

BOARD BITS

At the January Governing Board meeting:

- The board voted to support Carey Taylor-Noble in her application for a grant from the Unitarian Universalist Association to start an ecumenical youth program that would bring together youth of different faiths for ecumenical services that would be held at various churches, including Bell Street Chapel. The program will not cost Bell Street any money; it would be run on the grant, if approved.
- The board has been working on updating the membership list for certification in February. It is also working on updating the membership directory.
- The board met with Parish and Social Concerns Chairperson Clara Hardy to discuss asking the congregation to choose one main social issue to rally around this year, to help focus our social action efforts and work cohesively as a church.
- The board made a commitment to do public relations on our church's behalf to make our church better known.
- The Board has received our church's license to show films from most major studios without copyright infringement at our monthly movie night.
- The Board gave informal support to an informal request from the Rhode Island Film Festival to use Eddy Hall for its LGBT film series in August, at a date and time to be determined.

-Meredyth Waterman,
Secretary



The Religious Society of Bell Street Chapel

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**“Love is the spirit of our church
and service is its law**

**This is our great covenant:
To dwell together in peace,
To seek the truth in love,
And to help one another.”**

MOVIE NIGHT

Friday, Feb. 8, 6:30 p.m., Eddy Hall

Bell Street Chapel's Movie Night series continues on Feb. 8 at 6:30 p.m. in Eddy Hall. February's movie, selected especially for Valentine's Day, is about a loving and very lovable drag queen whose traditional ideas about romance and love remind us that we all have so much in common, no matter what our gender identity or sexual orientation. This character is truly unforgettable. Our church video license agreement, which keeps us in compliance with copyright laws, prohibits advertising the film by name, but see if you can guess what the film is. Those who can't wait until Feb. 8 to find out can call or e-mail Bell Street Chapel or Carol Crowley (ccrowley8@cox.net or (401) 272-2088). Thanks to our talented audiovisual technician, Genevieve Peri, these films are shown on a large screen with excellent acoustics. We invite you to join us. Bring food or non-alcoholic beverages to share – and bring your friends to Bell Street Chapel's Movie Night!



■ FEBRUARY

■ 2008

BELL STREET COLUMNS

NEWSLETTER FOR THE RELIGIOUS SOCIETY OF BELL STREET CHAPEL

WORSHIP SERVICE SCHEDULE

SERVICES BEGIN AT 10 A.M.

TODDLER CARE AND SUNDAY SCHOOL AVAILABLE

3 | FEBRUARY GOD AND THE NEW PHYSICS *Carol Martino*

The 20th century witnessed a profound change in our scientific understanding of the material universe. We entered the century believing that the universe was a great clockwork and human beings, simply passive witnesses to its movements. Discoveries in quantum physics, however, have put us back at the center of things. It seems that we impotent “cogs in the machine” have become the co-creators of the universe.

10 | FEBRUARY LIVING NON-VIOLENTLY *Rev. Bill Robinson*

17 | FEBRUARY THE PERFECT MINISTER *Peter Bowden*

Our congregations fight with a tradition having a professional do it all. Perhaps one day we will build a robot that can do all the things we expect from ministers. Peter Bowden, seasoned lay leader, TV producer, and minister's spouse will share insight into how we can change our ways, perhaps finding a little bit of that perfect minister in all of us.

24 | FEBRUARY ESSENTIAL AGREEMENTS WITH OURSELVES *Rev. Bill Robinson*

IN THE INTERIM: HOSPITALITY

I was wandering around the Parish House this week and uncovered a small cache of brochures about “hospitality” written by the Rev. Peter Morales. The essay printed on three of the six panels was directly related to welcoming visitors.

Peter suggests that the reader: “Think of a time when you have felt truly welcomed . . . Relive those feelings for a moment . . . Feel that warmth again; see those smiles and feel those arms embracing you . . .” Hospitality well planned and well performed can be quite powerful.

