



STEPPING UP

Annual Report 2011-2012



First Unitarian Church of Des Moines
A Unitarian Universalist Church

Minister's Message



Looking back at 2011-2012 in the life of our congregation, we see a year filled with growing commitments to our congregational life and growing possibilities for all we can yet be, both with each other and in the larger community.

As your minister, I see much to celebrate:

- From nurturing our young people through excellent religious education and Coming of Age programming, to ever-expanding opportunities for adults to engage in theological reflection and stimulating thought.
- From pursuing justice through community collaborations, classes, and the efforts of our affirmed justice groups, to making meaningful connections with each other through small group ministry, Wellspring, caring ministry and our growing list of interest groups.
- From creating music through our various choirs, groups and Sunday service opportunities to sharing fellowship at our many dinners, potlucks and holiday events.
- From our talented and devoted staff who are always seeking to help us become the best church we can possibly be, to the countless volunteers who truly make our congregation the vibrant place we love.
- From the 47 new people we welcomed into membership this year, to the long-time members who continue to call First Unitarian home.

We have much to celebrate, indeed!

This fall, we anticipate many new programs and possibilities for spiritual enrichment, justice making and community building. But for now, take a look at this report and appreciate how much we have already done. It's an impressive story, one worth celebrating and sharing.

See you in church!
Rev. Mark Stringer





Looking Back, Stepping Up

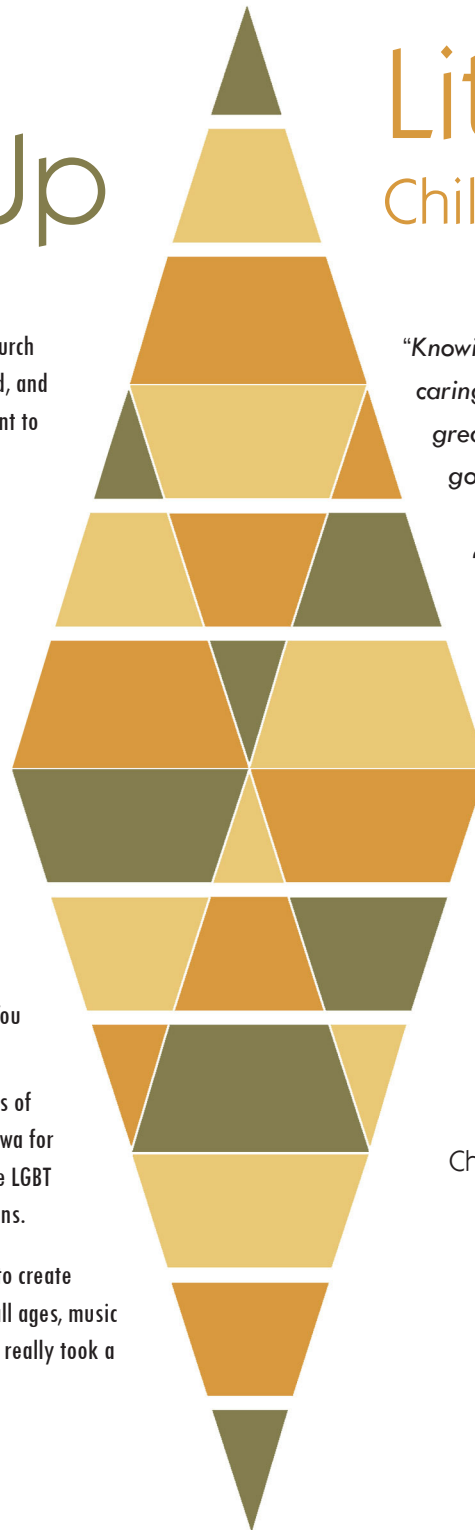
Little Feet, Big Steps

Children & Youth Religious Education

This is more than an annual report. It is a celebration of our vibrant church community - where our spirits are nourished, friendships are cultivated, and connections to our world are strengthened. We hope you take a moment to reflect on the milestones of our life as a church.

