

**MINISTER'S ANNUAL REPORT TO THE CONGREGATION
Boise Unitarian Universalist Fellowship (BUUF)
Rev. Elizabeth L. Greene
Boise Unitarian Universalist Fellowship
2008-2009 Program Year**

**IN MEMORIAM
Phyllis Phillips Hower
Mary Livingston Jones
Michael Steven Miller (father of Leslie Miller's son)
Imogene "Gene" Delores Snider (Sheryl Dowlin's mother)
Charles Douglas "Fuzzy" Steuart (Cathy Sherman's father)**

**WEDDING
Kit Brown and Dave Hoekstra**

CONGREGATIONALLY SPEAKING

It's a funny thing about annual reports: often (not always), my general comments note that we are undergoing change, with the exhilaration *and* the unhappiness that always go along with that. This year is one of those change years.

The good parts of change at this time include:

- I returned in August from a seven-month sabbatical-plus-vacation, and we have gotten re-acquainted, as both I and the congregation are different.
- Incredible music in Sunday services, especially the addition of *being hUuman*, our Fellowship "house band." Increasing the music director's hours to ¼ time has given us far, far more than our money's worth.
- Lively children's and youth religious education (including Coming of Age and Boston Bound), maintained through a change in Director of Religious Education.
- Addition of another acre to our land, bought in spring, 2008, when I was on sabbatical. This gives us wonderful potential for the future.
- A Board that has recognized we will need new structures within our organization, and has worked hard to come up with a new organizational chart that will let us have smooth organization, so we can really attend to all the inreach and outreach that make us a church.
- A Vision-Mission process in the fall that allowed us to gather in large numbers and articulate what is important to us; a Strategic Plan, building on Strategic Plan work of the past two years, to help us carry out our vision.
- An amazingly successful Fund the Faith campaign in the fall, making up the large deficit in our '08-'09 operating budget.
- A spring Stewardship Drive characterized by both the human touch and better organization than has sometimes been the case.
- Membership practices that have not only increased our membership, but have emphasized the commitment that joining entails.
- A simply amazing Bylaws revision process. These stalwart folks took a searching, overall look at our somewhat patchwork bylaws, and created a new General Revision. They sent out drafts to the entire membership and held at least five meetings to consider questions and concerns; in many cases, the committee made changes based on these meetings.
- A well-attended Social Action Empowerment weekend, conducted by Unitarian Universalist Association staff, here at our Fellowship.

We need to hold up proudly all these accomplishments. At the same time, there are several areas and events that indicate the instability associated with change. Primarily, there has simply been more conflict this spring, both between and among members and friends, and between members/friends and the church itself.

The most public—and probably most distressing to all—is the raising of questions about a proposed bylaw change that would require a monetary pledge (of any amount) and service to the Fellowship, in order to be a member. (Replacing the old “money and/or service” bylaws phrase.) The good people who feel strongly that a church should not require a financial pledge entered the conversation after the Bylaws Revision Process was completed, so process questions have complicated the discussion. At this writing, the subject has not been voted on, and there is still the possibility of serious relational repercussions. (By “relational,” I mean the danger of people breaking off with each other, or the church.)

In addition, I am seeing many more inter-personal conflicts than we usually have in a given spring. I know, from these 21 years with this church, that such an unusual rising-up of difficulties indicates a more general instability, especially among folks who have been around for awhile, and who have worked in the “old” systems.

Fortunately, I have been around long enough that I see these occasional trying times—and they are trying—as normal. I know, in my very soul, that we can weather times of change and keep on lifting hearts, broadening minds, and healing souls.

I never want to downplay or ignore the “down” side of our church in a given year, so I speak plainly about the issues I see. The ones we are currently experiencing have the potential to be divisive, if we are not very intentional about our covenants, about forgiving ourselves and each other.

At the same time, there is so much great activity going on, programs and events that are neither the up nor down side of change: they are simply continuations of things we have done well for a long time.

