

Report from the Senior Minister September 24, 2006

There were years when in my reports to you, I offered you a waltz through the programs that the Church of the Fellowship is proud to call its own. These days, the waltz would be far too long, even for the heartiest.

There were years when in my reports to you (last April was an example), I contrasted the recent past with current life in the CLF, but the pace is so quick now, the technology so fleeting, that what we rolled out a few months back is old news indeed.

There were years when in my reports to you I told you about our staffing, or our members, publications, GA, or grant proposals in the making. Sometimes I talk about money, and plans (strategic or not). There is nothing about the CLF that I don't love to talk about.

Today I will offer you tidbits in only a few categories—I hope you will have questions about other aspect of the CLF when we meet in person.

The CLF runs a great number of interactive online groups in a variety of formats. One such category is our "Shared Interest Groups." At the moment there are nine: retirees, healing (for people living with serious illness), free world CLF prison pen pals, UU Pagans, UU Christians, UU Humanists, GLBT, mental illness, and international. 329 CLF members are served in this way, an increase of 188% in six months.

Other factoids regarding a small sampling of CLF online communities: We have seven on-going online covenant groups and a long waiting list. 187 people are on the RE-list, an increase of 22% from a year ago. Six new online courses are immediately behind us (taken by 106 people); seven up-coming. Almost 200 people have taken the self-guided courses in 6 months. 164 people have signed up for Discussion Forums, with nine different topics currently available. 253 people receive our weekly fully online RE curriculum for children. We have 275 prison members, 67 of whom are in old-fashioned letter-writing matches through our prison ministry.

Podcasting. This summer our statistics showed that about 6000 people a month hit our *Quest* podcast page, with approximately 1500 going to the sermons each month, a monthly average of 1000 going to the backpage inspiration, and about 600 going to the various columns. People all over the world are listening to *Quest*.

In every area of programming, the news seems to be nothing but good, and we are directly fulfilling our mission.

However, in the area of dollars and cents, it's hard to find good news. We are, I believe, in firm control of our expenditures except in the area of staff benefits. It will come as no surprise to you that health insurance and other employee costs are bringing us to our knees—we've gone from a benefits/FICA line of \$32,178 in 2004 to a projected \$66,611 in 2007 maintaining the same core staff. At the same time, we are in desperate need of more people in the office.

In addition, clearly our revenue stream is not increasing at the pace we need it to. We optimistically tried to move from a member contributions figure in 2004 of \$238,071 to \$280,000 in 2006. A growing percentage of CLF members are young adults, prisoners, and international folks who cannot meet the expectations of member giving that we've traditionally held. Jewelry isn't as big a money-maker as it was before the days of competition. Expectations of free services over the Web limit our abilities to generate revenue in our new venues.

So. In my view, we have difficult discussions ahead. Fund-raising and member recruitment will be much on our minds. But at the same time, we'll be remembering those we serve, generating a lot of excitement about serving them better, and thanking one another for the important work done by the Board of Directors of the Church of the Larger Fellowship.

Respectfully submitted,
Jane Rzepka