

March 2007

Dear Unitarian Universalist leader,

You may have heard that some plenary sessions at the General Assembly in Portland this June are being replaced by a process called Open Space Technology. You may not have heard this at all, until you read this, but you know it now. Everyone involved in planning these sessions hopes your congregation will decide to send as many delegates to GA in Portland as you can. The purpose is simple and important. Our faith community needs your congregation's deep engagement in the issues and opportunities facing us today. Because the Association and its Board of Trustees needs your input, and because you have the experiences and insights to provide it, we hope every delegate your congregation is entitled to will attend the Open Space sessions in Portland.

The rich diversity of backgrounds, experiences, insights and passions among Unitarian Universalists provides the means for exploring our place as a faith community in the larger world. Our future, informed by our theologies, histories and traditions, is ours to create. There will be no "undiscussables" in the Open Space sessions. We will come together as people of goodwill, ready to use the dreams we have for our faith community as the basis for Open Space. None of this will happen without you, and all the delegates your congregation can send.

Issues of concern will be on the table, if congregational leaders choose to put them there. Written records of the Open Space discussions will be available to everyone at General Assembly, and will be posted on the UUA website. Everyone attending GA can be involved in these sessions, and in the last session, issues will be prioritized by delegates based on what their congregations care about. These priorities will inform the work of the UUA Board in the coming year and our Association in future years.

In this congregational packet, you'll find descriptions of Open Space, its principles and methods, and even some ideas about raising the money to send all the delegates your congregation is entitled to. It's time for us to get to work, with our ideas, questions, recommendations, concerns, and desire for future direction. With your congregation's full participation, this opportunity to shape the vision of our faith community will be strengthened. Please join us!

Yours in faith,

Gini Courter, UUA Moderator

Dr. Helen Bishop, Open Space Technology Team Leader

What is Open Space Technology?

Open Space Technology is a large group intervention process developed by Harrison Owen, who noticed that much of the work that takes place at a conference happens during breaks, or in informal settings such as over meals or around the coffee/tea/soda area. Owen designed a process in which a topic focus is provided, and a facilitator encourages people to lead small group discussions that relate to the topic. Many small groups meet at the same time, come back together to hear reports from one another, and receive reports from other areas that also relate to the topic. Participants are invited to make use of the Law of Personal Mobility - if someone discovers that s/he is not in the right place, s/he is encouraged to find the right place, wherever that is. Owens also outlined Four Principles for Open Space:

- Whoever shows up are the right people.
- Whatever happens is the only thing that could happen.
- Whenever things start is the right time.
- When it's over, it's over.

How will Open Space Technology be used at General Assembly?

At General Assembly in Portland OR, delegates and attendees will have the opportunity to begin the work of creating a mission and outcomes for the future direction of our Association of congregations. We will use open-ended questions like "How should the Unitarian Universalist faith community be in the larger world?" as the basic focus. The UUA board, which is exploring policy governance, is beginning to explore ends statements related to this topic. General Assembly attendees will have the opportunity to participate in several Open Space workshops, and delegates will vote on prioritized statements from these workshops during the last plenary session. on Sunday The UUA board will consider these statements in the development of a mission and ends statements, and will report on their progress in January and April 2008 in preparation for General Assembly 2008. Next steps at GA 2008 could include a vote on a mission and global ends, or further Open Space workshops to refine the work done at General Assembly 2007.

Why use Open Space Technology at General Assembly?

The Unitarian Universalist Association board is exploring policy governance, and is working on ends statements in response to three questions that policy governance boards address:

- Whom do we serve?
- At what cost?
- For what reason, or toward what end?

Trustees would like to hear from congregational delegates about what

they think the mission of the Association should be. This question might be framed in this way: "In today's complex world, what is our mission as a faith community?" Open Space Technology offers the opportunity for General Assembly delegates, as charged by the congregations they represent, to help define the direction of the Association and offer guidance about its mission to trustees.

What happens in an Open Space Technology session?