- Sunday mornings have consistently, all year, been well attended, enthusiastic and moving—the services involving our youth, senior and junior high, amaze us, delight us, and give us hope for the future.
- Our little gem of a Sunday-morning bookstore, the Book Nook, offers a small and brilliant array of titles, and gives folks a place to gather.
- Adult Religious Education offerings have, as always, covered a wide variety of topics and have attracted many, in our congregation and from outside.
- Chalice Circles are a good place for people to know a smallish number of people much better than Sunday mornings allow, and they give new people a great entry point.
- The Congregational Care Team has initiated a Pay It Forward Fund and a small food pantry for our congregation—we have been able to be of significant help to some of our own in need. The BUUF HelpNet has been established.
- In November, we had a fabulous celebration of the 20th anniversary of my ordination—Twenty Years of Partnership in Ministry—attended by the UUA Moderator, Gini Courter, who preached a barn-burner of a sermon that Sunday.
- A few determinedly-lively people have organized great social events, like the Hoedown.

Praises be, almost all of our new or newish folks, and a lot of “old-timers,” will have no idea what I am talking about, when I say there have been problems and conflicts—you’re just diving in, excited about what we have to offer. You all hold up the banner of moving forward as an enthusiastic, honest, fun-loving, respectful, loving community. The rest of us **will** catch up, I promise!

We are a fallible human, religious community, bringing the Holy to earth by our work together. Martin Luther King, among numerous others, spoke often and eloquently about Beloved Community. This profound spiritual concept was not a “pie-in-the-sky” vision of angelic people in a perfect world. No, it was about real people, with real faults, sins and imperfections, covenanting together to keep talking, keep forgiving, and keep working to bring more love and justice into the world.

THE MINISTER’S YEAR IN BRIEF

General

This year has been a bit of a wild ride, coming back from sabbatical, plunging into the amazing array of activities our leaders have led us in. One of the most important issues that has emerged is the importance of having clear expectations of each other. What do we want our minister to be? (CEO? Spiritual leader? Prophetic community activist? Scholar?) It is pretty clear to me that the CEO model is not the right one for me, nor, do I believe, for our congregation at this time. I fit primarily into the “spiritual leader” model.

However, somebody has to get the staff supervision, hiring and firing done; somebody has to help the “operational” groups (committees, task forces) with their work; policy has to be made and monitored. All these, we are beginning to see, have to be assigned and organized, and I have been working closely with the Board and other leaders to help sort it all out.

I believe one of the reasons we are having a bit of change-turmoil is that there has been a necessary emphasis this year on organization, and we are missing an emphasis on fun, spirit and community. This needs to shift for next year.

I continue to see my greatest strengths as leading worship, with an emphasis on preaching; teaching, which I don’t do enough of; serving as nudger, challenger, support, idea contributor, whatever it takes to help the lay leadership find their ministries and callings within the church; holding the vision of Beloved Community, during good times and hard times; keeping a figurative finger on the pulse of this organization, helping find what needs to be done at a given time; calling us, ever and always, to our best selves as individuals and as a spiritual community.

I was quite sick with pneumonia during February and March, into April. Even at that, I’ve preached as many Sundays as usual (more than some years), and attended over 200 meetings of one kind and another

Worship

I conducted 30 worship services, two more than is called for by my letter of agreement. Twenty-three were “solo,” sermon centered; three were shared presentations; in four, I conducted the service with someone else as primary presenter. I also preached on Christmas Eve after planning and carrying out—with a lot of great help from my friends—the Winter Solstice service on Dec. 21.

The Sunday Services Committee continues to do its job with expertise and good will—I don’t know what I would do without them! We always need new member on this committee!!!

Lifespan Education

I was directly involved in the beginning and the end stages of the Director of Religious Education (DRE) Search Committee's work. They did a very thorough, professional job (a process that has illuminated the need for some better defined personnel policies and practices). After Karen Raese and Cathy Carmen shared the job of Acting DRE for 18 months, we hired Emmie Schlobohm to serve as our full-time DRE. She jumped onto this moving train mid-year, and has had a most interesting time. With advice and support from Cathy and Karen, plus Cathy's leading of Coming of Age, she's doing great.