- In August, Matt Green presented his story about walking across the United States.
- In the Fall of 2011, many of us participated in an all-church read of "Death of Josseline", which helped spark an Adult RE class and Affirmed Justice Group on Immigration.
- We honored our long-time members with a Heritage Reception and service on October 23. This reception included the unveiling of our new Art Gallery wall with photos and bios of 28 long-time members of First Unitarian Church of Des Moines.
- In January, we celebrated an amazing 10 years with Rev. Mark Stringer.
- The Board of Trustees conducted a congregational survey. You can find the results at: www.ucdsm.org/board-business
- In May, Rev. Stringer was recognized as one of two recipients of the 2012 Faith & Freedom Award by Interfaith Alliance of Iowa for his work on issues of religious freedom, full equality for the LGBT community, immigrant rights, and other social justice concerns.

Beyond the milestones, we took steps in all areas of the congregation to create meaningful connections through religious education programming for all ages, music programming, and our many social action endeavors. Our congregation really took a "Step Up" this year.



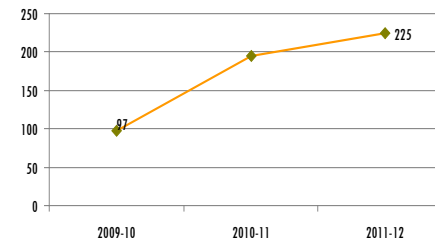
"Knowing our children are nestled each week in the hands of caring, respectful, and dedicated UU teachers gives us the greatest sense that we are not alone in nurturing all that's good in them." – Meg Notch

"Coming of Age was a joyful and transformative experience that opened my mind to the adult world" – Anson Tonelli

The Coming of Age program for 7th and 8th graders was completed by 28 youth with presentations of their Faith Statements during Sunday services on May 20.

The High School Youth Group continues to gain momentum. Led by four adult advisors, the high school youth met weekly on Sunday nights, hosted a youth conference in December, and led Sunday services on February 19.

Children and Youth enrolled in Religious Education Programs more than Doubled in Three Years





Sweet Sounding Steps in Music

"I enjoy the ethnic variety of music I sing in the choir – from traditional and soulful African hymns to rocking, knock-your-socks-off southern spirituals. I love hearing the blending of our voices, always unique." – Jo Cox

First Unitarian's music program continued to enrich our senses and lift our hearts this year. In addition to our amazing adult choir and the beautiful Bell Ave. Ringers, we expanded our children and youth choirs to three (Sparks, Chalice Choir, and the Flames), with a total of 38 children and youth participating. Volunteer musicians gifted us with their performances on 47 weekends this year, with guest musicians sharing at an additional 4 weekends. Moira Leu, Music Director, led three music services and hosted three musical events for all ages and abilities: a Campfire Sing-along in October, the Talent Show in June, and Summer Singers in July.

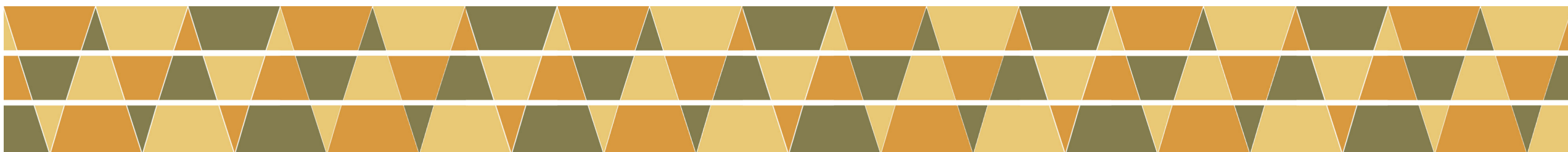
In April, we received the gift of a 1934 Steinway piano from one of our neighbors, who did not attend this church but lived on Druid Hill Drive. The Steinway will serve as the church's rehearsal piano in Channing Hall.

