

2012-2013 Board of Trustees Annual Report

When walls come down the light streams in. When old buildings get renovated, dreams are born anew. When we look one another in the eye and really see each other, we too are born anew.

It has been my privilege to serve as Chair of the Board of Trustees during this dynamic and transforming year. When the church year began last fall, the *Unity Tomorrow* project was still underway. Everywhere we looked, there were living examples of “churn:” staff operating programs out of closets and former bedrooms, unhappy discoveries beneath the asphalt and in the foundation walls, change orders, daily wrinkles, constant adaptation to new circumstances. But we are a people of faith. Through it all, the lights stayed on, the Sanctuary offered, well, sanctuary, and our staff showed unflinching adaptability and remarkable cheer.

That cheer belonged to all of us when the church re-opened, born anew. We can mingle in the Whitman Lobby outside our children’s classrooms, do our committee work in well-designed spaces, and share our kitchen, meeting rooms, and Sanctuary with community groups. We’re operating leaner and greener, and our facilities staff is sleeping better at night. We have only to stand in the Sanctuary or Parish Hall, looking through the windows to our stunning new entry lobby, to arrive at the heart of it: we’re here to connect with each other, to live out our values by working together, and to make a positive impact in the world. The architects had told us that when walls come down, “interior and exterior spaces are more naturally connected.” This happens not only to buildings, but also to people. It’s happening here.

Exhibit A: a central part of the board’s work for this past year has been the development of new five-year **Ends statements**. In the spring the board hosted a series of conversations and events in which we asked people of this church to speak of times when they acted with courage and vulnerability. We asked what it was worth being courageous about as a church. Walls came down, and stories poured forth. During the same time, we asked our partners in the community, many of whom have really struggled for dignity and justice, to describe to us the community they long to see and are working to build. I will tell you, their answers were the same. We all long to be seen and known, and to give something real of ourselves. We want to know that it makes a difference that we are here. A separate report in this packet provides a summary of the Ends renewal process, and the Ends statements themselves.

A second, separate report describes another major task of this year’s board: an investigation of our policies related to the **composition of the Executive Team**, or ET. Who has served on the ET over time, and what were their experiences? What core functions must be represented on the ET, and why? Last spring the board formed a sub-team with the charge to determine whether existing policies, by-laws, and limitations are sufficient, and if not, to recommend to the full board changes that would support both effectiveness and accountability of the ET.

While this may sound a bit wonkish, it was a fascinating study. It provided an opportunity to engage in deep conversation with church leaders and staff, both past and present. As we reflected on what we learned in those interviews, scrutinized our governing policies, and grappled with nuances and what-if’s, we gained a deep respect for the wisdom with which our predecessors designed Unity’s policies, and for the collaborative and executive skills required of each member of the ET in this covenantal model of leadership. The board concluded that no policy changes are needed. We did identify ways that the board can strengthen its own operations related to the ET. And we recommend a change to Article V of the By-laws, to more clearly state what the board’s role should be in hiring ET members who are not called ministers. A resolution to that effect appears with the ET Composition sub-team report in this packet.

The board of trustees also conducts a range of annual **evaluation activities**, in carrying out its responsibilities under policy governance. Four surveys are conducted:

- The **staff/volunteer survey** asks for direct and confidential information on how staff and volunteers perceive they are treated. Respondents have a chance to provide written comments, either positive or negative, and to have the board chair follow up on any concerns if requested. This year, eight staff and 53 volunteers answered the survey. They reported no incidents of unfair treatment or discrimination, although three comments pointed to lapses in communication or disagreement with how conflict was handled. The bulk of feedback received was enthusiastic in remarking on professionalism, clear communication, compassion, and respect in the church work environment. Many respondents applauded the effort made to ensure safe conditions even during the extreme disruption of *Unity Tomorrow* construction.
- Trustees completed a **board self-evaluation** in early summer. At our July meeting, as we planned for the second half of the year and new trustee recruitment, survey results were a starting point for structured reflection on our responsibilities, strengths and weaknesses. The discipline of this self-evaluation is, it seems to me, a good tool for a governing board. It offers a structured way to hold up a mirror, learn from one another, and strive to improve.
- Our policies require an annual **ET performance evaluation**, which we completed in August. Results are being analyzed, including differences between ET and board member responses. The November board agenda includes a discussion of the findings, along with ET work planning for 2014.
- The annual **congregational survey** is the chief means through which both the board and the ET evaluate progress toward our Ends, and identify areas that need additional time and resources. This year the board agreed to replace our traditional survey with a pilot survey being developed for the purpose of measuring spiritual growth or maturity within a congregation. The pilot project is nearing completion and in the months ahead we will assess its value to the congregation, ministers, and the board. Meanwhile, the board will be updating the 2014 congregational survey to reflect our new Ends statements.

This report would not be complete without an expression of gratitude, bordering on amazement, for the skills and dedication of my fellow trustees, our ministers and staff, and the congregation at large. My faith in the shared leadership of this church has been borne out in more ways than I could have imagined when I began as chair. Our church is filled with volunteers who make things work and get things done, even if they don't think of themselves as Leaders with a capital "L." Over and over this year, we have heard personal stories of commitment and passion. We have witnessed a readiness to take on challenges with a good will. While none of us individually brings all the skills and qualities needed to lead this church forward, together we make a pretty good team. That is cause for celebration, gratitude, and renewed optimism for our capacity to live into our mission and Ends.

In faith,
Marg Walker
Chair, Board of Trustees
Unity Church-Unitarian
November 16, 2013