

# Annual Report to the Congregation

## Allegheny Unitarian Universalist Church

### Annual Congregational Meeting 19 May 2013

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#### NOMINATING REPORT

The Nominating Committee is pleased to present the following candidates for Trustee positions.

##### Board of Trustees

Candidates for three, two-year Trustee seats:

Liz Dell

Jane Schwarz

Gail Ward

The Board of Trustees and the Endowment Committee are pleased to present the following candidates for Endowment Committee service.

##### Endowment Committee

Kate Tomlinson, three-year term

Karen Zoller, one-year term

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#### ANNUAL REPORT OF THE CALLED MINISTER

*Rev. David McFarland*

This year the Board, Leadership Council, and staff worked and played and paid and prayed to foster the health and growth needed to strengthen our mission. When other churches are scaling back and hunkering down, this church embraces the challenge to fulfill our mission and to do our best to use our resources to build the church for the next century.

Through worship and small groups and *Rainbow Connections* and committees and ministries, we create together the spirit and commitment and enthusiasm that keep moving us forward into the next moment, the next week, and on into the future. We have the principles and the reputation and the building and the website and the community and the music and the place kids want to come back to; more importantly, we feed souls by challenging complacency and boldly asking one another to be and become better human beings and create a more responsible human community.

This year we continued to mature as a mission-focused church. With the retirement of Social Justice Chair, Liz Dell (thanks again, Liz, for your years of service!), your Board of Trustees took responsibility for leading our outreach efforts. The Membership Committee shared our *Members' Expectations of Membership* and guided the conversation about the responsibilities of being a member. Stewardship encouraged the mission-based use of our time, treasure, talents, and temperament.

What's clearer and clearer to me over time is that we grow because we connect. This has been a year of connecting: to our mission, to our vision, to our covenant, to our neighbors, to our highest aspirations, to our God, to our inheritance and our legacy. Especially in these years when we have decided to stretch toward taking greater responsibility for living up to our mission by extending our limited financial resources to provide staffing for growth, we need every member, every friend, and everybody who wishes Allegheny well to do their utmost to grow into that future.

Preparing for my sabbatical in 2014, I'm thinking a lot about the church in the next ten years: a church dedicated to whole-hearted living: reaching out as a natural consequence of reaching deeply within: deepening connections throughout the North Side as a natural consequence of members fully living their authentic faith ....

I hope to meet with every member before my sabbatical so I can hear your dreams for the soul of this church.

As long as we keep connecting by reaching within, reaching out, and reaching out together, we can become the self-sustaining congregation we aspire to be by embracing the new: new people, new ways of being, new ideas, new challenges, new conflicts, new ways to grow our soul. If you're doing your utmost; great, help others do theirs. If you're not, now is the time. It's up to us. We're all in this together.

*Blessings, Rev. Dave*

## MUSIC PROGRAM

Jesse Landis-Eigsti – Director of Worship Music

Music making at Allegheny Universalist Unitarian Church continues to be a source of joy for me. Whether it's the congregation coming together for familiar songs, the choir and instrumental group bringing new sounds to the church, or the children singing and signing together, I believe that music is an important part of worship.

In the last year, we've increased the number of music-led services, such as *Music as Solace*, *Music as Blessing*, and *Singing Green*. We've had meditative services inspired by the Taize tradition—which have then in turn inspired the wonderful member-led Soul Sounds on the third Wednesday of each month.

As a music teacher, I enjoy the chance to integrate children into services, and I will continue to work with RE to include our younger members. I am gratified by the growth of the choir and instrumental group and I want to continue to make sure that all know they are welcome to participate. I also want let people know that they are welcome to participate in music even if they aren't able to be a permanent member of a musical ensemble. If you are interested in singing or playing, please let me know!

I thank you all for your support and encouragement and look forward to another year singing together.

