closing, I want to invite all of you to pay careful attention to the various calls to the shared ministry of the Society that you will hear in coming months so that you recognize the one that best fits your skills and passions. We will need volunteer receptionists (contact Society Administrator Christina) and volunteer musicians (contact the Music Committee). The Membership Committee would love to have more people to greet and welcome guests as well as to support and nurture long time members.

I remember the words of my first mentor in ministry, the Rev. Gordon McKeeman, who was fond of saying that ministry is all that we do together. As we begin this interim year, let us do joyfully all that we can do, together.



How do I find out how I can help?

Volunteer Page on our Website Under the "Get Involved" section of the website (www.uusociety.org) there is a page just filled with volunteer jobs needing to get done. If you're looking for a way to get involved, this is a great place to check.

Facebook The First Unitarian Universalist Society of Burlington has a Facebook group. This page has doubled in size in the past few weeks and is hopping with interesting discussion and announcements. Friend us on Facebook and get involved! Staff members have found this an excellent way to advertise last minute volunteer opportunities.

New Mid-Week Worship Service

On October 5, 2011 the Adult Programs Committee (APC) will be premiering a weekly Wednesday evening service called "Reflections". It will include music, poetry and readings from many traditions, with time for silence and sharing by participants. The service is from 5:30 until 6 pm and will be open to the greater Burlington community. We are looking for one or two people to help lead the service once a month. There is an easy to follow list of instructions and themes are already chosen. All you'd need to do is choose a couple of short readings and some music that fit the theme of the day, arrive by 5 p.m. to start the recorded music, and lead the service. APC members are available to consult as you design the service and we have a training session planned. This is NOT hard – YOU can do it! It's a wonderful opportunity to give yourself a mid-week spiritual gift AND to provide a service to FUUSB and all of Burlington! Contact Jean Palmer at jean-pa813@gmail.com or 288-9566.



Editor's Correction:

In the Mid-Summer Newsletter there was an article announcing an event sponsored by the Women's Alliance, "Make a date with Vermont writer Dorothy Canfield Fisher." Please note that the correct date for this event is on Sunday, September 25th at 2 p.m. in the Parlors.

Provisional Committee on Ministry

A new opportunity is upon us as we, together, move forward in strengthening the health, vitality, outreach and unity of our very own First UU Society. Many UU congregations throughout the US have an oversight and vision committee that is called Committee on Ministry (COM). The purpose of this committee is to nurture the mission and ministry of the congregation. To this end, our Board has approved the formation of a "provisional" Committee on Ministry (PCOM)

Shared Ministry as a UU concept

The congregational covenant that is central to our association as Unitarian Universalists is that we promise to one another our mutual trust and support. This promise recognizes the relationship of congregation to congregation and, within each congregation, from congregant to congregant.

We respect the inherent worth and dignity of every person; we commit ourselves to foster spiritual growth and religious development for each and every one of us and for each of our congregational communities.

In our free and responsible search for truth and meaning, we respect the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part. This means that we are each accountable for and to each other and to our religious communities.

Committees on Ministry focus on all aspects of the congregation's ministry, including professional leadership, music, social justice, religious education, spiritual care, small group ministry and so on. The Committee on Ministry functions as a vision or oversight group

"Provisional Committee on Ministry"- 2 year plan

There are many tasks to be done and decisions to be made in crafting a COM in order that it meet the needs of FUUSB and allow our congregation, staff and clergy to fully participate in the work and ministry of our congregation. The Board of Trustees voted that a "provisional committee" be appointed to do the work of educating themselves and the congregation in order to realize an ongoing committee that can function effectively.

The Provisional Committee on Ministry, will work closely with the Board, as well as other committees, congregants and staff as we gather information from COM's in other churches and move toward a deeper understanding of the function and workings of a COM along with its potential benefits. It is known that this is a detailed assignment. A time frame of two years is suggested for doing this preliminary work.

Composition

Five members of the congregation, including three who have recently served on "Relations Committees" currently make up the Provisional Committee on Ministry. They are Lynn Douglas, Chair, Janice Kerr, Melinda Lee, Pam MacPherson and Jeff Trumbower.

We have a committee email address: provisional-com@gmail.com and we welcome your input!

Board Musings . . .