It needs to be well planned because visitors can tell when welcoming is a second-rate, casual effort, and of little apparent interest to the person actually doing the welcoming. It needs to be well performed because the person doing the welcoming needs to be thoughtful and prepared to warmly welcome visitors and to respond to their questions. According to Peter, hospitality is both a spiritual discipline and an expression of spiritual health. He suggests that it is oh so difficult to be gracious and hospitable if one feels angry or hurt or unloved in another area of their life. This makes it impossible for us to extend a warm welcome to another. However, if one is at peace and “filled with joy at being alive” then it is relatively easy to extend warm and fulsome hospitality.

This is true not only for an individual but also for a religious community. A congregation with relatively poor spiritual health will find it very difficult to extend a warm and heartfelt welcome to visitors. The greeting just won't come across as being authentic. Peter suggests that the phrase “Hospitality is love in action” should be the prime directive.

The tradition of providing hospitality to travelers has long been the rule of the religions that developed in the desert. From time immemorial travelers would ask for lodging to protect themselves from robbers or coming storms. The property holders would be obligated by their religion to offer hospitality to the visitors. This is mentioned in several stories in the Hebrew and Christian Bibles and in the Koran.

In Buddhist tradition hospitality is more than an obligation; it is a spiritual practice. Hospitality is considered to be a relatively simple way to connect with each other which is important because Buddhists believe that compassion extends beyond our time here on Earth. In the meantime practicing hospitality is a way that enables us to connect with what is loving and sacred in our lives and to welcome others to our community.

And, of course, the nicest aspect of hospitality is that it enables us to meet others who we don't yet know. It is a way to connect with each other. It provides opportunities to shake hands across the pews or to enjoy a cup of coffee together during Social Hour. Peter ends his essay with the following thought, “. . . As stewards of hospitality, we . . . stand ready to look at each other face-to-face, and to see the divine in each person.”
What a gift it is to be welcomed.

~ Rev. Bill

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MINISTERS

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INTERIM PARISH MINISTER

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To schedule an appointment contact him at
revbillrobinson@msn.com or at (508) 226-2910.*

REV. MARY MARGARET EARL
COMMUNITY MINISTER

REV. BEN HALL
COMMUNITY MINISTER

CHURCH STAFF

HEIDI GILKENSON, OFFICE MANAGER
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RELIGIOUS EDUCATION, KATE GILLIS
PARISH/SOCIAL CONCERNS, CLARA HARDY
WORSHIP, AUDREY GREENE

NEWSLETTER COMMITTEE

MEREDYTH WATERMAN, EDITOR
TERRY BARBOUNIS, LAYOUT/DESIGN

CONGREGATIONAL AFFAIRS

FROM THE BOARD GROWTH IS OUR FUTURE

This past month, in preparation for the mid-year congregational meeting, the Governing Board has been talking a lot about the future of Bell Street Chapel. During these discussions, one topic kept returning to the table: growing our membership.

As a board, we believe that efforts to grow and sustain our membership are critical to the future sustainability of our church. Without providing an exact numerical answer to the question of "How big do we need to be?" below are some suggested guidelines.

The membership of Bell Street needs to be large enough that:

- The annual canvass fundraiser can sustain a full-time minister and fulfill our annual commitments to the UUA and BCD without sacrificing other needs (committee budgets; appropriate administrative support; etc.).
- We have a "bench" of volunteers so that we don't risk burnout among those who are currently serving the congregation in various capacities.
- We are building a base of prospective leaders (board members, committee chairs) who have time to learn about the positions they will fill prior to assuming office.
- We are energized and enthusiastic about supporting an active agenda of social justice activities.
- We are not worried about Bell Street's future.

How can you help? At the mid-year meeting, we'll share our belief that there is a way for every one of us to use our individual strengths to support growth.

- Sign up to be a greeter for one (or two or three!) Sunday mornings.
- Bring a snack, help to set up or clean up coffee hour.
- Offer to help teach one session of a new member class
- Introduce yourself to a new face at coffee hour
- Bring a friend to Bell Street
- Participate in a Parish and Social Concerns Committee-sponsored activity—these activities are what drew many of us to Bell Street.