## SMALL GROUPS MINISTRY

Rev. Dave, leader; Rev. Lynn Aquafondata, Suzanne Gais, John Luff, Fran Quinlan, Linda Richards, Chuck & Gail Ward

Our main Small Group this year was a monthly exploration of our new covenant. It was clear to most if not all participants that the sessions could have gone on for hours or even weeks without exhausting the topic. Not surprisingly, the more we meditate on these covenants, the richer and more fruitful they become.

## INREACH MINISTRY

Rev. Dave, leader; Katie Parker, Linda Richards, Jane Schwarz, Braden Wimer

We're blessed to have Rev. Lynn Aquafondata provide lay pastoral training sessions for us before she leaves Pittsburgh. With her help, we'll venture into the summer intending to connect with each member before Rev. Dave's sabbatical begins in 2014.

## CONNECTION CIRCLES

Tim Nuttle, Lead Coordinator

Connection circles is a new effort by the Board of Trustees and the Leadership Council with the support of the Growth & Vitality team. Called the *Rainbow Connection Circle*, it is an intentional way for members and regular guests to connect with about twenty others, personally, socially, and through acts of service, to the church and the neighborhood. April was the first month of Circles' activity, with the *Red Circle* taking responsibility for some Sunday morning hosting and welcoming tasks. The volunteer coordinators/circle leaders will be making contact with folks from the congregation.

## STEWARDSHIP COMMITTEE

Betty Luff – Co-Chairperson

Allegheny UU is a history-rich congregation of 78 members, housed in our original buildings, with full-time ministry and two part-time staff members. We are overcoming a weak culture of stewardship and financial giving that consistently fell short of covering our budgetary needs. Over the past three years the Stewardship Team of Mark Tomlinson, Betty Luff, Tiffany Merriman-Preston and John Luff have worked single-mindedly to challenge old assumptions about money. Rather than wring our hands over a lack of resources, we chose a new approach of abundance and generosity.

Over the last two years, the annual canvass has increased by nearly 50%, a significant improvement. We have institutionalized an End-of-Year campaign based on a message of generosity and gratitude. As a result, the projected 2012 fiscal-year deficit was lowered by 70% at the church year's close. The 2013 fiscal-year deficit is on-track to be even lower.

There's still much work to do. But, our financial health has grown. And over the course of the last year, Stewardship also spearheaded the creation of an Endowment Fund, which received its first generous donation during December's End of Year campaign.

We are confident that the culture around giving and generosity at Allegheny has changed. We don't talk *need* – we talk *possibilities*... we don't talk *budgets* – we talk *mission*, *covenant* and *stewardship*. We believe the old assumptions of scarcity are being won over.

Our gratitude to everyone who has given to the best of their ability and from the depth of their spirit. It is from us all, for us all, and to us all that we give.

## ENDOWMENT COMMITTEE

John Luff – Chairperson

The Endowment Committee was established at the Annual Meeting last year. The committee is now at full strength (John Luff, Jill Breathauer, Karen Zoller, Pete McQuillin, Kate Tomlinson) and is working on marketing materials. The Endowment opened a checking account after considerable delay getting required paperwork in place. An initial review by pro bono counsel of the base documents governing the Endowment has passed muster.

Plans are coming together to begin explaining the Endowment in detail to members—one on one, and early in the Fall we expect to have the full plan ready to roll out. Work will begin in the next few months to select an investment advisor. We will interview several options before deciding who can serve us best in the long term.

Best of all we received two gifts to the endowment at the end of 2012! Our balance is over \$11,000. Much work is left to be done, but we are quite pleased with our start in the first year.

## COMMITTEE ON MINISTRY

Charlie Snowden – Chairperson

In keeping with the Committee on Ministry's responsibility to monitor congregational life and assess its ministry, the Committee considered doing a formal assessment of our Church ministry this past year. We looked at many assessment models, but none seemed appropriate given that we had many new members who were not familiar with our committees and their function. In lieu of a formal assessment we planned the workshop, *It Takes All Souls*. The objective was to allow each committee to communicate to members and friends the committee's past accomplishments and hopes for the future, and to solicit feedback and ideas for future planning. The workshop was well attended and plans for a future workshop are being considered.

