



The South Church
Weathervane

From the Minister's Desk

October 2010

Rev. Jennifer Brooks

A HERITAGE OF MIND AND HEART

Over the last month our congregation has been shaken by the news that some members have asked the Board of Trustees for new ministerial leadership. Since then there have been three meetings of the Board; two of the Committee on Ministry; and our UUA District Executive Bill Zelazny came to a series of meetings on September 14. More than 25 people, some signatories of the letter and some not, have met individually with me.

One of the most moving aspects of this intense period has been the sincerity and honesty of conversations among members and congregational leaders. Members have faced one another directly to share their different viewpoints, sometimes with tears and sometimes with laughter (yes, laughter is possible). I have been witness to the broadening of perspectives as leaders have begun to understand the wide range of feelings and perceptions among our membership.

“In a house which becomes a home, one hands down and another takes up the heritage of mind and heart, laughter and tears, musings and deeds. ... We live, not by things, but by the meanings of things. It is needful to transmit the passwords from generation to generation” —*Antoine de St. Exupéry*

My primary concern (shared by the Board and the Committee on Ministry) has been to encourage the expression of different views without polarizing or splitting the congregation. As part of my own discernment process, I sought guidance from experts on congregational dynamics and congregational conflict. It seems clear that a congregational meeting to “discuss” an issue as volatile as whether the minister goes or stays would be polarizing and not conducive to constructive resolution. Yet how else do we honor our fifth UU principle, “use of the democratic process within our congregations”?

The experts I spoke with, and our District Executive in his seven-hour round of meetings, urged that we use a dialogue circle process to begin understanding the disagreements members have with one another (most not about the minister). As our Board President Craig Sperry said in our joint statement on September 19, “In this congregation, differences in point of view have not often been discussed in supportive settings where people can really listen to one another, so it is important to explore our perspectives in a constructive, transformative way.”

This sharing has already begun. It will continue with expert guidance in mid-October. In the conversations that have occurred, one thing rang out clearly: the deep love members have for this congregation. Initially that love was expressed as certainty that one particular outcome is “best.” But as conversations continued, minds and hearts opened. It is this unfolding that will maintain and strengthen the ties members have with one another.

Perhaps the best contribution I can make to this congregation's member-to-member work is to remove myself as an “issue.” I'll stay for a year, but next August I plan to leave Nantucket to serve another congregation.

Four hundred years ago it was the opening of minds and hearts that brought into being the UU heritage of “unity in diversity.” Come laughter, come tears, we live by the meaning we make together, by the love under our disagreement. Open minds; open hearts. *These are the “passwords” that make Nantucket UUs a congregation.*

Where We Stand • Rev. Jennifer Brooks

Many people have asked me how I'm doing, given the controversy about my leadership. This issue has been around, more or less, since the day I set foot on Nantucket. I followed a beloved, charismatic minister who served our congregation for 28 years; an interim minister who was persuaded to resign after seven months; a period with no professional ministerial leadership; and a two-year interim minister who was well-liked and whose departure was, for many, a source of deep sadness. Under these circumstances, it's amazing that I've been here, and happy, for more than seven years.

So the short answer to the many kind inquiries is—I'm fine, and still happy. Here's why.

One of the major goals this congregation had when I arrived was the development of true congregational governance. Over the last seven years, we've seen the emergence of new committees that shoulder serious responsibility: Finance, Buildings & Grounds, Personnel, Ministry. We now have a congregational handbook, and the Board of Trustees has begun a practice of adopting written policies that are shared by inclusion in the handbook. One of those policies is our "Channels of Communication and Decision-Making," which in a nutshell is a written statement of what constitutes "right relations" among us. These are marvelous, positive steps that have been possible only because of the dedication of congregational leaders.

When I arrived, despite the work done by the legendary Allie Wilson to create and run a pledge campaign, one of the most awkward tasks congregational leaders faced was speaking frankly about money. That's changed, partly through the efforts of the Finance Committee to raise consciousness about the use of our reserve funds, and partly through 10 years of many fine pledge campaign chairs. This year's chair, David Oman, brings long experience of successful pledge drives and a clarity of vision about what's needed. He's set the bar high, for this congregation, at \$110,000.

This is the best possible moment to make the pledge campaign entirely successful.

Look at it this way. The conflict that has surfaced has been present in this congregation for a long time; in some ways, since before I arrived. Now it's out in the open, or at least beginning to be out in the open, and the Board of Trustees is courageously leading a process designed turn conflict into opportunity. Our membership has just completed a dialogue circle process to envision what this congregation can and should be. It's an exciting vision, and well within reach...if those pledges come in.