~ Jen Shimkus
Treasurer

MARCH NEWSLETTER

The March newsletter deadline is Feb. 17 at 8 p.m., firm. Please submit your articles as a Word attachment – not in the body of the e-mail – to Meredyth Waterman at MeredythW@aol.com. If you are sending photos, please save them as a .jpg, and if you can, save them at a high resolution, but not a gigantic size. (200 dpi, 5 by 7 inches is good.) Your cooperation and contributions are very much appreciated.

(UN) WELCOMING CHURCHES: HOW DO VISITORS SEE US?

Reprinted with permission from InterConnections, a publication of the Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations

Recently, I was traveling to a large city and took the opportunity to attend services at the closest UU congregation. As a board member and congregational president, I look forward to visiting other congregations when traveling. I arrived thirty minutes prior to the service to have some coffee and chat with the local people. A membership committee member met me at the church entrance and gave me a different color nametag, which I was told would identify me as a visitor.

I followed my nose to the coffee area and walked the length of the large room, where coffee and fellowship abounded. Upon getting a cup of coffee, I began my mission to chat with like-minded souls and see how they did church. To that point, no one had looked at me. But, armed with a friendly smile on my face, a special visitor nametag, and a full cup of coffee, I wandered around a room filled with folks chatting and laughing with one another.

First, I worked a string of tables with easels, literature, and sign-up sheets. Since only two of the positions behind the easels were staffed, I spoke with one of them about what her easel was advocating. She quickly filled me in, and then without additional chatter, she turned back to the only other person behind the tables to continue their conversation.

At the beginning of the service, the board member making the announcements invited visitors and guests to meet with members of the church leadership after the service.

With anticipation of a new beginning, I went to the designated place after the service and found the leaders engaged in conversation—among themselves. It became obvious that it was up to me, the visitor, to try to break up their chat clusters and introduce myself. I did just that, but found they were more interested in conducting church business with one another than in mak-

ing an effort to welcome a visitor or potential new member.

The whole experience reminded me of the membership seminars held at UU University before General Assembly 2005. There, members of the Jefferson Unitarian Church of Golden, CO, tried to teach us that every member of a congregation needs to be proactive in making visitors feel welcome. They also told us that church business should not be conducted during the Sunday morning experience.

Would I return to that church? Definitely not. But as I reflected later upon my own home congregation and that Sunday morning experience, I thought: We are a lot like them.

I've been just as guilty as their leaders—many times! After that experience, I returned to my home congregation with great enthusiasm for improving our greeting of guests and visitors. Being welcoming isn't hard. Look a visitor in the eye and tell them you're glad they've come. Help them find a seat and chat with them at coffee hour. Years later many UUs can still remember who greeted them on their first Sunday. It's a memory worth making, and if visitors take away one good memory they might overlook a cobweb in the bathroom or a glitch in the sound system. To ensure that your congregation is truly welcoming to visitors, share and discuss this article with others in your congregation.

~Donald Skinner
InterConnections editor

CLEAN BATHROOMS, HALF AND HALF, CREATE WARM WELCOME

Reprinted with permission from InterConnections, a publication of the Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations

Tandi Rogers Koerger, program specialist for the UUA's Pacific Northwest District, developed a list of "Thirteen Steps to Start Your Church Year Strong." Here are a few of them.

1. Bathroom sniff test: Is your church bathroom up to "company standards?" I especially love those congregations that put out a basket of goodies like fragrance-free lotion, band-aids, feminine products, safety pins, diapers, and wipes.
2. Sound system: Respect your assembled community and the folks who lovingly put together the worship enough to make sure the sound system works seamlessly. Train a cadre of people who can work technical magic and can step in when needed. Practice using the equipment.
3. Greeters as ministry: Wouldn't it be great to be greeted at the door by someone who knows you by name and says, "How are you? I'm so glad to see you!" Blessed are the greeters who take special care with visitors. Remember your first day?
4. Name tags: They're a matter of hospitality and good manners. Another purpose is tracking. After church ask people to put their name-tags in a basket. Your membership counter will know who attended.
5. Real cream: We are so into our free-trade organic coffee and usually fumble on the nasty powdered milk substitute. Spring for the real cream (or half-and-half). It makes a difference.
6. Search team of possibilities: Skip a couple Sundays and check out other churches. What good ideas could you bring back? I think it would be fun to have an organized team go out and systematically search for possibilities to share with their leadership.

