

## President's Message to Congregation—Semi-Annual Meeting—October 13, 2011

Six months ago, the new Board of Trustees inherited some serious problems. The congregation seemed to be divided into two factions who appeared to differ strongly about whether or not Pastor Bud should continue as our minister, and a large group of people who felt caught in the middle of a confusing conflict about personalities. For many of us, this division in our society came without much warning. We experienced confusion, pain, and anger. There was a lot of blaming.

After the spring pledge drive, our congregation became aware of a budget shortfall which forced us to reduce the minister's compensation and hours. We had to adjust rapidly to the unexpected crisis of not having enough money to pay a full-time minister. We still don't understand all the reasons for the pledge shortfall, but it suggests that the conflict was not just about personalities, but also about how to use our UU society's financial resources. Whatever the reasons were, the conflict was not a pretty sight, but it was not the end of our society. We have survived because we are intelligent and loving people who have come together because we adhere to certain principles such as "We affirm and promote the inherent worth and dignity of every person."

We are meeting today because we are halfway through our church year. It is time to begin planning our program and our budget for the next church year and for what will happen when Pastor Bud retires. Soon, our congregation will need to make a choice about the level of professional ministry we want, and how much we are willing to pay for it. Today, we will begin a conversation about that choice. The conversation should not be about the virtues or shortcomings of our current minister, or any perceived past injustices or offenses, but rather about what level of ministerial services we want both now and after Pastor Bud retires.

We must be clear about the fact that if we decide we want a full-time minister, we should make a multi-year commitment to paying for a full-time minister. In addition, we should consider the possibility that other options may have advantages for us beyond costing less money. Because of Pastor Bud's sabbatical, we have had recent experience of not having a minister available, so this is a good time to consider various possible futures, including part-time ministry with increased congregational participation and becoming a fellowship with no paid minister.

In a survey last year, we learned that many members felt that the Board of Trustees had not communicated and consulted with the congregation about vitally important issues until decisions were already made. Your new Board of Trustees heard you, and that's why we are consulting with you now, out in the open, six months before our budget for next year will be presented for your approval. Today's meeting has been arranged so that we will have time for that consultation. Committee chairs have prepared written reports, which many of you have already read. Most of them will be here to answer any questions you may have. Pastor Bud will be reporting to you on his activities, and will present his viewpoint on the value of professional ministry for our society. Several Board members will be prepared to answer questions about comparative costs of various options, and about the history of our pledge drives.

Today we are asking you for curiosity and civility. We know that everyone here is concerned about the long term future of our society. If you have come here with some residual anger in your heart, remember that moving forward requires giving up all hope of a better past. We're not here to rehash past grievances, or to blame or praise our minister or any other member of our society. In fact, if our discussion veers in that direction, I will redirect it immediately.

The Board of Trustees is not asking for any decisions today. We are asking you to spend a few months thinking about the next five years and deciding what you want for and need from this society. You will be expressing that decision as a congregation when we vote on next year's budget in April, and more importantly, when you make your pledge during our next pledge drive.