The Committee continues to monitor the plans and progress of preparations for Rev. Dave's sabbatical. With the establishment and implementation of Congregational Circles and Rev. Dave's sabbatical, the Committee on Ministry will continue to keep a watchful eye that our ministry is maintained and our covenant with each other is strong and healthy.

Current Committee includes: Charlie Snowden, Jay Poliziani and Jane Dirks.

## MEET THE CANDIDTES

### Liz Dell

Liz has been a Unitarian Universalist since she was three years old and a member of Allegheny Unitarian Universalist Church since 2006. She has been a *church lady* since high school, holding leadership positions at Cedar Lane Unitarian in Bethesda, Maryland and First Unitarian Universalist Church in Pittsburgh before finding her church home at Allegheny. Liz's most recent service was as the Social Justice Chair but she has also worked on the Long Range Planning Committee and helped to coordinate the Pittsburgh Cluster's Pride March activities for the last three years. She is passionate about what Allegheny can offer the North Side and Pittsburgh and is looking forward to furthering the Church's mission as part of the Board. Liz lives with her husband and their two Dutch rabbits in the Highland Park area of Pittsburgh.

### Jane Schwarz

Jane has been attending Allegheny since 1996. She has been involved in Anti-racism Training, organized the Church's shelter meal participation at Pleasant Valley for four years, and has been on the Membership Committee for a number of years. Jane also sings in the choir, and is involved as a musician for Sunday services. In addition, she has been a part of the Green Team, and previously served on the Board of Trustees. Professionally, Jane is a licensed clinical social worker working as a therapist with the chronically mentally ill, and teaches piano.

### Gail Ward

Gail joined Allegheny in 2010, but thinks she may have been a Unitarian all her life ... and just didn't know it. She and Chuck were married in First Unitarian Church in 1985, in large part because Gail was taking piano lessons from their music director at the time. Gail's yearning for spiritual nourishment, love of music (and Rev. Dave!) led them here, and the people of the Church, its mission, and its wonderful Sunday services have kept them coming back. She has been a small group leader, worship host, and most recently joined the Membership Committee, and is ready to take this next crazy leap of faith to serve on Allegheny's Board of Trustees.

## FINANCE COMMITTEE

*Peggy Thompson – Chairperson*

One of our focuses this year has been to work towards a balanced budget. This effort remains ongoing but we've come closer to reaching that goal. One of the questions we ask is, "Does our budget further our church mission and support growth?" One of the ways this can be achieved is to encourage awareness of financial matters and responsible spending. By thinking outside the box we can find ways to cut costs and develop fund raising opportunities. Being financially secure will help us to continue our tradition as a vibrant, liberal church.

The Finance Committee also deals with the day-to-day financial workings of the Church such as recording and tracking expenses, offerings and other income. We monitor the Church's portfolio of socially responsible stock, bank accounts, and CDs.

The efforts of individuals have made a difference in working toward that goal of a balanced budget. Ongoing fund raisers such as Giant Eagle gift cards have helped. The hard work of the crew that installed the plastic storm windows helped to lower heating costs, among other things. The Stewardship Committee led the successful year end giving campaign. The newly formed Endowment Committee ensures our stability into the future.

Thanks to those members who served on the Finance Committee this year. They include Jill Brethauer, John Luff, Mac McMahon (Church Treasurer), Betty Schwarz and Laura TaVoularis.

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## [MEETING] HOUSE COMMITTEE

*Donald Zeilman – Chairperson*

The House Committee did not initiate any major improvements this year, although we hired a new cleaning contractor for the church interiors. It is evident that the level of cleaning has risen dramatically. We also initiated a twice-a-year stripping and finishing of the flooring in the lower level of the church. Again, this has made a huge difference in the appearance of the spaces.