The hard work of congregants taking place over the summer months has continued and I'm hopeful it sets a new standard for the responsibility we share of ministering to ourselves and to our community. The board recognizes this amazing effort and we thank you for stepping up to help out.

Your board has been extremely busy, too, with three board meetings (one literally during the passing of Hurricane Irene) and several email votes taking place over the past 6 weeks. We have agreed that our board must continue the evolution of moving itself from an operational, decision-making board to a vision and mission-focused board. There are a lot of governance structures in place that we must change to make this happen but we are up for this effort!

The vision for our Society includes an empowered, actively engaged, vibrant congregation with structures that allow people to make decisions for themselves. It includes programs that develop new leaders so we don't have the same people rotating through different leadership roles. It includes a board focused on our mission of ministry, social action and outreach.

There is great inertia in place to continue with doing things as they have always been done. That's what makes this work so challenging and time consuming. It includes changing by-laws and writing new policies. But we've already taken steps to move the board and our Society towards our desired end state.

Meeting only a couple times a month, your board understands it doesn't have the insight or day-to-day experience to make operational decisions. So, we have delegated the board's authority to su-



pervise, evaluate, hire and dismiss employees of the Society to our minister. This makes our interim minister, Roberta Finkelstein, the "chief of staff" and she is now empowered to act in the best interests of our Society. There is an element of trust that goes with this empowerment and we feel confident it will not be broken. And, being a hired minister, Roberta reports to the board and serves at its discretion.

Chip Patullo, our board vice president, will now oversee policy and by-law changes that must be updated. Adam Bortz, chair of our Council, is now freed up to focus the council in a new direction towards empowerment and greater responsibility for program operations.

We were also working to clearly define the responsibilities of the board's executive committee, a subgroup of the board, so we can free up even more time for our monthly board meetings. Of course, we can't lose sight of our interim period goals, including taking the steps necessary to call a new minister. Each board meeting will have time reserved to review this effort.

And, to keep our members and friends informed, we will be holding board forums periodically during the year with each forum focused around a topic. Our first session will be held on Sunday, September 18th in the sanctuary following each service. This month's topic will be "Empowerment and Leadership". We look forward to seeing you there and hearing your thoughts!

A lot of work remains, but your board is working hard to take deliberate, long lasting actions to assure we are prepared for a new called minister and the future that follows.

In faith,
Bill West, Board President

The New Newsletter . . .

Our newsletter is now a monthly publication containing articles 400 - 700 words in length. Unless we have a specific request for a paper copy to be mailed, it will be emailed to everyone on our mailing list. There will be a link to our newsletter at the bottom of the Enews Blast each week, and will also be available on our website: www.uusociety.org.

Our newsletter's goal is to look at our Society from a "Big Picture" perspective and to offer insight into our goals and mission. Our newsletter is not a place to notify people of upcoming events, and will not contain a calendar. It will focus only on articles directly related to our Society.

The deadline for submitting articles to the newsletter is the 3rd Monday of each month. Articles may be sent to newsletter@uusociety.org. The newsletter will be published the first week of each month. Any deviations from this schedule will be announced well in advance. Please contact Christina at (802) 862-5630 ext. 22 or xina@uusociety.org.



**First Unitarian Universalist
Society of Burlington, Vermont**

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Sundays in September

September 11 - ONE SERVICE AT 11 Am - Ingathering and Water Communion – Rev. Roberta and Director of Religious Education Martha Dallas will co-lead a multigenerational service celebrating our coming together again as a community of faith.

September 11—Peace Vespers at 5 pm The theme of peace will emerge through prayers, readings, chanting, music and silence. Child care will be provided.

September 18— 9 a.m. & 11 a.m. Rev. Roberta – “In The Interim” A wise interim colleague says that the job of an interim minister is to “render more secure the passage between yesterday and tomorrow.” Although it is impossible to say when or where a passage actually begins or ends, let this Sunday be a marker along the way, the intentional beginning of an intentional relationship that will bear fruit in the form of your chosen future as a community of faith.

September 25th—9 a.m. & 11 a.m. Rev. Roberta – “And Service Is Our Prayer” There is a spiritual aspect to volunteering; it is a way to give and a way to grow. On Committee Fair Sunday Rev. Roberta will reflect on the spirituality of service.