FINANCE COMMITTEE OUR FINANCIAL HEALTH

We are more than halfway through the fiscal year and we are doing well financially. All of our bills are current and our income is keeping pace with our expenses. However, with the loss of the parking lot rental income from VHB, committees need to keep an eye on their budgets. It is also recommended that we do not replace our cleaning service until we find a way to replace the lost income.

You should have received your annual pledge letters by now. It shows your total pledge donations for 2007 and outstanding pledge for fiscal year 2008. If there are any errors with your letter, please contact our Treasurer, Jen Shimkus.

We have also been working with the Leadership Development Committee to recruit four members for the Canvass Committee. The Canvass Committee will develop and execute the strategy for the annual fund drive, which will end in April.

Finally, we would like to thank you for your continued support. Please do not hesitate to contact a member of the Finance Committee should you have any questions, concerns or need detailed financial information and thank you for making and honoring your pledge commitment.

~ The Finance Committee

(Joe Chaves, Jen Shimkus, John Simmonds, Phil Smith, Lyn Stein)

	JUL-DEC ACTUAL	JUL-DEC BUDGET	VARIANCE	ANNUAL BUDGET
INCOME				
- PLEDGES	\$24,546.00	\$27,500.00	(\$2,954.00)	\$55,000.00
- SUNDAY COLLECTIONS	\$6,880.00	\$3,736.00	\$3,144.00	\$7,472.00
- INTERESTS AND INVESTMENTS	\$27,320.00	\$23,988.00	\$3,333.00	\$47,975.00
- RENTALS	\$5,800.00	\$6,750.00	(\$950.00)	\$13,500.00
- EVENTS AND FUNDRAISING	\$4,176.00	\$3,125.00	\$1,051.00	\$6,250.00
- OTHER INCOME	\$3,142.00	\$0.00	\$3,142.00	\$0.00
TOTAL INCOME	\$71,864.00	\$65,099.00	\$6,766.00	\$130,197.00
EXPENSES				
- SALARY AND BENEFITS	\$35,593.00	\$38,477.00	(\$2,884.00)	\$76,954.00
- ADMINISTRATIVE EXPENSES	\$9,726.00	\$9,947.00	(\$221.00)	\$19,893.00
- BUILDING AND GROUNDS	\$6,820.00	\$9,500.00	(\$2,680.00)	\$19,000.00
- DENOMINATIONAL AFFAIRS	\$0.00	\$1,475.00	(\$1,475.00)	\$2,950.00
- OTHER EXPENSES	\$950.00	\$5,700.00	(\$4,750.00)	\$11,400.00
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$53,089.00	\$65,099.00	(\$12,009.00)	\$130,197.00
NET INCOME GAIN/LOSS	\$18,775.00	\$0.00	\$18,775.00	\$0.00

CONGREGATIONAL AFFAIRS



GUEST SPEAKER FEBRUARY 17TH

Peter Bowden is a children's television producer and consultant working with Unitarian Universalist congregations across the United States. He works on the Emmy Award-winning show Peep and the Big Wide World and the Curious George show. In addition, Peter consults with UU congregation across the United States on small group ministry, UU evangelism, and congregational growth strategies. Peter lives in Newport with his wife, the Rev. Amy Freedman.

CONFLICT WORKSHOP

Conflict Transformation Workshop
Feb. 23, 8 a.m. to 3 p.m.