In Children's Education, I was very involved in Coming of Age: monthly meetings, led by Cathy Carmen, then helping our youth prepare for their very wonderful presentations. I also met (with Emmie) with the graduating seniors, who presented thoughtful and delightful Bridging statements at worship. I am traveling to Boston in June to be with our Boston Bounders (youth pilgrims) and chaperones.

Adult RE: With Elton Hall, I taught a Building Your Own Theology class.

Pastoral

The Congregational Care Team continues to be invaluable in "being there" for people who are ill or in trouble. (More often the former.) I am delighted that they have also created new helping programs, even though the Team has suffered some attrition.

This year, my pastoral meetings (folks in trouble or making decisions or lonely or upset or just wanting to talk; wedding and memorial planning, etc.) constituted only about a quarter of my total meetings. Five or so years ago, that figure was nearly 50%; a couple of years ago, about 30%. I really hate the idea that I can't meet individuals in the way I used to (someone called me "corporate"!), and will welcome help in figuring out how what the best solution is, for me and for the church.

Organizational/Committees

Regular meetings for me this year: Committee on Ministry; Sunday Services Worship Planning; Congregational Care Team; the Board and Executive Council; Coming of Age. Attending these meetings is eminently reasonable, and I need to make at least occasional appearances at others, particularly Chalice Circle Leaders and Finance. What takes up the biggest chunk of meeting time is *ad hoc* meetings on many and varied subjects.

I am not directly involved in Chalice Circles, but they are extremely important, giving both old and new people places to be with a small group, discussing matters of worth. I hope this program continues to grow.

The most important proposed structural change in the works—one I will put energy into starting and helping form—is the Program Ministry Council. When it is up and running, there will be a very important Council Leader, a person with organizational skills and an understanding that everything people do in their church is a ministry. Teams and committees will be organized "under" the Council Leader, with job descriptions and much communication. If we get this working—which will require a fair amount of "startup" energy—I am hoping that I will have fewer of those *ad hoc* calls and meetings. Who knows? There might be more pastoral time available!

Administrative

The staff team of Emmie Schlobohm (DRE) [Karen and Cathy for the first half of the year], Gerry Morris (office manager), Nancy Harms, office assistant and I continue to work well together. Carrie Bastian, music director, works as closely as possible with me and with the Sunday Services Committee, given her impossibly-busy schedule, and the congregation has been treated to lovely choral music this year.

The office was a fairly empty place for awhile this year, as I recovered from pneumonia, working a lot from home, and Gerry dealt with a very serious, prolonged family crisis. Nancy stepped into the breach with competence, confidence and skill, for which we are all so very grateful.

Denominational

I continue to love the UUA Board work. I attend three four-day meetings a year in Boston, and some Pacific Northwest District (PNWD) meetings. The UUA Board is moving in that direction, and it is interesting. I am the incoming chair of the UUA Board's Committee on Committees, the group that staffs the Board committees, doing our best to ensure diverse representation.

Community

I presented an evening on spirituality for the Jefferson Street Counseling Center; I was part of a sexuality education seminar convened for religious leaders; I participated in the annual Inter-Faith Thanksgiving service in St. John's Cathedral; and I share writing a column for the Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual/Transgender publication *Diversity*. (I share the writing with our Welcoming Congregation Committee chair, Louise Jacobsen, who has by far done the lion's share this year.)

I continue as one of the 8 or so religious leaders who take turns writing for the *Statesman*.

Continuing Education

I continue to process all that I learned on my sabbatical, about myself, my spiritual life, and how a religious community works. My District UU Ministers' Association Chapter retreats (three a year) always have a continuing ed component.

Personal

I still sing (Bob, too) in Master Chorale, which I love, and maintain a regular spiritual practice. My home life, with Bob and the two cats and George the Dog, is happy and fulfilling.

My protracted bout with pneumonia set me back a bit, but I'm on my feet again. My yoga practice fell by the wayside for a bit, but it, too, is back, and very important to me.

One of the long-range results of my sabbatical is that I am much more regular about a daily spiritual discipline, praying and meditating each day.