

Report from the Acting Program Consultant for Lifespan Faith Development Debby Herman, January 2008

Religious educators in the St. Lawrence District were provided many opportunities for professional development and collegial networking this past fall, thanks to our very active and dedicated Religious Education Committee and to generous financial support from the district. The year began with our annual RE Fall Ingathering, which was, as always, well-attended by directors and coordinators of religious education from around the district. The engaging and very timely presentation on non-violent communication by Rev. Dr. Deane Perkins of Glens Falls was much appreciated by all. In October the Renaissance module on Administration of an RE Program was offered in Syracuse, immediately followed by a workshop for new directors of religious education, of which we have several! I'm pleased that a number of DREs in the district have professional expense accounts that were generous enough to allow them to attend LREDA Fall Conference in San Antonio, Texas in October. The more regional, chapter retreat was held near Niagara Falls in November, which provided district LREDA members with another, more affordable opportunity for retreat and renewal. In the plans for this spring are a Jr/Sr High OWL facilitators' training, and the 4th annual RE Leaders Retreat at Unirondack.

I am excited to report that two of our newer religious educators, Leah Purcell from Albany and Sonja Lamicela from Syracuse First UU, have chosen to enter the UUA's Religious Education Credentialing Program. This is a very ambitious undertaking on the part of these two DREs, indicative of their professional career goals and of their dedication to UU religious education. I also applaud their congregations' leadership for making the commitment to support them in this effort, both collegially and financially.

I hope to see many of you at District Assembly in April, and am excited that it will be hosted by my own congregation in Binghamton. The talks and workshops promise to be thought-provoking and engaging, and we will once again close the business meeting with a bridging ceremony for our transitioning youth. One of the items to be voted upon during the meeting will be a new safety policy for the district. Although this policy includes some general safety and risk management guidelines, the focus is on protection of our children and youth. In particular it institutes more stringent hiring and volunteer recruiting practices, as well as guidelines for supervision during district meetings and events. It is important to note that this policy only affects St. Lawrence district-sponsored meetings and events – it is NOT binding upon individual member congregations. The district does however, encourage congregations to institute their own child safety policies, and we are glad to provide resources and consultation in that area. The proposed policy will be posted on the district's website if approved by the district Board at its meeting on February 9th. Please take the opportunity to review the policy in advance of the meeting, so that you will feel informed at the time of the vote - I'm glad to answer any questions by phone or email.

The role of our new Young Adult and Campus Ministry Consultant, Robbie Brydon, has been re-configured, and he is now available to consult with individual congregations or clusters of congregations on a one-time basis or in a longer relationship. Please be sure to see his informational flyer in this mailing, and take advantage of his services and expertise. We also hope to bring in another young adult, Elayne Mosher from Oneonta, to assist Robbie on a per-diem basis, in the expectation that young adult and campus ministry programs in the district will develop and grow under this new leadership.

Jody Brown, our District Youth Coordinator, has done a wonderful job working with our youth and the district Youth-Adult Committee for the past three years. However, she will be finishing up her role at the end of June of this year, and a search committee is being convened to find her replacement. We in the St. Lawrence District very much appreciate everything that Jody has done for our youth program, and wish her the best as she moves on.

As many of you know, I took over the role of Program Consultant for Lifespan Faith Development on an acting basis in January of 2007. I have very much enjoyed my work for the district this past year, but like Jody, I will also be finishing up at the end of June 2008. Karen Palmer is chairing an excellent search committee to fill the position, and the effort is well under way, as you will see elsewhere in this mailing. I have made myself available as a resource to that committee, and I will also support the incoming PC in every way that I can. With commitment on the part of our district Board to professionalize this new staff position even further, adding hours and providing benefits, I feel confident that it will be filled by a very high quality religious professional. In the meantime, I look forward to working with all of you during the upcoming months.

In faith,
Debby Herman