The plans for the Conflict Transformation Workshop are under way. There will be five sessions, each 30 to 60 minutes long:

- Understanding Conflict
- Personal Styles of Response to Conflict
- Learning Collaborative Skills
- Practicing Collaborative Skills
- Congregational Conflict

They are all based on materials developed by the Lombard Mennonite Peace Center, which runs workshops on and provides mediation for congregational conflict. There will be ample time for questions and discussion. Of course, there will also be a continental breakfast, lunch, and several breaks.

In order that we can get the most out of our limited time, participants will be asked to read 16 pages of material and to complete a self-assessment exercise on personal styles of response to conflict in advance.

The goal of this workshop is to discuss conflict in general terms; to learn not to be frightened or put off by it; and to come to view it as

CONFLICT WORKSHOP

CONTINUED FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

an opportunity for change for the better, both for the congregation and for personal growth. Usually what prevents us from thinking of disagreement in this way is the lack confidence in our skills for dealing with it. Hopefully, this workshop will improve our skills and our confidence.

Bell Street's interim period, like most transitions, will probably provide ample opportunity to practice and hone these new skills. As conflicts emerge we will schedule appropriate venues for getting interested parties together to discuss and resolve their differences.

Speak to Carol Crowley (ccrowley8@cox.net or (401) 272-2088) if you are interested in signing up for this workshop. We are requesting a donation of \$10 to cover the cost of materials and food.

HOUSE COMMITTEE

The House Committee has been moving forward on several projects around our property. Maybe you've already noticed the lovely new porch floor, stairs and repaired railings on the Parish House. Or perhaps (more subtly) the new paint in the bathroom, thanks to the work of our chairman, Frank Faltus.

We have another simple project coming up with which we would like your help: On Sunday Feb. 3, after service, we will descend upon the pews of our sanctuary with some vintage-style screws to replace some missing ones and make the pews more secure. We've resisted the temptation to give this event a name, though several racy ones have come to mind. It won't take long if we have help, so bring your flathead screwdriver (not electric, just manual, please) and come, um, fasten screws with us.

CONTINUED NEXT COLUMN

FROM THE HEART

Beauty in the Midst of Struggle

Yearlong, McAuley House guests, struggling with homelessness, addictions and other challenges, work with local artist Kathy King to create artwork. Please join our celebration:

An art show and open house with food, music, flowers and beauty.

Thursday, Feb. 7, 5 p.m. to 7 p.m. at McAuley House, 622 Elmwood Ave., Providence.

Please RSVP to Rev. Mary Margaret Earl at (401) 941-9013, extension 302.

In other news, our new approach to the Sparkle Project seemed to be pretty effective in January. On Jan. 13, a number of members and friends stayed after coffee hour and participated in a cleaning blitz, some even bringing their own vacuums. It didn't take long, and our church looked terrific afterwards. This blitz will now be scheduled the second Sunday of each month after service. Let's keep up that kind of energy and help keep Bell Street sparkling. Again, we expect this to be just a temporary plan until we are able to hire a cleaning service.

Finally, we have a few spots that we would like to try to get out of our carpets. If you have a carpet cleaning machine that you wouldn't mind lending to us for a day, please contact Meredyth Waterman at MeredythW@aol.com or (401) 451-2322. Thanks!

MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEE

Clara Hardy and I have been asking people to greet on Sunday mornings. I would like people to sign up in advance. Greeting is an independent action that is not connected to making coffee. Clara is the chairperson of the Parish and Social Concerns Committee. Her energy has helped move the Membership Committee to keep on top of the greeting sign-ups.

We are also in the process of updating the membership directory, with help from Meredyth Waterman and Heidi Gilkenson.

I also want to thank Joe and Arline Davis, Stan Kuziel, Jasmine Appleberry, Annette and Tom Briand and Rev. Bill Robinson for their constant support.

As we move toward spring, I hope more people will volunteer a day here and there as a greeter.