So, where do we stand? In a great place, actually. Members **strongly agree** on a congregational vision. Because latent conflict is out in the open with constructive conversations in the works, this can be a **transformative moment**. Now is the time to pitch in, make a pledge for 2011, and be sure your voice is heard.

Transition Team Update • Rev. Jennifer Brooks

A three-person team of the Board of Trustees is guiding the planning for an immediate round of conversations about this year of transition: Craig Spery, Meg Hunter, Jack Weinhold. I am ex officio. Our UUA District Executive Bill Zelazny has given us the names of four conflict-resolution experts, and the Board likely will ask one to visit on the weekend of Oct. 16-17. It's not clear exactly what will happen that weekend, but probably the expert will meet with congregational leaders to figure out how to make the next steps as constructive as possible. Very soon after that weekend, most likely a round of dialogue circles will invite all voices to be heard. The team agrees that there are differences in the way that various members of the congregation perceive the issues; as a practical matter a majority of the membership has effectively been left out of the decision-making process, so it's important to have a process that includes as many members as wish to take part.

Announcement by Rev. Jennifer Brooks and Board President Craig Spery on Sunday, Sept. 19, 2011

JB Four hundred years ago the first Unitarians began sharing the idea that difference need not mean disrespect. Their slogan was "unity in diversity." This is our heritage.

CS The Board of Trustees, working with an expert facilitator, is planning to live this principle in a series of congregational conversations ("dialogue circles") that will allow members to share their different perspectives on how we "do" church.

JB This step arises from the recent disagreement that focused on whether I should remain as your minister.

CS In this congregation, differences in point of view have not often been discussed in supportive settings where people can really listen to one another, so it is important to explore our perspectives in a constructive, transformative way.

JB Over the last few weeks this sharing has already begun, and I have asked myself how I might best contribute to the process. The answer that came to me is to begin planning with the Board for my move to another congregation next summer (in the normal cycle of ministerial transition), while remaining in place as minister to support and encourage this congregation as you begin this transformative process.

CS The Board of Trustees plans an immediate round of conversations about the transition plan, with a follow-up series of conversations we call a "healthy congregation development process." This idea emerged from the thoughtful, reflective discussions that began in the Board and the Committee on Ministry over the last few weeks.

JB The past seven years of my ministry here have been, for me, a gift and a blessing, but I anticipate that the coming year will be something more: momentous, powerful, and life-giving for us all.

CS The Board and our minister stand in solidarity to support this congregation and the 2011 pledge campaign. Our challenge is to live the truth of a 400-year-old idea: “unity in diversity.”



From the President of the Board of Trustees

As we move into fall, your board of trustees is taking steps with our UUA Ballou Channing District Executive Rev. Bill Zelazny to lead in a process of self-examination for our congregation and board. As the board of trustees president, I look forward to sharing more information about how this process will unfold as specific dates and times are set for dialog circles involving everyone who wishes to participate. For now, however, I'd like to take the opportunity to lay the foundation for what lies ahead.

The subject of "healthy congregations" is one being addressed by churches throughout the country as groups face change, transitions and tensions. An expert on this topic is Dr. Peter L. Steinke, an internationally respected systems consultant who has also served as a minister, educator and therapist. He is the author of three best selling books: *How Your Church Family Works*, *Healthy Congregations: A Systems Approach* and *Congregational Leadership in Anxious Times: Being Calm and Courageous No Matter What* and he has been a speaker at numerous conferences within the UUA and other denominations. According to Dr. Steinke, a healthy congregation is one that actively and responsibly addresses or heals its disturbances. A healthy congregation is not one with an absence of troubles, however. Congregations have healing capacities; they possess strengths and resources, which they use to manage conflict. Healthy congregations are known for renewing and regenerating themselves. They have the wisdom to face the tensions and stresses that befall all living systems.

Dr. Steinke adds that healthy congregations will neither anxiously hurry nor slow down the healing process. Because it is a natural force, healing knows its own fitting time. Healthy congregations let their strengths and resources carry them through their woundedness. In a concluding chapter of *Congregations: A Systems Approach*, Dr. Steinke advises that the significant measure of the health of the congregation is not where it stands in moments of comfort and ease, but rather, where it stands at times of challenge and crisis.

As was stated in the reading delivered by Jennifer and myself at the September 19th service, "the board and our minister stand in solidarity to support this congregation and the 2011 pledge campaign. Our challenge is to live the truth of a 400-year-old idea: "unity in diversity." It is my sincere hope that you will decide to join with fellow members of our congregation in the process of renewal and regeneration in the months ahead, however long it takes us. I welcome the opportunity of talking with you if you have any questions, concerns or ideas to share. Please contact me at 508-228-7892 or craigspery@aol.com.

