



# Leaping Ahead

Annual Report 2010 - 2011

First Unitarian Church of Des Moines  
A Unitarian Universalist Church



## Minister's Message

Take a look at this report and marvel with me at how much we accomplished in 2010-2011.

We grew in membership, Sunday morning attendance, and religious education enrollment and overall participation. We grew in opportunities for spiritual enrichment and community, adding Wellspring to our already vibrant Wednesday night and Sunday morning programming. We grew in serving our community and this world we share, with our social justice working groups leading the way. And we grew in our giving, enabling us to add two new staff positions, mid-year, to help manage our growth.

We nurtured another ministerial intern, continuing our commitment to developing the next generation of UU ministers. We began a new bell choir, kicked-off a concert series, and improved our web presence. We were selected as a UUA "Leap of Faith" congregation, working with and learning from another vibrant UU congregation in Albuquerque, NM. And we successfully hosted our district's annual conference, welcoming more than 400 UUs to Des Moines for a weekend in April, leaving a good and lasting impression on all those who attended.

There can be no doubt about it: We are a congregation that is leaping ahead, finding new ways to be open to life, expecting to love and prepared to serve. So take a look at this report and appreciate all that we have done. And don't stop dreaming of what we still can do. Liberal religion is alive and well in Central Iowa, and we are making it happen...together.

See you in church!

Rev. Mark Stringer

## Leaping Ahead

In early Fall 2010, First Unitarian Church of Des Moines was invited by the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) to join a project dubbed “Leap of Faith,” focused on congregational growth. Four goals for our church resulted from our participation:

1. Enable the creation of a strong young adult community
2. Implement technology in the auditorium to improve quality and accessibility of Sunday services
3. Implement a well-attended third service
4. Maximize parking capacity within existing facilities

We moved quickly to strengthen our young adult programming and improve parking facilities. We applied and were selected for the Spring 2011 Prairie Star District Chalice Lighter Grant to improve our auditorium audio and video capabilities. Planning is now underway for the addition of the third service.

The success of the Leap of Faith project led to an exciting new challenge. Our church has been selected by the UUA as a mentoring congregation for All Souls Unitarian Universalist Church of New London, Connecticut for the 2011-2012 church year. This will be an opportunity for learning and growth for both our churches.

*A review of accomplishments and progress in 2011-2012 shows First Unitarian Church of Des Moines to be on solid ground for Leaping Ahead!*



## Religious Education

“My son, Braden, participated in the first ever Chalice Camp at church this summer. He was so excited to tell me all about the cool things he did each day- the music time, the arts and crafts, and the fellowship with his church friends. I was so excited that all of these “cool” things had a special spiritual meaning that contributed to his personal and spiritual growth. He can’t wait to go again next year!”  
 – Jennifer Senne (Braden is in 4th grade)

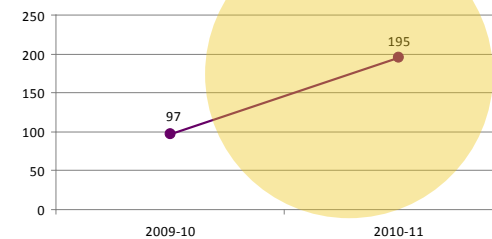
“OWL was a gift to my son and our family this year. I am confident that my son will be able to navigate the terrain towards adult sexuality with dignity (for himself and his partners), safety, and joy. The conversations we had with him and the respect he received from the adults teaching the class made him a stronger person and us a better family. Thank you!”  
 – Darcie Vandegrift



OWL (Our Whole Lives) engaged 28 middle school youth in a comprehensive human sexuality curriculum, led by highly trained volunteers, with accurate, age-appropriate information.

Inaugural year for Chalice Camp with 37 children entering 1st through 6th grade participating.

Children and Youth enrolled in R.E. Programs Doubled in Two Years



# Membership & Congregational Life

First Unitarian welcomed **45 new members** between 2010 and 2011. These new friends brought new ideas and new energy into the vision, passion, and work of our church.



“When our family moved to Des Moines, we were looking for a community of people who shared our values; a place where all are welcome and where rationality and spirituality are not mutually exclusive. At First Unitarian Church, we felt welcomed from the very first time we visited.

Since then, it has become a centerpiece of both our social and spiritual lives.”

-- Michael Ream, Judy Walden, and Sofia

“Late last summer, we moved from San Francisco to Des Moines not knowing a soul. We craved a progressive community of people committed to social justice and engaged in exploring life’s big questions, and we feel

we have found a home at First Unitarian Church of Des Moines. Thanks to the church’s unwavering support of marriage equality, we visited First Unitarian knowing that our family would be welcomed and supported.”

-- Calla Rongerude

An array of already flourishing adult education opportunities grew by two giant steps forward with the addition of two programs: Wellspring, a program of personal spiritual exploration and growth, and ARAOM (Anti-Racism, Anti-Oppression, Multiculturalism) Study Group.

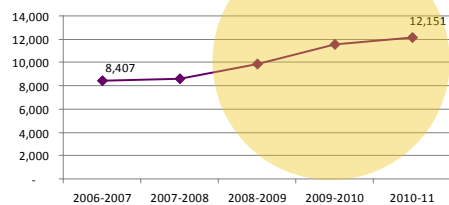
Other new ventures included a Young Adults group, the River Rats, Youth Scouting, Girls Night Out, Boys Night Out, and FUUN Night.