~ Steve Kagan
Chair



CONGREGATIONAL AFFAIRS



FEBRUARY | CALENDAR OF EVENTS

PH=PARISH HOUSE | S=SANTUARY | EH=EDDY HALL | MPL=MEET IN PARKING LOT | MO=MINISTER'S OFFICE | OS=OFFSITE | L=LIBRARY

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
					1	2 8 am Sitting meditation (EH)
3 9 am Choir (S) 10 am Service (S) 11 am coffee hour (EH) 11:30 am sandwiches (EH)	4	5 6:30 pm Worship Committee (PH)	6 6 pm Order of Service deadline	7	8 6:30 pm Movie Night (EH)	9 8 am Sitting meditation (EH)
10 9 am Choir (S) 10 am Service (S) 11:30 pm Cleaning Blitz (S)	11 6:30 pm Finance Committee (PH) 7 pm Adult RE	12 7:30 pm Governing Board (PH)	13 6 pm Order of Service deadline	14 7 pm Bible Study (PH)	15 Parish and Social Concerns Film Night (EH)	16
17 9 am Choir (S) 10 am Service (S) 8 pm newsletter deadline	18 President's Day 7 pm Adult RE	19 7:15 pm House Committee (PH)	20 6 pm Order of Service deadline	21 7 pm Bible Study (PH)	22	23 8 am—3 pm Conflict transformation workshop (EH)
24 9 am newsletter fold (EH) 9 am Choir (S) 10 am Service (S) 11 am coffee hour 11:30 Midyear meeting	25 7 pm Adult RE	26 6 pm Parish & Social Concerns (EH) 7 pm Membership (PH)	27 6 pm Order of Service deadline 6:30 pm Leadership Development (PH)	28	29	

MINISTERIAL SEARCH COMMITTEE

By now, many of you have completed the preliminary survey. Your participation in the survey process helps us better understand and represent the issues most important to you and articulate the unique strengths and assets of Bell Street Chapel. Your input is valued in every step of our process, which, while off to a great start, still has so many inviting steps. We invite you into our thinking process with a timeline for the coming months.

January/February:

The Ministerial Search Committee participated in a retreat on Jan 4 and 5, held at the Attleboro Unitarian Universalist Church, led by Robert Sarly. This retreat helped teach us skills in shaping our visions, effective communication, making mindful decisions and collaboration.

We will be compiling and carefully reviewing the ideas you have generously offered in the first survey. We plan to share a summary of the major points, and perhaps surprising developments, in the March newsletter, and to hold a meeting after the March 2 service to answer any questions.

March/April:

On March 2, the Ministerial Search Committee will lead the worship service with a focus on its work and discoveries. During these months the committee members plan on attending other committee meetings to learn from their shared perspectives.

“Cottage Meetings”: From mid-March to mid-April, we will be facilitating “cottage meetings” for members and friends. The committee anticipates rich, meaningful, and informative dialogue will emerge from these small groups, which will greatly add to our comprehension of your likes, wishes, concerns, and hopes. These small group meetings will be held at

congregants’ homes on a volunteer basis, at different times during the week.

May/June:

In late spring, our second, more detailed survey will be distributed, taking into consideration what we have learned through your input thus far. These results will be shared with the congregation.

Congregation Workshops: At a date yet to be arranged, the committee will offer a workshop entitled “Beyond Categorical Thinking,” which can help all of us to expand, open and diversify our thinking in considering visions of a future settled minister. An additional workshop may also be offered in the future with the topic to be determined, based upon what could be most helpful at the time and with your feedback in mind.

June/October:

All these steps should guide us toward an important task we will undertake during these months, that of the creation of a congregational record that represents Bell Street Chapel to future ministerial candidates. We remind everyone who may be attending church-related events to bring a camera if possible, so that the memories, spirit and varied activities that help to characterize us can be well-represented. Photos should be forwarded to committee member Ray Perreault.

As we approach these next steps, we are encouraged and bolstered by the creative, collaborative, forward-thinking energy of the Bell Street Chapel community. As always, we are available during coffee hour, by phone, and by e-mail for any questions or thoughts.

~ Jasmine Appleberry
Ministerial Search Committee