Craig Spery – President, Board of Trustees



Dear Members, Associate Members, and Signers of the letter to initiate ministerial change,

As I am not on island, "The Weathervane" is my means of communicating with as many of you as I can. I have a substantial interest in the annual pledge campaign succeeding and I am spouse of the 2011 Pledge chairman. It is because of David's position, I am privy to a different campaign; one to force Rev. Jennifer Brooks out. I have not read the letter and this troubles me.

Please understand I appeal to you on my own and not on behalf of David's position. If you are offended with my views, please do not take it out on the pledge campaign. I challenge you to fight the urge to express your opinions with your pocketbooks and covert letters rather than

outright discussion. The church direly needs our financial support regardless of who is at the helm. Do not sink the ship because you are not fond of the captain. As an associate member, my experience is limited to a short span of time during the summer months. I was caught unaware of the shadowy undertow that threatens to drag our whole congregation down. My goal is to have clarity and forthrightness intervene.

To the 48 of you who wrote and or signed the letter, please make it public. If you felt so fervently as to initiate a change, then read aloud our 7 UU principles: I appeal to your conscience to be overt not covert in your requests.

Secondly, I urge you, the signers of the letter to pledge 10% more. Thirdly, if you are not a member and signed the letter, then join and give. You don't get to initiate change if you are not a member.

Lastly, I support Jennifer as our minister and applaud her stewardship in these rocky waters. In addition, I expect and respect a democratic process within our congregation if ministerial change is to be initiated.

With hope for us all,
Amy Oman



Here are the results... what now?

In June thirty nine members met in small facilitator-led groups. Following a structured method, called dialog circles, they individually reflected on four questions designed to discover who we as a congregation are and what we want to be. For each group a person observed and took notes.

Since then nine members have distilled those 337 notes into a snapshot of our congregation today. Here, in words, is that picture:

1. I feel connected to, get value from, and know I am valued by the congregation: When I give my time as a volunteer; When I am involved individually and collectively in congregational activities of support, change, and growth, and when I am participating in, among other activities, music, education, peace and justice, and 4th Sundays.
2. My Unitarian experience has made a difference in my life, and brought me meaning, purpose, and excitement by: Affording me safe participation, through fellowship and volunteering, in a congregation of like minded individuals who believe in the UU principles of liberal religion. Providing for the spiritual education of children without doctrine. Presenting intellectually challenging and spiritually enhancing talks and sermons. Offering great music!
3. We should live our commitment to justice, equity, and compassion, as a part of the interconnected web of existence by: Providing leadership in the community to enhance and continually support social programs such as: the green initiative, Habitat for Humanity, Peace & Justice, and Food Pantry, among others. Providing a vibrant community center for learning through education, forums, music and the arts. Reintegrating absent members, and reaching out to include immigrants and the gay community in our congregation.

4. We can make our Nantucket Congregation a 21st century center for personal and spiritual growth by: Presenting more speakers, performers, films and musical events of many cultures, religions and traditions. Growing our membership through expanded educational offerings in the principals of UU and the greater UU Experience, for adults and children, in our congregation and in the island community. Providing opportunities for additional supportive personal sharing, social interaction, and volunteer involvement.

What now?

The purpose of this small group reflection and sharing was to take the first step toward defining a mission. Over the winter, in workshops and webinars attended by our committee members, trustees, and Jennifer (for a week-long retreat) the common message was, “No church can remain static, it must change as the world changes, just to stay alive. To do that you must discover the story of who you are and your story, your vision, of what you want to be. Follow your mission and everything else will fall into place.”

From “1002 UUU - The Marks of a Healthy Congregation”, Peter L. Steinke:

“Healthy congregations focus on mission. This, he pointed out, does not mean merely that the congregation has a mission statement, but that it uses that mission statement to organize its activities. A good mission statement, Steinke noted, is no longer than a sentence, with no more than one comma, "can be understood by a 12-year-old and can be repeated at gunpoint." Mission helps mobilize the energy of the community; if the congregation isn't focused on mission, it will focus on its past, its budget, problems or something else.”

The spring dialog circles were a great beginning to discovering who we are. With more sharing and listening to each other over the months to come we will find those words that feel right when we describe our church and our purpose to others.



Kickoff Lunch 2011 Pledge Campaign

An enthusiastic group of more than 50 members enjoyed a delicious buffet lunch on Sunday, September 19 in celebration of the kickoff of the 2011 Pledge Campaign. The delicious lunch was singlehandedly catered by chef extraordinaire, Christopher O'Reilly. A fabulous chocolate and caramel cake fashioned as a two foot high, three dimensional representation of the Meetinghouse was ingeniously created by Eidy Venzor-Briere.