There were two volunteer efforts related to the facilities that stand out this year: volunteer organizing for cleaning Unitarian House and the storm window initiative. Shane Freedman has been the organizer and driver for the cleaning work, and Jeanne Zang for the storm window project. House Committee members,

## MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEE

*Betty Schwarz – Chairperson*

MEMBERSHIP IS MAKING CONNECTIONS—Welcoming newcomers, scheduling *What We're About* sessions, assembling guest packets and new member packets, making name badges, monitoring coffee supplies, organizing potlucks ... these are a few of the ways the Membership Committee helps us all make connections at church. We also identify and explain *Pathways to Membership*, articulating what it means to be a member, how to become a member, and discuss *Members' Expectations of Members*, a description of how we interact with and treat each other as members in order to help newcomers in the transition to membership. We want to be sure that those entering into membership are aware of and have an opportunity to discuss these ideas before joining. We are preparing a pamphlet to introduce Allegheny UU Church to visitors. We maintain our on-line directory at **congregationbuilder.com\*** and are working to have a new printed directory available in July. Our aim is to make and keep connections here so that we can all learn, help and grow. We welcome the new Rainbow Circles program as a wonderfully powerful way to connect. We look forward to the more vibrant community that we will be as we pursue our mission to celebrate life, nourish the spirit, and inspire a commitment to justice.

*\*for further information/access, please contact:*

*< membership@allegheny.org >*

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Andy Schwarz and Charlie Snowden have been active partners in these significant efforts.

Andy also takes responsibility for facilities rentals, and Charlie continues to be available for specialized repair and maintenance. Both provide input for planning, contractor hiring and facilities use.

In the upcoming year, the Committee will be starting renovations to the second-floor bathroom at Unitarian House and beginning the process of making the building's hot water system more efficient.

Our thanks to all of the volunteers that helped and led projects, initiatives and planning—without you our facilities would not be as clean, safe and appealing as they are.

If you have concerns as a congregant, want to join us in our committee work, or volunteer, please see me, or e-mail < house@alleghenyuu.org >.

## **SOCIAL JUSTICE REPORT**

*Mark Tomlinson – President 2012/2013*

Social Justice at Allegheny is a deep and storied commitment, with justice work being not just a rich thread of our church life, but also deeply personal in many of our lives. A few of the ways we live out this commitment are with the monthly shelter meal at the Pleasant Valley Shelter of Northside Common Ministries, with making sandwiches weekly for Operation Save a Life, and with participation in the Pennsylvania Interfaith Impact Network and its public actions. Our biggest event of the year continues to be Pride Day, when we host the cluster churches for morning worship and then walk together as UUs supporting the LGBTQ community in the Pride March. We have collected and given away about \$5,000 this past year through Share the Plate, helping justice partners do important work. We have increased our support of the Food Pantry at Northside Common Ministries,

responding to an urgent need with more generosity. Social Justice speaks from our pulpit, where we heard Rev. Mark Kiyamba of Uganda sharing stories of protest and witness where life truly hangs in the balance. With these and many other involvements, large and small, we remain committed to social justice as central to our mission and part of this church's DNA. Thank you to everyone who has been involved with social justice projects at Allegheny this past year!

A huge THANK YOU goes out to Liz Dell, who for several years has guided the work of our Social Justice Council. With Liz stepping down from that role last Fall, the Board of Trustees has taken on leadership of this effort while we go through a discernment process to help us define how we best organize, energize, and carry out justice work in the future. Part of that future will be new leaders, and if this work speaks to you please share your interest with me, Mark Tomlinson.

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## **RELIGIOUS EDUCATION**

*Brian Byers – Director of Religious Education*

Serving as the Director of Religious Education (DRE) for Allegheny Unitarian Universalist Church is a source of great enjoyment for me. Every week I look forward to working with the children, youth, and community at Allegheny. I also very much enjoy working with the caring and excellent professional staff, here.

