

Senior Minister's Annual Report

This is the twenty-third annual report I am making to you as your Senior Minister. May I state from the outset that I continue to feel it is a privilege to serve our church. And in the year just passed I have particularly appreciated the help so many of you have given to me and to our church as we seek to carry out faithfully our many ministries for Christ.

In June of 2009 our Church Council accepted a Visioning Statement for our church which grew out of a retreat our church leaders held the previous fall. That retreat was led by Rev. Dale Hempen, our Area Conference Minister of our Massachusetts Conference of the United Church of Christ. I think the development of that Visioning Statement was an important step which can help guide our church as it now looks to its future ministries. I would ask you now to join me in reading the six major points of that Visioning Statement. They are found in your worship bulletin this morning.

- 1. Our church should become more welcoming and truly open to everyone.*
- 2. Our church should intentionally seek to welcome more young families into our congregation and minister to the needs of our young church families.*
- 3. Our church should intentionally seek to provide more inter-generational activities and contacts within our congregation.*
- 4. Our church should intentionally seek to keep our youth and young adults as an active and vibrant part of our congregation.*
- 5. Our church should do more to celebrate and make known to our wider community that we are a Christian church, which encourages people to use both their hearts and their minds in living out their Christian faith and discipleship.*
- 6. Our church should do more to encourage our congregation to develop a personal sense of Christian discipleship. Our church, more than being just another club, has a sacred mission in that we repeatedly seek to discern and follow the teachings of Jesus Christ who is the spiritual head of our church.*

Copies of the full text of that Visioning Statement are available on the Opportunity Table outside our Church Office. In this new year I would encourage all the committees and fellowship groups in our church to review that full Visioning Statement and consider what they can do, within their area of responsibility, to develop programs and procedures which help meet the goals of that statement. I thank Lise McGillicuddy, Rob Bowerman, Evelyn Johnson, and Bob Nickerson for developing that statement from the findings of our planning retreat.

All too often in church life, I've seen carefully worked out goals for the future lost sight of completely after some time passes. May that not happen with these goals, as I believe they contain some key points which, if embraced and worked on, will enrich the life of our congregation and enhance its position in our community.

In 2009, our Church Council, under the leadership of our Moderator Jan Hull, saw good results from numerous ad hoc committees it had created to better meet the fellowship and administrative needs of our church. An example of that is the Council's ad hoc Membership Committee, led by Wiley Osborn. In addition to receiving our new members, one of their important projects has been to develop name tags for our parishioners. Everyone is encouraged to wear a name tag each Sunday, so our visitors will recognize that we really seek to be a welcoming and

hospitable church family.

Another example of that is the Council's ad hoc Church Life Committee which has been working to nurture the development of new interest groups and programs in our church. If you would like to sponsor an activity or start a new group in our church, I invite you to contact that committee for assistance.

Another example is the Council's ad hoc Planned Giving Committee, led by Curt Fithian, which, with considerable input from Rich Miner, has developed our church's new Belfry Society planned giving program. Already two individuals have participated in that charitable gift annuity program which will benefit them and also our church ultimately. More participation is welcomed.

Yet another example, is the Council's ad hoc Safe Church Committee, which, after many years of effort, finally completed an entire revision of our Safe Church Policy in 2009. That was a very difficult task, to create a new policy which both interfaced with current Massachusetts laws and was realistic and detailed enough to let our church's ministries to children and youth still function effectively. I thank Valerie Harding and all those who worked with her on it at different times over recent years. Your contributions helped make our new policy a reality.

Last year our church saw the development of a number of other new programs and events, such as: Evolution Sunday, a potluck dinner and program on the Passover Seder before our Maundy Thursday Worship Service, the Women in Spirit and Service fellowship group, an adult forum on organ donations, Playtime for parents and young children, Maritime Recognition Sunday, the Deacons' Breakfast, and the Southern Christmas Breakfast Brunch after church in Advent. I thank our Religion and Science group; Wiley Osborn and our Deacons; Lane and Lysbeth Abrams and their sons; Robin Bowerman; Elizabeth Welch; Lise McGillicuddy; Tom Haynes; our Retired Men's Group; and many others whose efforts made those and other new initiatives possible last year.

In 2009, our Women's Union, whose Steering Committee is led by Barbara Bosselman, created the Rev. Nan Geertz Scholarship program, in memory of our church's late Associate Minister. That scholarship will be given annually, if possible, to a graduating high school senior who is a member of our church and going on to some form of continuing education. Criteria for awarding that scholarship include service to our church, good character, and consideration of others.

Another new development is that I have created a manual for our church's members which presents a great deal of information which may be helpful to have ready at hand. That manual has been attached to our church's resource list with parishioners' contact information, which is available each year at this time. We will update this manual along with that resource list each year. I wish to thank Martha Evans, our Office Administrator; Jan Hull; and Don Abt for their editorial help in creating that manual.

