

REPORT TO THE FIRST UU CHURCH OF AUSTIN ON THE INTERIM MINISTRY
Rev. Dr. Janet E. Newman, Accredited Interim Minister

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To the congregation:

The specialty of intentional Interim Ministry is very future-directed, and the work I am doing with the First UU Church of Austin is no exception. During the time I have been on staff, since September 1, 2009, I have found that the congregation has proceeded well with the transition it began during the first eight months of the year.

One of the tasks that Interim Ministers are expected to do is to guide congregations to come to terms with its past – honoring its achievements and recognizing its conflicts and disappointments. My observation is that First UU has done very well on the Time-Line project, posting many notes about the congregation's history, especially the events that brought pride and those that caused disappointment. In addition, the area for posting hopes and dreams for the church presented many intriguing ideas for the future. The Transition Team and I will reflect on the results of the Time-Line project in a sermon soon.

Another task that Interim Ministers seek to guide the congregation through is to encourage new leadership, lay and ordained. I am very encouraged by the efforts of the Nominating Committee, begun before I arrived, to develop leadership by means of the seminars this fall. I have no doubt that this project will continue to bear fruit. I am also pleased that lay leaders are looking carefully at the structure of the committees and other bodies of the church in an effort to make them more effective and inter-related. In addition, the Board continues its progress toward a new style of governance and will soon be helping the leaders and other congregants understand what Policy Governance means, as indicated by Dr. Peter Steinke last winter.

Work on the church's identity, vision, and mission also continues apace, another task that was assigned by Dr. Steinke in early 2009. I am glad to be part of the Bridge-Builders Action Plan which is putting the plans for creating a new identity

into practice. This, too, is part of the Interim Ministry agenda. In addition, I am very committed to guiding the church to the establishment of guidelines of healthy relations, or, in other words, a behavioral covenant for the church. This fits with Dr. Steinke's assignment that the church develop healthy community.

The opportunity to renew connections with the Unitarian Universalist Association and beyond is one that many congregations in transition believe not relevant. However, it is during this very transition that the church relies on the resources of the Association and the district more than ever. I will continue to guide a closer relationship with these entities, and I will also continue to urge congregants to make use of local, district, and UUA conferences and other efforts.

The result of all of the work of the interim period is to ready the congregation for new ordained leadership and new directions for the church. As First UU has only had three and a half months of intentional interim ministry, this goal is months away. However, leaders and congregants have made great strides toward readiness.

One of the barriers to such a happy outcome is the philosophy and practice of stewardship at First UU. As congregants observed with alarm during the fall campaign in 2009, lack of pledge income can lead to serious and enduring cuts in staff and programs, which leads almost inevitably to the deterioration of the church. Although the congregation is learning to adjust to its smaller membership, the need for funding quality programs and administration remains urgent. Financial matters need immediate attention with an eye toward the big picture.

Another barrier to readiness to new ordained leadership and new directions has to do with the continuing and vocal anxiety among some congregants about the dismissal of the former called minister. The church has made great strides toward healing the multiple losses suffered over the years, but there is still a sense of intransigency from some members. In order for the church to commit to new leadership and directions, members will need to set their anxieties aside and go into the future with renewed hope and courage.

It is my pleasure to work with an excellent team of Senior Staff whose reports are also in this appendix. I owe a great deal to them for their insights and support. In addition, my thanks are to the additional support staff and to lay leaders who are of great value to the church. I am also very grateful to the Transition Team, the congregation's lay leaders and think tank for transitional ministry: Nancy Bene, Jim Burson, Michael Kersey, Wendy Kuo, Sharon Moore, Sylvia Pope, and Margaret Roberts. Please thank them when you next see them; they are working hard on your behalf.

I am very hopeful that the next months of our ministry together will be fruitful, courageous, and radically hospitable!

Respectfully submitted,

Janet E. Newman, Accredited Interim Minister