Ministerial Intern Kali Hayslett began her ten month term of ministry and learning at First Unitarian in August, 2010, leading to ordination in August, 2011.

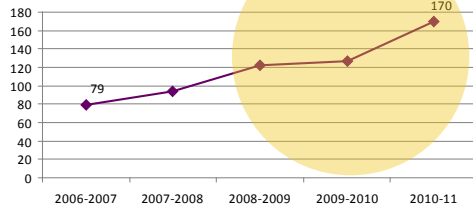
Hosted a VERY successful Prairie Star District Conference and Youth Def Con with more than 400 UUs converging on Des Moines in April.



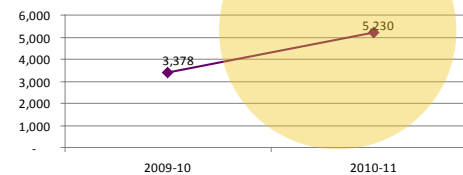
Service Attendance Grew 44% in Five Years



Completed Visitor Cards Grew 115% in Five Years



Wednesday Night Programming and Meeting Participation Increased 55% in Two Years



## Music

From concerts by special musicians to the presence of First Unitarian's talented musicians, our church was filled with song. During 48 weekends and three Canvass Campaign events, **697 volunteer musicians** enriched these occasions with their music ministry. Special recognition goes to performances by the Adult Choir, Vocal Ensemble, Chalice Choir and Pianist Bruce Martin, as well as performances by other church members and friends.

2010 marked the premiere of the **Progressive Voices Concert Series**, bringing in musical talents Peter Mayer, emma's revolution, and Jen Chapin. Audiences for these three concerts totaled over 500 attendees, comprised not only of church members, but of music lovers from across the Des Moines metro area.



"I enjoy music, but have always considered myself a musical "outsider" since I never learned to read music or play an instrument. I appreciate that the bell choir has been open to nonmusicians like me. I look forward to weekly bell practice so much that it's become my favorite activity at church -- I love the good natured company of my fellow bell ringers and am tickled by our progress as we continue to build our skills."

-- Cat Morris

## Social Justice

The Church's commitment to social justice became a year of putting our slogan, *Standing on the Side of Love*, into action. The Human Rights Action Group participated in One Iowa Lobby Day at the state capitol on January 11, 2011, urging lawmakers to maintain equality in Iowa and oppose a constitutional amendment to ban same-sex marriage. Also, over 130 members and friends marched for the rights of gay, lesbian and transgendered members in our community in the Des Moines Pride Parade.

We provided **Hawthorn Hill** and the **Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center's COOL program** over \$13,500 in cash contributions. The **COOL program** services families who are uninsured or underinsured. Families were able to receive holistic mental health services and evaluations as a direct result of these contributions. **Hawthorn Hill** Executive Director Tim Shanahan writes of the church's financial assistance "Your support allows us to provide the hundreds of families that come to us for a helping hand the support they need to move from homelessness to having a place to call home."

Our church continued to be a leader in **AMOS** (A Mid-Iowa Organizing Strategy) involved in improving workforce development and mental health care. In October, 2010, AMOS began fundraising efforts for a training program for underemployed and unemployed residents in central Iowa. Rev. Mark Stringer, along with church members Dan Aten and David Hurd were key players in launching the effort.



## Endowment Fund REACH Grants

Each year a percentage of the Endowment Fund earnings is available to the Endowment Committee for the award of REACH (Radical Engagement and Creative Happenings) grants. This is an exciting program to fund new initiatives.  
The REACH grant recipients for 2010-11 were:

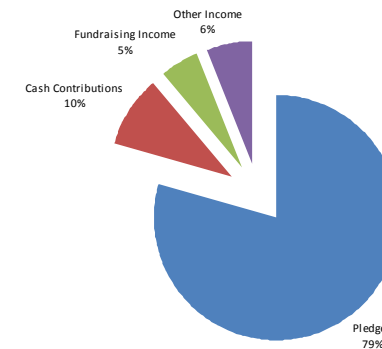


- ⌋ Purchase of hand bells to start a choir
- ⌋ Iowa Public Radio outreach
- ⌋ Professional stage lighting
- ⌋ Serving a meal at the homeless shelter

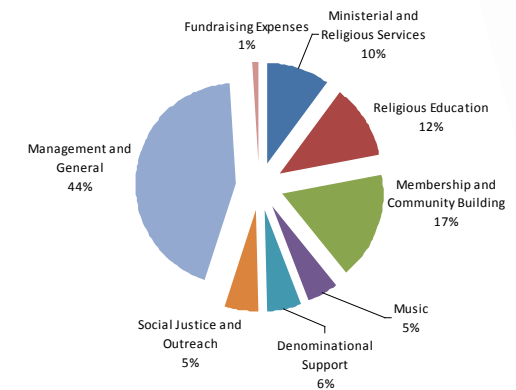
Member contributions to the Endowment Fund make the REACH grant program possible.

## Finances

### 2010-11 Where Money Came From



### 2010-11 How Money was Spent



First Unitarian Church of Des Moines  
1800 Bell Avenue  
Des Moines, IA 50315

Non-Profit  
Organization  
U.S. Postage  
PAID  
Des Moines, IA  
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