

2008-2009 Annual Report to the Congregation Rev. Millie Rochester

The church year has been characterized by a feeling of energy and optimism, thanks to the dedication of staff and volunteers. The bright, fresh paint in the Religious Education area is an apt metaphor.

It's been my pleasure and privilege to work with the Reverend Abhi Janamanchi, and UUC's wonderful staff: RE Assistant Christine Pensa; Office Manager Yvonne Charnesky; Bookkeeper Karen Roeder; Plant Manager Janine Tompkins; and child care providers Kay Cutler, Erin Carpenter, and Leigh Martino. You should know that in addition to the 12 hours Christine is paid to work each week, she "volunteers" another 10-15 hours – time that I do not have at my disposal. I am grateful also to Janet Clark, who served for the second consecutive year as RE Committee Chair, and most grateful to the 50+ volunteers who have taught and/or assisted in classes for children, youth, and adults.

The RE program has regained strength this year, confirming what the UUA Trauma Ministry team predicted after the deaths of a family in December 2007 – a drop-off in attendance, followed by returned growth. We currently have **82 children and youth** in the program; attendance has averaged between 39 and 40. Sunday attendance has been as high as 65, and as usual decreased in the spring.

Undoubtedly, the greatest success this year has been the comprehensive human sexuality program, *Our Whole Lives (OWL)*. Five adults facilitated, and eleven youth participated, from mid-January through mid-March. Special thanks to Ken Bliznick, Heather Calderone, John Carpenter, Lore Eargle, and Ray Williamson. Thanks again, too, to Charlotte Olson, for coordinating the RE-sponsored luncheons that financed this program and to the many people who supported her with their hard work and participation.

Adult RE classes have included *Pathways to Membership* (4 series); *Articulating Your UU Faith*, *Introduction to Buddhism*, *Building Your Own Theology*; *Let Your Dough Rise – Financial Advice for Women*; *Digital Photography*, *Wills and Estate Planning*, *Understanding India*, *The Global Food Crisis and Ethical Eating*, and many on-going events, all of which grow community, along with learning. Planning for next year is already well underway, and includes a new program from the UUA, *Spirit of Life: Exploring Spirituality for Unitarian Universalists*. In addition to other ongoing courses, a dozen Covenant Groups have met monthly, including 122 people. I thank Helga Reaves, who coordinates this effort and co-leads monthly meetings with the facilitators. Participants celebrated with a gala annual dinner, which Helga expertly organized.

Pastoral care has continued to be a high priority for me this year, and I make myself available at church, in homes, hospitals, hospice, and care centers, in person and by phone, averaging around 30 contacts each month. I touch base at least weekly with Jackie Brown, chair of Cares and Concerns, as well as many others in the congregation

who care for people in need. Monthly events such as Conversations with the Ministers also provide opportunities for people to connect with one another.

Worship: I have either preached or shared responsibilities with Abhi 12 times this church year, including holiday services; have led the children's message, children's worship, and been worship leader for guest speakers, and participated with Abhi in dedicating two children. Away from UUC, I was invited to lead worship for several congregations over the course of the year.

Outreach: I co-led, with the Reverend Leddy Hammock of Unity Church, the annual community Blessing of the Animals, participated in the inter-faith Thanksgiving service; and conducted two memorial services. It was an unexpected pleasure to be contacted by a couple whose baby I dedicated a baby two years ago, to dedicate his younger sibling. I have continued to be a member of the Clergy Committee of the Pinellas County Domestic Violence Task Force, which meets monthly, and organizes an annual presentation at the Hospice of the Florida Suncoast.

Denominational Connections: I continue to serve as program advisor for a seminarian and mentor a new minister, meeting with both at least monthly. I attended the fall conference of religious educators at which I led a workshop, and will attend General Assembly in June. As a member of the Board of the Liberal Religious Educators, I led a workshop just prior to last year's GA, and will do so again this year; and as a Good Officer for the UU Ministers Association, I have been called several times over the past year. Closer to home, I met regularly with other ministers in the Cluster and Florida District, and attended the District Annual Meeting in Sarasota.

Church Administration: I meet regularly with RE staff to maintain communication and provide direction, as well as with Abhi and Yvonne. E-mail is both a blessing and a curse with its constancy.

To conclude: I envision ever greater growth in UUC's learning and community in the years to come. I am honored that so many of you have come to me with your concerns, sorrows, hopes and joys over the last four years. I am proud of the work I have done with you here and in the wider community to spread the justice and compassion inherent in our faith, and most proud to have served as your Associate Minister. I will carry you in my heart when I leave Clearwater, and begin August 1 as the parish minister for First Unitarian Universalist Church of Winnipeg.

Respectively submitted,

Millie Rochester