Allegheny's RE program has had a number of success from 2012. Most notably the program has grown tremendously over the past year. Weekly RE attendance has increased over 100% in most weeks. The age range of RE enrollment is 2 to 15 years of age with the majority being in the 5-to-10 age group. Another success we are proud of is that we have engaged and retained a former RE staff member to provide care for the youngest members of the RE program. This is significant because many of the current older children are familiar with this staff person and this familiarity allows for comfort not only in the children and youth but families as well. The older-aged children have also engaged in a service learning project. This project

involves the children and youth deciding upon an activity—a bake sale—to raise funds for the local animal shelter on the North Side. The children and youth are responsible for coordinating, baking, collecting money, and delivering the money to the intended recipient. Additionally, the RE program has begun planning for (and has held) events, such as a spoken word/poetry slam for local community artists and outings for RE families and children.

It is also a source of pride for me to be an active participant in the planning and delivery of weekly worship, particularly in terms of conveying the *Time for All Ages* stories. This time to connect the spiritual theme of the Service to the activities in the RE Program is a special time for me. It is also great for others in the congregation to be able to participate indirectly in the RE program when they don't feel they can or have the desire to commit in other ways.

In closing, I would like to thank the members and staff of this Church for their patience, support, words of encouragement, and all around awesomeness in helping the RE program to be such an exciting place to be!

## BOARD OF TRUSTEES

*Mark Tomlinson – President 2012/2013*

With every annual changeover in Board membership and leadership there is a new opportunity to bring fresh ideas to the congregation. As that year winds down, I'll admit I've been surprised by just how much time has been taken up by the regular business affairs of the church, which makes it hard to spend as much time as we wanted to on new initiatives. We've tried to be responsive as various issues have needed attention. We're thankful that it has been a time mostly devoid of crisis or conflict. But we do feel we've been able to advance a few important things this year. I don't feel like the Board gets full credit for anything, but is more of a hand in shaping and encouraging things along, working to guide the church to a better place. So much of the real work comes from the volunteers and leaders among us who step up.

We have an awesome new and still growing website in place. We have "shepherded" as the Circles concept has grown from crazy idea to a new way of living

church life. We have worked to build stronger internal systems for managing finances and membership. We are laying the groundwork for a successful Minister sabbatical next year. We have spent time exploring new models for social justice at Allegheny. A year after its creation we have not just an Endowment Fund but a growing balance in it. In July 2012 we made a two-year commitment to building capacity and creating and supporting growth. We will continue to conserve money where feasible but spend where necessary and smart and strive to grow the income side of our budget equation.

The 2012–13 Board of Trustees has had a fruitful year. We thank all of the members and friends and staff who make this church a living, breathing community of souls—and a wonderfully vibrant place to be on Sunday mornings! Finally, I'd like to recognize and thank this year's Trustees for their service: Betty Luff, Donald Zeilman, Mac McMahon, Ellen Kerr, Andy Schwarz, and Matt-Merriman Preston.

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## SABBATICAL TEAM

*Ellen Kerr – Coordinator*

Rev. David McFarland will be on sabbatical from Allegheny for six months during next fiscal year, starting January 2014. This is a planned sabbatical in compliance with our Letter of Agreement with Rev. Dave.

Allegheny has formed a Sabbatical Team consisting of Ellen Kerr, Jane Dirks, Devon Wood and Mark Tomlinson. The Sabbatical Team has begun meeting with Rev Dave. The Team announced the Sabbatical and its dates at the Mid-year meeting in January.

Our purpose is to facilitate a successful sabbatical that enriches Allegheny in as many ways as possible. The Church will support Rev Dave's work during the sabbatical. He will be able to study, reflect, and create. The Team will work with the Church's groups to ensure coverage of worship, adult faith development, pastoral care and administration. We see this as an opportunity for growth, inspiration, creativity, and deepening of commitment to the Church. Communication about the Sabbatical and Allegheny news will be available via a planned newsletter.

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Rev. David V. McFarland, Minister