Stepping Forward for Social Justice



The congregation's commitment to justice, equal rights and the environment continue to be a cornerstone of the First Unitarian mission. Some of the many areas our congregation was active in the community this year:

- The Social Justice Council, through the on-going efforts of its Affirmed Justice Groups, works tirelessly to feed meals to the homeless, ensure Iowa's commitment to marriage equality, pursue legislation for death with dignity, seek ongoing ways to be a sustainable congregation and community, and become informed about immigration issues so members can more effectively work towards justice for all.
- Many members of our church lent a helping hand to help settle the Gebray family, an 8-member family of Eritrean refugees.
- Social justice projects are a regular occurrence for our young adult group (GenUU), including helping at a food pantry, pulling invasive species, volunteering at an animal shelter, and taking part in a Habitat for Humanity build.
- Efforts toward earning a "Green Sanctuary" designation from the UUA were on-going this year through various programs and initiatives, including reconstruction of the bioswale to mitigate storm water runoff into the creek.
- Generous donations to our Second Basket on Sunday mornings raised more than \$14,000 for our outreach recipients, Hawthorne Hill and Iowa Refugee Support Network.
- Our investment in AMOS (A Mid-Iowa Organizing Strategy) has led to success in mental health care and the Project IOWA workforce development initiatives.



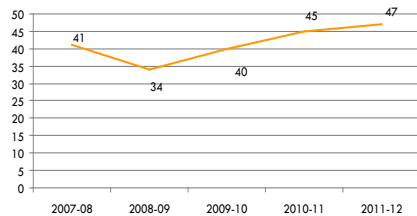
New Steps & Membership &



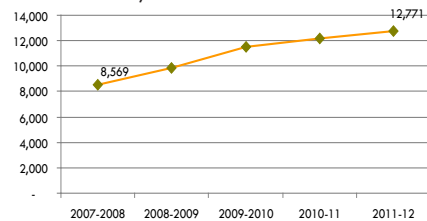
“UU membership means an opportunity for my wife, Diane, and I, to grow together in what is proving to be an increasingly spiritual phase of our lives—after the kids are gone, careers aren’t all consuming, and the search for meaning intensifies. While always sympathetic to and considerate of our individual paths and pursuits, we find First Unitarian offers a place that we frequent together—physically, mentally, emotionally.” - Jim Baker

We welcomed 47 individuals as they took the step up to membership this year. Each new face in our community offers new perspectives, fresh enthusiasm and greater chances for creative interchange. The commitment all members make to our church provides the foundation that we rely on to create a welcoming and dynamic environment for our current members and friends, as well as future visitors.

More than 200 New Members in 5 Years



Service Attendance Grew by 50% in 5 Years



Community Steps Congregational Life



We invite people of all ages and backgrounds into creative interchange and community. Congregational life programs and activities nurture relationships and help bond the community together. Just a few examples of how we shared community this year:

- Production of the first ever First Unitarian music video (“Don’t Stop Believing”) brought all ages together in this youth-led endeavor. Posted on YouTube and in the “Newcomer” section of our web site, the video provides visitors with an energizing tour of the building, as well as many welcoming faces.
- The Adult Religious Education Council outdid itself this year with an unprecedented 20 class offerings on Wednesday evenings and Sunday mornings, plus a one-day Wicca-Con, and special sessions to discuss the all-church read of “Death of Josseline”.
- Church Chats kicked-off this year - a program designed to increase opportunities for creative interchange through one-on-one meetings among members
- Small Group Ministry, Wellspring and our many affinity groups continue to be opportunities for members and friends to form meaningful connections