This past year I conducted funeral, grave side, and memorial services for nineteen of our church's members and friends. I want to thank our Deacons, led by John Honey; our Reception Committee, led by Beverly Gigliotti; and our Women's Union for all their help at such critical times. I know their efforts in services and receptions afterwards are greatly appreciated by our grieving families.

This past year, as usual, I visited our Falmouth Hospital on Tuesday and Fridays, and on other days as needed. Our Hospital Pastoral Visitors, led by Rev. Bobbie Miner, also visited our parishioners in the hospital most days. Fortunately, our combined visitation efforts seem to reach most of our parishioners who are admitted to that hospital. But, I do need to emphasize this. If during your admission to Falmouth Hospital you do not specify the name of our church as your religious preference, our church's visitors may not be able to find and visit you. That is due to current privacy laws.

We were also fortunate this past year in having pastoral care provided our parishioners by our Lay Ministry Committee led by Elin Sorlie and our Communion Ministers led by Howard Whitmore.

In 2009 I led Bible study classes on the formation of the Hebrew Bible, from the point of view of modern archaeology. The film "The Bible's Buried Secrets" produced by NOVA was our basic resource. I also spoke on the nature of Congregationalism to a youth group which visited our church from a sister UCC church in Coral Gables, Florida. That was their second visit to our church.

I also gave some assistance to our own church's Confirmation Class which is led by Meg Becker and Anne Dyer, with the help of our parishioners who serve as mentors. I believe that Confirmation Class is one of our church's best offerings. And, it is always a delight to see the young adults in our church complete that class and confirm for themselves, the baptismal vows which, in many cases, their parents made for them when they were younger.

Last May I also joined with Rabbi Elias Lieberman and Pamela Rothstein, both of the Falmouth Jewish Congregation, in leading sessions for members of our two congregations on life cycle observances in our respective Christian and Jewish traditions.

I continue to serve on the Church and Ministry Committee of our Barnstable Association of the Massachusetts Conference of the United Church of Christ and along with fellow UCC clergy attended Boundary Awareness Training sessions this past year.

Last year our Christian Outreach Committee, under the leadership of Sue Antilla and Carol Lyons initiated two special projects to serve the needs of others. One of those projects was their sponsorship of SERRV which brings beautiful, crafted objects to our country and helps low income artisans and their families in developing areas of our world. In another project, our Outreach Committee joined four other Falmouth congregations in sponsoring the Alternative Gift Fair held at St. Barnabas last November. I think that Fair was a wonderful opportunity for our church people and others to express their faith by supporting worthwhile causes which they then gave as gifts to their loved ones and friends.

I'm pleased to say that last May, our Outreach Committee reported that from 2008 to that point in time, their Children's Clothing Project had provided clothing for 337 children. Clearly, our Clothing Project is having a significant positive impact in our community.

Our Deacons, with the help of Linda Ryan, have initiated a new Congregational Contact Program which should help strengthen the communication and fellowship bonds within our congregation. We are thankful that Deacon Cliff Duckworth provided our balcony with new pew Bibles which match those he provided earlier for the pews on our church's main floor.

Our Board of Christian Education, led by Lise McGillicuddy, and with considerable help from Laura Abbott, our Director of Christian Education, continues to oversee our fine rotation-style Church School curriculum program. This past year the Board has also been working on better publicizing our church school offerings through a brochure in our pews. Informative banners at our church's back entrance on Katharine Lee Bates Road are also being developed.

Last Advent our church held what amounted to its 41st Annual Christmas Fair. Led by Jan Hull, it was a fine opportunity for fellowship. It also did well financially. The same things were also true of the Women's Union's Rummage Sale last May.

This past year our Trustees, under the leadership of Dick Meyer and Walter Slaboden, have completed a number of important projects on our church property. For example, special thanks is due to Walter for his tireless efforts in making repairs to both the Manse and the fence in front of it. As reported, one estimate to fix that fence amounted to \$44,000. But Walt was able to fix it for \$3,800, less than a 1/10 of that estimate. Also, the Trustees' newly formed Green Church Committee, led by Tom Stone, has, with the help of Cape Light Compact, changed lights in our

church, which should lead to a power saving of \$3,600 to \$4,500 each year.

At this time, I'd also like to express a note of thanks for the generosity of the late Connie Faxon. Connie's legacy, along with the contributions of many others who've loved this church, have, through the years, helped make it possible for us to care for our church facility and to support our church's ministries.

Last fall our Stewardship Committee, led by Hal Peterson, produced a very well designed booklet in their "Active Discipleship" pledge campaign. That booklet contained testimonies as to the value of our church's ministry to a number of our parishioners. I found those testimonies very meaningful and believe they spoke to the heart of what our congregation as a church of Jesus Christ is and always should be about. Many responded generously to that pledge campaign, and for that we are thankful. But also, given these difficult economic times in which many American churches, even well established ones like ours, have suffered, we faced a shortfall both in that pledge drive and in the fulfillment of many pledges made for 2009. Added to that was the fact that in 2009 the lease of a major renter of our facility was not renewed.

