

Annual Report from the Minister,
Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Hendersonville,
May 21, 2006, submitted by James M. McKinley

The 2005/2006 congregational year was a year where the past ushered in the future. The fabulous twenty fifth anniversary celebration complete with a tent on the grounds was followed almost immediately with purchase of land as commitment to a new building in a few years. In January the two services process led to the decision to go with a second service of similar content but flexible format. Full religious education would be offered in the second hour with an all age program offered at the first hour. The details were to be worked out with a possible starting date this fall. Just last month the board urged the staff and task force to start in September. It looks like Sept. 10 Ingathering will also be the beginning of two services. Our canvass for the 2006/2007 year successfully raised \$20000 more than last year. Each of these initiatives are necessary parts of our commitment to be bigger where we are in order to eventually move to a larger home of our own design.

We accomplished great things. Each of them required planning and considerable participation of both time and money. At the same time some of the present stumbled a little in the excitement. Three adult programs in particular. The combined effects of their absences made the need for more adult programs and connections very clear. It also helped place worship more clearly in the center in a way that makes a second service more an opportunity and less an anxiety.

Through a series fo unfortunate events I failed to get the covenant groups which had been so strong for two years going again until last month. The open discussion group which was led by Fred Harris began the year with a bang in a joint presentation by Charles Grady and me on Thoreau and Civil Liberties, but Fred died suddenly in October and the group never recovered from the loss of Fred's organizing energy. The Sunday morning Forum struggled with the shared space, tried evening meetings and was unable to find new facilitators. Even with new quarterly plans and earlier meeting times, we were unable to find interested leaders. The good news is that we have turned this around in the last two months. Covenant Group facilitators are in place with people and enthusiasm to cofacilitate four groups. We are even looking at taking one group to Lake Pointe Landing and Carolina Village for some of us who have a more difficult time traveling. Bob and Fran German will head an Adult Program project and a plan is in place to start now. For those of you who are concerned about maintaining a one congregation feel even as we move to two services, Groups like these are how much of that will be done- and done better than it is now. Worship is one connected part of what we do and who we are. It is central, yes, but so much of our experience is in the many groups that orbit the Sunday gatherings.

This year I led 33 worship services and was present at 37. I articulated and used a simple understanding of the center of our UU faith to organize this year's talks. From my new home office, I began typing sermons, making copies available for people with hearing difficulties and posting sermons on the web. Using Word count, I shortened many. I have also tried to change my style to reflect more my own voice. In the last few months I have scheduled one ensemble talk per month. Starting in the fall I will establish a sermon writing day which will be the same every week.

This year we met our goals of four intergenerational services and having the children in the first part of the service at least twice a month. We introduced the Story Bag. Katherine's additional hours have made time for more collaboration with music. It is both fun and rewarding. Under Katherine's leadership the choir has grown in both numbers and organizational understanding. In religious Education, I have been working with Vicki on the Coming of Age program. The worship service with the youth will be June 10. Vicki, Katherine and I have also been working on possible first hour projects and focus for next year. Be sure to come see the puppet theater, June 3. Somehow include a special thanks to Helen Bishop for her help in working with choir, RE and second service planning. Maureen Killoran too. Who shared freely of their ministerial and consulting skills.

The Caring Circle is doing a good job of staying in touch with those in need. The Fellowship Friends program for members who need regular contact and help to get to the congregation grew this year. Eight people are being so served at the moment. Neighborhood groups now have CC liaisons. Continuing education included active listening, clarifying the differences between pastoral visitor and friend, and developing a system for ongoing check in after life crisis or loss.

I continued to facilitate the Keeping On group's monthly meetings exploring issues and needs of those for whom age and aging are a concern. The group has used books as study guides and is also breaking new ground on its own. Through the Membership Committee we held two New UU classes and dinners and welcomed two classes of new members. The Committee on Ministry meets monthly to consult and advise both this minister and the ministry of the congregation. Completed annual Evaluation of the Ministry forms were returned last week and will be compiled by Committee members within the next month so that suggestions and concerns can be distributed and incorporated into approaches and plans for next year. As part of our efforts in the larger community, I am on the Interfaith Assistance Ministries strategic planning group, the board of mainstay, the Carolina Mountain Land Conservancy advisory group. I served on the organizing and steering committee of Hendersonville's first Love Welcomes all Conference. I am now one of the Times News View from the Pulpit columnists for 3, possibly 4 columns.

As part of our larger UU tradition, I have been mentor with monthly contacts to a minister in Preliminary Fellowship. I completed my second year as Good Offices minister to ministers in the Thomas Jefferson District. The Western Carolinas UU Ministry group meets monthly in the UUFH office. I attended the Western Carolina Gathering in Asheville, both fall and spring meetings of the Southeast UU Ministers Association at the Mountain and I will be attending General Assembly in St. Louis the week of June 19.

Our experiences this year move right into next year. A helpful theme for our focus might be growing bigger and better where we are. The staff has already committed to focusing on the process of implementing a second service. That means turning down some outside nominations and opportunities. But you can see from the response to Adult programs and covenant groups, our need to continue to develop and strengthen congregational offerings that go beyond worship. The right programs are in place. All of them can be thought of under the general heading of Membership Development that

includes both new and established members. A focus on membership development emphasizes programs, ongoing contact with new Members as they find their way in the congregation and also a congregational clarification of expectations for all of us. This should include congregational covenanting. It is Not only what we do but how do we agree to do and be together. It is important as we grow to assume less and rely less on the general culture and knowledge of this congregation and more clearly state our understandings and expectations making them more easily accessible and available to anyone and everyone who joins us.

I mentioned new programs. One new program that is under way is the forming of a social action group to examine and discuss social issues and actions. Others that are being discussed are pastoral associates or lay ministers and also worship associates who might take things like the story bag initiative in new directions. We shall see.

Earlier I mentioned some members of the staff. They should be honored on their own You have managed to assemble one of the best. They run good programs, do their jobs well, work with a variety of people and situations and work well together. We are collegial and committed to growing this congregation. I am the supervisor in name and support more than in need. You will hear from Music and Religious Education and building and grounds. In the office Chris has done a good job with both tasks and welcome. As Chuck will explain (or not) Chris has been helping with the accounting one day per week and will be training next year to eventually take on most of the treasurers job. To make time for the training we will be trying to find tasks that she can give back to volunteers. The Beacon set up is one of those. Also committees are urged to do the word processing work and copying that is reasonable to do on their own. Chris, Vicki, Katherine and I check in with staff meetings monthly and will probably have to establish a more frequent and regular schedule for the fall. There will be more to organize and adjust.

Before I list the rites of passage for the year, remember that this year has been a rite of passage on its own. We are in to our second 25 years as the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Hendersonville. And we have moved in to a new phase of our organizational life. We are maturing. Past present and future are working well together.

Rites of passage.
Weddings

And Now a moment of silence for members and friends who have passed into memory this year. Please stand. Fred Harris, Cora Styles, Harry Brookes, Nancy Keefauver, Peter Fisher, Bob Stuhmer.

We are better for their lives among us. We are saddened that they are gone. We miss them one and all.

Child dedications

It has been and continues to be both a privilege and a pleasure to serve this congregation, the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Hendersonville.

Thank You.