

Report from the Executive Director September 2006

I have been back from sabbatical since September 5th. My heartfelt thanks to you and the rest of the congregation for allowing me to take the time. My most sincere and undying gratitude to the rest of the staff for their efforts while I was away. It was not an easy time for them and I so appreciate it. Catch me on a break and I will bore you with stories of our wonderful sabbatical trip out west.

Now, to business. Financially, this year is challenging with Member Contributions off budget by \$31,000. We had a terrible spring, picked up a bit in June and were under budget again in July and August. We could recover with a wonderful canvass and we will hope to do that in the next four months. Another major financial issue has arisen because our long-time jewelry fulfillment person, Kathy Rogers, quit without notice in May. The office staff had to pick up that ball and run with it in addition to their regular work, and that has been interesting and challenging.

We have made some cuts in expenses by not re-hiring our most part-time staff this fall; by not putting salary increases through that were due on July 1 for Jane and myself; and by making no further purchases of computers for the year. We manage expenses very closely, so there aren't many places to go during the year to save money.

We were very lucky to receive a donation from CLF members Brent and Linda Wilkes (formerly of Danvers, MA, now of Saratoga Springs, NY) of a whole office full of furniture. The break-down, moving, set up and logistics was a huge job with Jane and the rest of the staff working very hard to make it all happen before I returned. The office looks great and we are delighted to have such a professional place to work.

We will be receiving a new bequest shortly. The projected amount of the bequest is \$379,000. Kelly Weisman Asprooth-Jackson, one of our intern ministers, will be telling you more about the donor on Friday. We think that this bequest may present an opportunity to purchase some inventory for the retail items we sell, like jewelry, order of service covers, and note cards. If we could afford to print or purchase in larger quantities, our margins would be higher and we could raise more money. Our former jewelry fulfillment person has an inventory of some of our best-selling pieces, and we may be able to purchase her inventory with one lump sum in the neighborhood of \$15-20,000. Food for thought.

And, finally, with Denny's help, we have submitted a grant request to the UU Funding Program called *Sharing Our Faith*. With the assistance of an advisory committee, we hope to develop a new year-long web-based ad campaign (via Google AdWords), analyze its effectiveness, and share the results with UU congregations and organizations.

As always, there are the members. We hear from them via their contribution envelopes, by telephone, and certainly by email. They remind us how important this work is. We recently learned of the loss of two of our favorite elder members, Nancy Merritt from Michigan, and Erston Butterfield in Tennessee. We came to know them and will miss their enthusiasm and love for Unitarian Universalism. For me, and all the staff, these relationships are what make this such a special place to work.

My heartfelt welcome to our new board members. I'm looking forward to knowing you better and sharing stories of this wonderful, unusual congregation.