

**Report to the Board of Trustees  
Congregational Services  
March 2007**

Prepared by Tracey Robinson-Harris, Director for Congregational Services

**Now Is the Time: Leading Congregations into a Multiracial, Multicultural Future**

Congregational Services sponsored the first national conference on multicultural competencies for congregational leaders, entitled *Now Is the Time: Leading Congregations into a Multiracial, Multicultural Future*. The purpose was to help leaders understand and explore how to lead our congregations into this kind of future, and to experience what such a future might look like, sound like and how this vision challenges us to change. The conference was held from February 16-18, 2007 in Arlington, VA. The conference coincided with annual gathering of the Asian Pacific Islander caucus of DRUUMM. A number of APIC Caucus members participated in the conference on Friday. In total there were 146 participants representing 58 congregations from 23 states and the District of Columbia. Highlights of the conference included the opening worship service led by the Revs. Bill Sinkford and Jason Shelton; a challenging and inspiring day long keynote presentation with the Rev. Dr. Jacqueline Lewis, Senior Minister of Vision, Worship and the Arts at Middle Collegiate Church in New York City and former lead consultant for the Cultural Boundaries Project of the Alban Institute; a half day keynote previewing the soon to be field tested curriculum "Building The World We Dream About" by Dr. Mark Hicks, four workshops that explored other aspects of leadership and resources supporting leaders in this work. The conference closed with the participants joining in worship at All Souls Church in Washington, DC. This worship also was the close for the APIC Caucus gathering. After the many opportunities to think about, talk about, imagine and glimpse what multiracial, multicultural congregational life can be, this worship service was the real thing.

These three comments reflect some of the gifts of our time together:

Jacqui is passionate about developing leadership in multicultural/multiracial churches. She says. "Of 300,000 Christian congregations in this country, only six percent are multiracial, that is with 20 percent of another race other than the majority. We have much work to do around this issue. . . . and capacities to be built. We don't need communities of people pretending to be all the same, but rather communities in which the unique particularity of each person is recognized, accepted and affirmed. In the midst of that, it is important to risk showing our authentic selves and embracing the conflict that we might encounter, even while we commit to stay in relationship."

In introducing his workshop, Mark wrote, "As is well-documented, building a multi-racial/multi-cultural spiritual community is extraordinarily complicated work, but it can be done. The curriculum gently and intentionally builds a community of learners who carve out time to explore their own racial/ethnic histories, inter/intra-group dynamics, the role of power and privilege in congregational life, and, most important, how to respond to what is learned through these discussions with an anti-racist/anti-oppression lens. The morning workshop will provide a brief overview of the curriculum as well as a first-hand experience of the curriculum itself, which is set for field testing later in 2007."

One participant wrote: "Last Sunday's worship service at All Souls was the most spiritual experience I have ever had in any church in my 35 years of life (and I've "done" a lot of church) . . . my heart is still so very full. . . . I was a visitor. . . , part of the corps from the "Now is the Time" conference. From the tolling of the church bells to the last folk song, your church and that service was an affirmation that multicultural worship can happen, can be intentional and doesn't have to feel forced. It doesn't have to be some poorly-cobbled-together experience that ends up feeling like an empty, P.C. exercise guided by well-meaning but clueless white folk (like me). It can reflect the absolute best part of our universalist selves. We can be plural -- but still be together."

One final comment reflecting on both conferences: there were a number of people who attended both the Now Is The Time and Contemporary Worship conferences and made a point of noting that they were the two best UU conferences they'd ever been to--and back to back, to boot.

A DVD resource using conference video is in development. We are beginning the planning that will allow us to offer a similar conference experience in 2008 and 2009.

### **JUUST Change Consultancy - assessment underway**

The purpose of the JUUST Change Anti-Oppression Consultancy is to help congregations increase their effectiveness in anti-oppression and social justice work. The consultancy aims to meet congregations where they are and help them in a developmental process to build leadership, strengthen capacity, and apply anti-oppression knowledge and principles to both transform congregations and the communities of which they are a part.

The first group of JUUST Change Consultants (JCC) was selected at the end of 2004, and JCC consultancies began the summer of 2005. A few pilots were

underway while the consultancy was being designed. Consultants were selected for skills which would enable them to meet congregations where they are and help them with a developmental process of congregation based anti-racist, anti-oppressive multicultural transformation and social action. Consultants are expected to help identify internal leaders and facilitate group processes in developing vision and mission, dialogue, problem-solving, team development, and goal-setting. Consultants possess Pastoral Skills and Experience, Anti-Oppression Knowledge and Experience, Organizational Development Skills and Experience, and Multicultural Competencies. Including the pilot phase JUUST Change has providing consulting to 58 UU institutions and leadership groups.

Paula Cole Jones, lead consultant for JUUST Change, is in the midst of an assessment process of the first 18 months of this consultancy. The three components to the assessment are: interviews of selected congregations and other UU groups that have used the consultancy; conversation with the consultants, and dialogue between Paula and myself. Among the learnings that are emerging are:

1. To value these three C's conversation, collaboration and contextualization. All of the work begins and depends on having conversations about what can happen. Through conversations the needs emerge. JUUST Change Consultants contextualize our antiracism and multiculturalism commitment to specific groups. Contextualization is integral to every step. If consultants contextualize from the first conversation to the last one, the final conversation will be a new beginning for the group.
2. This is developmental work. It takes time. If we want this work to succeed then we must look to those places and people who can help us learn what it means to move forward. We must be willing to learn to use new tools, and practice new ways of thinking, being and doing. We must continue to seed the work... we are harvesting from seeds that have been planted over the past decade. This new phase of seeding will yield results over the next years. We must stay with the work. The thing that you thought was the right thing at that one point may have turned out not to be. The fact that it didn't work may mean you need to try something else, and not that the enterprise is bankrupt. JCC makes it more likely that the steps that are chosen will be a better fit for where people are now and helps people build skills and capacities that prepare them for more challenging work. It is about the long-term development of capacity.
3. Retooling is a critical step in transformation. Congregations and groups must have new concepts, frameworks, and skills before restructuring and transformation are possible. Retooling may be necessary in order for groups to revision their space and their relationships with the wider community.

4. Assessment tools are incredibly valuable in this work and Paula has taken the lead on developing two for the use of JUUST Change:
  - a.) a multicultural competencies inventory for individual leaders and groups
  - b.) change process inventory based on Welcoming Resistance by Chris Hobgood