

SENIOR MINISTER'S ANNUAL REPORT

Rev. Abhi Janamanchi

May 17, 2009

My tenth year at UUC was every bit as busy and exciting as previous ones have been. It would be impossible to itemize all the significant activities and programs I was involved in, and to describe each of the various projects in which I played a role. However, I trust that this brief report will give a sense of the nature, scope, and dimensions of my ministry.

Preparing and conducting **worship services** consumes at least a third of the fifty to sixty hours I commit to UUC each week. This year I made a point to address the economic recession that has impacted both our individual and congregational lives and provide some pointers on how we might use the principles of our liberal religious faith to live lives of abundance, generosity, and simplicity in a culture of scarcity and anxiety. Feedback indicates that these were useful to our members, and helped give them a sense of grounding and hope in a time of increasing economic stress and financial uncertainty. Attendance at our Sunday service was higher than last year (average attendance all year was around 185). The Sunday loose-plate collection was also more than double the usual amount from previous years. Both these trends point to the ongoing generosity and commitment of our members and friends.

The board in consultation with staff agreed to suspend the **two-service model** due to lack of growth at the 9 AM service and volunteer shortage. I convened and worked closely with **Worship Associates**, a group of spiritually grounded individuals (Marty Pelham, Greg Byrd, Jenn Bouchie, Dotti Doyle, Sue Boone, Helga Reaves, Delaney Rose, and Abhimanyu Janamanchi) who enhanced and enriched the worship experience with their reflections and sharing.

We also have a staff transition this year. **Rev. Millie Rochester**, our beloved associate minister, was called to serve the Unitarian Church of Winnipeg, Canada. I am deeply grateful to Millie for her four years of dedicated and skilled ministry, collegial support, and deep commitment to creating a well-balanced and strong team ministry at UUC. She will be greatly missed. We wish her the very best in her new ministry.

Holiday and special services were memorable in 2008-09. We hosted the annual **interfaith Thanksgiving service**, sponsored and coordinated by area religious communities. Although attendance was light, the service featured soulful prayers by interfaith clergy and wonderful music. UUC was privileged to host the **Maitreya Project** relic tour in October. More than 2500 people came through the doors to look at the relics and receive blessings from Buddhist monks. The interfaith inaugural ceremony was well-attended. In the fall, we also hosted an **interfaith memorial service** for Imam Deen Mohammed, the founder of *Mosque Cares*, the largest constituent body of Muslims in the U.S. The **Christmas Eve** service was well attended. Millie offered a special vespers service on **Winter Solstice** which was well received.

I conducted several **Adult education** classes in 2008-09. In the fall, I led **Building Your Own Theology** which drew seven registrants. Millie and I offered '**Pathways to Membership**' three times this year which were attended by prospective members. My four-week course '**Incredible India**' drew 50 registrants from UUC and the larger community. The course required fresh research and preparation and I was gratified by the response. I also worked with the Committee on Ministry to plan, organize, and facilitate a **congregational workshop on Mission** in late March that was attended by 70 members.

I worked with Millie and the Cares & Concerns committee to provide **pastoral care** to members, particularly long term and new members. I averaged between **7 and 12** counseling and visitation sessions per month this year.

I had hoped to cut back somewhat on the **number of meetings** I attend, but the demands of our financial situation, stewardship, and other issues of congregational life meant that I was at UUC many evenings during the week in the past nine months. In addition to these issues, I met monthly with several committees including Sunday Services, Committee on Ministry, Social Justice, and the Board of Trustees.

I conducted **Memorial services** for UUC members Florence Cohan Austin and Hal East, and for non-members Bill Castoro and Warren Bundy. I officiated at **five weddings** for members and non-members, each of which required approximately four counseling/planning sessions. I also performed two **child dedications** – Pax Turner and Hunter & Jack Pensa – this year.

Outside of UUC, my activities included offering the **Hand of Fellowship** at Allison Farnum's installation in Fort Myers; delivering the **invocation** at a Deepak Chopra event in Palm Harbor; **occupying the pulpit** at Plantation, St. Petersburg, and Bradenton, FL; attending the **Excellence in Ministry Summit** in Seattle, WA; OR attending the **UUA International Advisory Council** meeting in Boston, MA. I was deeply honored to be asked to deliver the sermon at the Sunday service at the **UUA General Assembly** in Salt Lake City, UT.

Locally, I initiated and led an interfaith effort to oppose **Amendment 2** in the fall of 2008, an initiative that took up a considerable amount of my time; helped organize **two musical events** celebrating Christmas and Martin Luther King Jr.s birthday with Fred Johnson; spoke on Unitarian Universalism at the **Largo Rotary Club**, on India at the **Friendship Force** meeting, and on voluntary associations at the **Center for Free Inquiry**. I also wrote several letters to the editor on different topics, some of which were published.

UUC has shown great health and vitality this year. New members continue to join and our membership now stands at **326 adults**. Giving to UUC has markedly increased despite the economic downturn, and so has participation in adult enrichment classes and special events.

I am deeply grateful to our excellent staff – **Millie Rochester, Yvonne Charneskey, Frank Wells, Linda Jones, Karen Roeder, Christine Pensa, and Janine Tompkins** – for the support they have given me in my work, and to the many committed volunteers who have accepted the gift and

challenge of “sharing the ministry” of UUC. I am especially indebted to **Susan Hegner** for her vision, dedication, and hard work as President and to the **Board of Trustees and Committee chairs** for their commitment to make UUC a vital and healthy religious community.

So, as we end one church year and begin another, I would have you feeling good about the many, tangible ways in which we are doing church RIGHT. We are a strong, compassionate, and capable Unitarian Universalist community with both an eye and a heart upon our essential religious mission of enhancing and enriching human life on every level. Yes, there is much more we can do to develop and deepen our ministry to the larger community of which we are a part of. We must continually challenge ourselves to do and be more for our Unitarian Universalist faith.

As I look to the future, I am convinced that we must continue to seek ways to reach out to surrounding neighborhoods, inviting persons, young and old, to share our faith journey. I hope we will continue our efforts to improve our connections and relationships with each other, develop and enhance congregational structures to fit the needs of our community, and work on implementing our vision and mission in the next year.

I encourage you to continue to bring your concerns and hopes for our church and its ministry to me, or to speak to a member of the Committee on Ministry [Hal Sparks, chair, Elly Kelly Baker (continuing), Lucille Odeneal, Eliseo Santana, and Pat McGiverin (new members)].

And thank you to all of you for your support, encouragement, helpful criticisms, and well wishes, but most of all for your commitment to UUC. It is an honor to serve as your senior minister!

Respectfully submitted,
Abhi Janamanchi