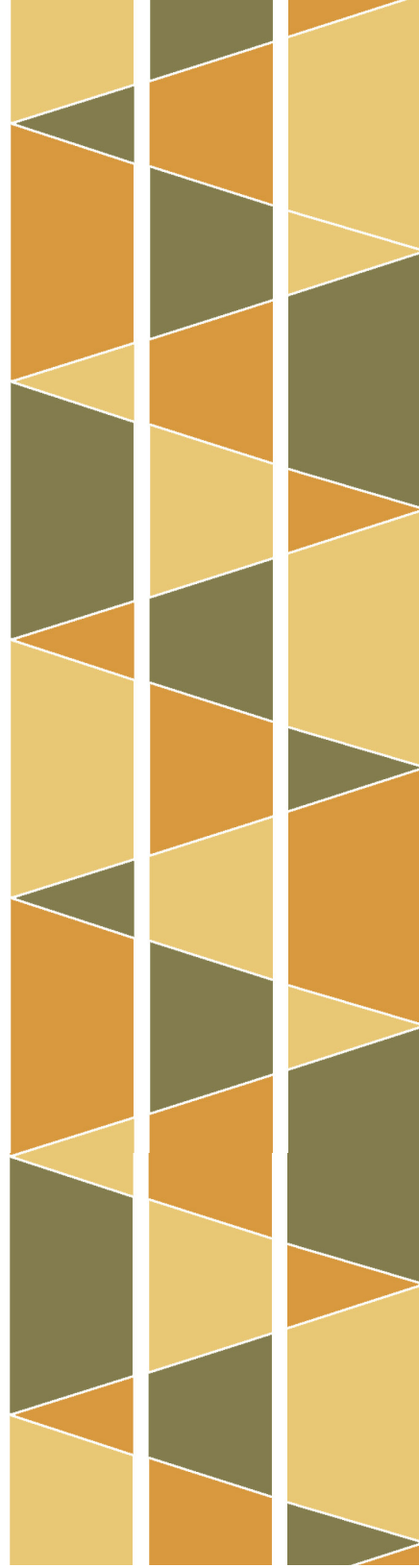
REACHing Out to Give a Step Up

Each year, a percentage of the Endowment Fund earnings are available in the form of REACH (Radical Engagement and Creative Happenings) Grants. Applications are submitted by members of First Unitarian and awarded by the Endowment Disbursement Committee based on its ability to showcase our church and REACH out, either into the larger community or deeper and wider into our circle of members and friends.

The REACH Grants awarded for 2011-12 funded the following initiatives:

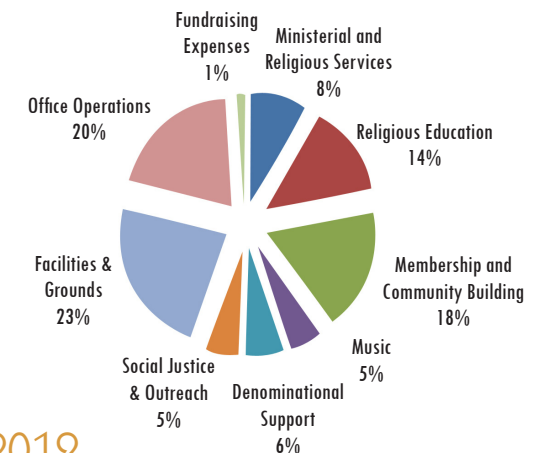
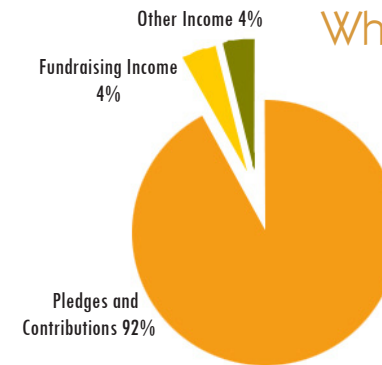
- **Lighting for the new Art Gallery wall**
- **UU Outdoor Experience**, a planning project for our church grounds.
- **Rising Phoenix Theatre Group**
- **“Raw Faith” film presentations**
- **Training in “Spirit Play”**, a Montessori-based approach to religious education

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



Stepping Up Our Support Finances

2011-2012 Where Money Came From



2011-2012 How Money Was Spent



First Unitarian Church of Des Moines
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Des Moines, IA 50315

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Did you know?....
Saturday Services Start September 8 at 5pm!

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