

## **Stewardship Testimonial 2010 – Monica Burnham**

After years of working with children, hopefully you will indulge me that my stewardship testimonial is a folk tale. I must warn you that it is a tale without an ending so I apologize if you don't like cliff-hangers. The good news is that every single one you will get a chance to play a role in the next part of the tale.

### **A Little Church in MUUSville**

Once upon a time, a long time ago in the early 1980's, there was a lovely little New England town with beautiful old houses, white steepled churches, and rolling fields. It was a special place but like all places, it wasn't perfect. MUUSville was very conservative. There were lots of churches and civic groups for conservative-minded people but almost none for the more liberal folks. In fact, some people thought that liberal minded people didn't exist in MUUSville and the surrounding towns. Then a few of the liberal minded people got together and started talking about starting a Unitarian Universalist church in MUUSville. At first it was a very few people meeting in each other's home but gradually the group got larger and more organized. Soon the group didn't fit in a house anymore and they started meeting at the local high school and the firehouse. Eventually, they got a part-time minister and a permanent meeting location and people could no longer deny that there were liberal minded people in MUUSville. But like all groups, things didn't go perfectly for new UU's. As the group got bigger, there started to be some disagreements among the members. The disagreements got so big that in the early 1990's the group split in two. But, the group affiliated with the UUA weathered the storm and slowly started to grow again. They were so happy when they finally could afford a full-time minister. But they were so excited to spread liberal ideas and thinking in conservative MUUSville, that they started spending more and more money. Soon the little church was only staying in the black by spending money people had left to the church. Finally, in the early 2000's all that extra money was gone and it looked as if the little UU church in MUUSville was done for.

But those liberal minded people wouldn't let it go. They had to give up a lot – they had to go back to a half-time minister, give up some of their meeting space, re-double their fund raising efforts, and increase their pledges. They did it. They saved their liberal church and for several years they operated a budget in the black and started to build up steam again. They were providing liberal religious education to the children; participating in local interfaith projects like the Food Bank and Americares; and becoming a stronger voice in MUUSville.

Then they came to another crossroads. The little UU church had a part-time minister who was very good fit for them. She helped them get better organized. She helped them gain a better understanding of who they were and who they wanted to be. The MUUSville church had the opportunity to increase her hours to almost full-time but it would really stretch them financially. They wouldn't go back to overspending like they had in the 1990's but they seemed better positioned than ever to grow and make a

large liberal voice in MUUSville. It would require sacrifice. Committees would need to continue with bare bones budgets and members would be asked to increase their pledges fairly significantly in a tough economic time. Would they do it? Could they do it?.....

Stay tuned until after the 2010 Canvass for the next installment of "The Little Church in MUUSville".