Without a doubt, our church faces some financial challenges in 2010. But, I would say this. While being prudent in planning and conducting our affairs, we should also remember that we are a Christian church and a people of faith. That's who we are. We are a church people who bear witness in our worship every Sunday morning, that we believe in God and in God's providence. Whatever challenges face us in this new year and in the years ahead, we need to remember that the resolution of those concerns is not up to us 100%. In fact, it has never been up to us 100%. For it is the providence of God which always has and always will, lead and help provide for this now 301 year old congregation, as it moves forward into God's future.

This new year now ahead of us contains a number of bright spots which may enhance the life and worship of our congregation, and also help our church be more appealing to different age groups of parishioners. That broadening of our appeal is a goal reflected in our Visioning Statement.

One of those bright spots is that through the efforts of a special subcommittee, our Deacons and our Music Committee, under the leadership of Karin Bohr, are now engaged in a project to secure new hymnals for our sanctuary. That project will primarily be supported through individual subscriptions and memorial funds. Our present hymnal was first published more than fifty years ago. In my experience the introduction of a new hymnal can be a wonderfully joyous time for a congregation, as favorite classic hymns are affirmed and refreshing new hymns are discovered.

Another bright spot is that we will be experimenting with some contemporary worship services on selected Sunday mornings. Those services will be well advertised in our church in advance and we will solicit feedback on them from our parishioners as we explore them.

Another bright spot is that we are developing a family-oriented Easter pageant, which will be offered as our first worship service, at 9:30am on Easter morning. Our 11:00am Easter service will continue to be our traditional service.

Another bright spot is that we are in the process of developing a new pictorial directory, which likely, as usual, will be created at no cost to our church.

Another bright spot is that we are considering developing a Facebook page for our church. I thank Tom Ryan, our church's web master, for his help with that.

I think the times really are changing and particularly in the fields of communication and publicity. The Internet and technological devices such as iPhones and Kindles are having a significant impact upon our lives and upon our Western Civilization's centuries-long dependence upon the printed word. In this new year, I hope we can carefully review and improve as indicated, the ways in which our church communicates to our congregation and to the larger community

around us.

Recently, our Deacons and our Church Council essentially affirmed that future ministerial search committees in our church should, without restrictions as to sexual orientation,

consider all candidates and present the best candidate to the congregation for a vote in accordance with existing by-laws.

The matter of whether or not our church will sponsor any kind of worship service to seek God's blessing on the union or marriage of same gender couples is a matter which is still being studied. Our Deacons have invited the feedback of our parishioners on that matter.

As I look into the future of our church, there are two positive things which I think would be good to work for. One of those things is a mission trip which involves our youth. Such trips can be life changing experiences.

The other thing is that I feel our church could well benefit from having another Associate Minister. From my perspective as Sr. Minister, our church is not small. It has, as our Church Clerk has now reported, 587 full members and 37 Associate Members giving us a membership total of 624 persons. I challenge anyone to keep track of the lives and serve all the church needs of 624 adults. Most of those persons, at one time or another, and whether or not they live in our community, call upon the services of our church, pastorally or otherwise.

We were all greatly saddened by the untimely death of our Associate Minister, Rev. Nan Geertz, in 2005. In a variety of ways, Nan expanded the ministerial offerings of our church and helped substantially with pastoral coverage. But then, we lost Nan, and we also lost that ministerial position on our church staff as well. My view is that it would be in the best interest of our church, if we made it a priority, to work for securing another Associate Minister in the future, even if that began as a part time position. And then, over time, as finances allowed it, that position could be expanded.

I wish to give special thanks to our Moderator Jan Hull, and our two Head Deacons, John Honey and Tom Haynes, who have always been there for me as a support and source of good counsel. I wish to thank our church's Honorary Ministers for their assistance to me in our church's ministry, namely Allan Page, Al Allenby, Bob Singer, Bobbie Miner, and Bill Tucker.

I also wish to give special thanks to our church staff who are so dedicated to our church, and who more often than many people realize, have been responsible for our church's ministry moving forward as smoothly and as effectively as it does. I thank Martha Evans, our Office Administrator; Laura Abbot, our Director of Christian Education; Howard Whitmore, our Director of Music; Pat Crews, our Organist; and Rick Hendricks, our Sexton.

Given time restraints, in this report I have not been able to mention every new development or specifically name every person who has made a significant contribution to our church's ministry last year. But, please know that I am thankful to you for your efforts.

And now, with God's help, and with faith and thanksgiving, we all move into 2010, this new year, with new hope, new ideas, and renewed commitment to our Christian faith, and to this our beloved Falmouth church. Amen.

Respectfully submitted,
Rev. Dr. Douglas K. Showalter