Pledge Campaign Chairman David Oman made a rousing case for 100 percent participation and for the urgent need for generous pledges to fund next year's budget, while protecting our reserve funds. To the tune of 'We Three Kings of Orient Are', Bob Leman serenaded the lunch crowd with an amusing and inspiring ditty on the need for Unitarians to financially support their church. Pledge cards were collected by David in a large basket which was followed by the serving of the cake.

Many thanks to all who help pull this event together, including Bob Hall, who orchestrated the set up, the many kitchen helpers and the cleanup crew including Sissy and Brian Girard, Trish Jarrell, David Hall, Bertrand Venzor-Briere, Karin Gockel, Susan Cary, and Linda Sonnestine



Pledge 2011 Update

What an exciting start after church on Sunday, September 19 for the congregation's 2011 pledge campaign! The cuisine prepared by Cris O'Reilly was outstanding and the chocolate and caramel confection created by Ace of Cakes Eidy Venzor were highlights of the kickoff event. And the generosity shown by those who filled out their pledge cards was applauded by all of those who crowded the social hall. As of the writing of this article at the end of September, we're at \$51,000 in pledges but have well over \$50,000 more to go to reach our goal of \$110,000 with 100% participation by all regular and associate members. Being a member of the Society in good standing means contributing your fair share, whatever you feel that may be depending on your financial capabilities and your appreciation for the benefits you derive from being a Nantucket Unitarian Universalist. Join us in supporting our congregation and our ability to be a full-time church within our community.

David Oman, 2011 pledge committee chair; Trish Jarrell and Linda Spery, co-chairs



Inter-church Harvest Fair

We have received an invitation to join our sister churches in their annual fundraiser:

"Dear friends, This glorious summer is winding down; next comes Fall. and with that the Inter-Church Harvest Fair. This year it will be held on November 6th in Bennett Hall at the Congregational Church. This is an anticipated event for the whole community and for visitors as well. It is also a fun way to add income to our church budgets. There will be a meeting in October to answer questions and listen to ideas. Please give me a call and let me know if you wish to participate. Hoping to hear from you soon. Sally Beckwith-508-228-2046."

We have had a couple of tables each year, most years, and realized some \$ as well as fellowship. This can only happen if we are able to get a good team to help. SO, I will call Sally if I feel there is good support behind the idea. Call ASAP if this is going to work. Otherwise I will call Sally and report that we are sorry but we won't be doing it.

Debby Merritt 508-228-6540



South Church Preservation Fund

On October 18 the main auditorium will be closed off and EverGreene (EverGreene Architectural Arts, Inc. of New York) will begin the process that will result in a replication of the 1846 appearance of the walls and ceiling. Their work is scheduled for completion by April 22, 2011. Because of the need for extensive scaffolding, there will not be access to the space by the public during the project. The decision to remove the many layers of paint and start over with a bare surface was made only after more than three years of consultation and discussions. The result will be small changes in the pattern and technique of the paintings and a major change in colors.

The changes are to reflect what was revealed by studies done last fall and other information to come as paint removal is proceeding.

The cost of this phase of the restoration of the building will be almost \$600,000. The money is in hand and has come from several grants, foundations, fund raising projects, and many individual donations. The two major grants are from the town's Community Preservation Committee and the M. S. Worthington Foundation. During the three months remaining of *The Campaign for the Restoration of the Historic Unitarian Meeting House*, the subcommittee on major fundraising would like to secure another \$200,000. This will enable us to redo the carpets, and to refinish the pews, pew caps, and lectern, as well as accomplish several smaller but desirable projects in the auditorium and entry vestibule. Of course, work on the building sees no end, and, as the next major step, the present plan of the SCPF is to address the need for a permanent maintenance fund.

Leslie W. Ottinger
President, Board of Directors

In Support of the Food Pantry

The Chef's Dinner for the benefit of the Food Pantry is Monday, Oct. 4 at 6:30 pm at the Nantucket Yacht Club. Tickets are available at the Even Keel. They cost \$75 each and must be purchased in advance of the dinner.

Sunday Flowers

We are fortunate that there are often flowers left from Friday and Saturday events. Also flowers may be placed in memory of a family member or friend or to commemorate an event. If you would like assistance with providing such an arrangement, Tomomi Sato, 508-228-0326, is usually available.

The cost of the flowers for one of her beautiful arrangements is \$50.

You're invited!

**ALL members and friends are involved in Faith
Formation for our children.**

Please join us for the annual

Pancake Brunch

&

Sunday School Registration

**At the Nantucket Unitarian
Church**

Sunday, October 3rd. 11:45AM

Activities Room

Parents: Register your child, age 5-10, for the Autumn semester which starts on
Sunday, October 10th

Our curriculum, **What is Religion for Others and for Us?**, will look at
celebrations, the five major religions, and the components of a religious
community using individual, family and wider cultural experience.