When participants enter a room where Open Space Technology will be used, they find chairs arranged in concentric circles, or U-shaped rows. The space is arranged so that people using wheelchairs or scooters can move around. In the center of the room, participants find sheets of newsprint and lots of water-based, scent-free markers. The number of newsprint sheets is equal to the number of breakout spaces available. A facilitator with a portable microphone is in the center of the room.

Once all the participants have entered the room and found a place to sit, the facilitator introduces her/himself and goes over the Four Principles of Open Space, the Law of Personal Mobility, and the concept of Butterflies and Bumblebees. Moving around in the middle of the room, s/he makes eye contact with participants while stating the framing question, which is open-ended. S/he then invites people who would like to facilitate a small-group discussion to come forward and pick up a sheet of newsprint and a marker. Each person who wants to facilitate a session writes his/her name on the newsprint, along with the title of the small group session. When the newsprint sheets are gone, people who want to facilitate a small group session come to the center of the room and give their names and session titles. Their newsprint sheets are then posted on the wall.

Once all the small group sessions have been announced, participants write their names on Post-It notes and put the Post-Its on the newsprint sheets, indicating the small group they want to be part of. The large group facilitator assesses the small groups in terms of breakout spaces available, and creates a grid showing workshop titles and locations. S/he then announces titles and locations, and participants go to the small group sessions, where the small group facilitators take notes on newsprint, using a report format provided.

One possibility at General Assembly is that when the small group session time is over, participants return to the original meeting room, where small group facilitators report back on their sessions, and post their newsprint sheets on the wall. Once participants have heard reports from all the small groups, the session is over.

Another possibility is that the small group facilitators will return to the original meeting room and give the large group facilitator their newsprint sheets. In that case, participants would not return to the original room.

In any event, the large group facilitator will report back on the sessions, using a form provided. The Open Space Technology team will use these reports to generate a

community newsletter that will be printed and copied for all GA participants by the end of the day. These reports will serve as the basis for the next round of Open Space.

The next to last Open Space session will be used for prioritizing ideas related to the mission of the Association in each of the ten domains being considered. In each domain, the top three concepts will be put forward, so in the last session delegates will discuss and vote on the thirty prioritized concepts, providing guidance to the UUA board on mission and outcomes.

What's an example of how Open Space Technology has been used?

Open Space Technology has been used in community and organizational settings for strategic planning purposes when input from many sources is important. Planners often use Open Space to establish initial priorities, and follow up with another Open Space conference at a later date. Open Space provides a means of bringing multiple and disparate voices together to determine what people believe is important. A strong likelihood exists of using Open Space again at General Assembly in Fort Lauderdale a year later to continue the process begun in Portland.

Raising money to send delegates to General Assembly

On average, sending a delegate to *General Assembly* costs around \$1,500, including registration fees, transportation, housing, meals and expenses. Your congregation has the opportunity to have its voice included in the mission of the Association IF you send all the delegates your congregation is entitled to. Each congregation should have a "GA delegates" fund, and all proceeds from these fundraising events should go into the fund. The board president can apply for a scholarship to pay up to half of the registration fees for GA. If your congregation doesn't usually pay delegate expenses, here are some ways to raise the money to do so:

- Ask major donors from your congregation to contribute \$500 each to the fund.
- Divide \$1,500 by the number of adults in your congregation, and ask every adult to donate that amount to the fund.
- Ask a group of major donors to match contributions made to the fund.
- Organize a monthly "Everyone can dance with everyone" dance. Cost of admission is the amount each adult in your congregation needs to donate to the fund.
- Ask someone who loves to entertain to put on a gourmet feast. Each adult attending should be asked to donate \$50 to the fund.
- Organize a raffle/auction of services and goods. All proceeds go to the fund.
- Ask children and youth to organize a car wash, with a suggested donation of \$20/car. All proceeds go to the fund.
- Auction "Lunch with the minister," "Lunch with the Director of Religious Education," "Lunch with the Music Director," "Lunch with the Administrator," and "Lunch with the Board President."
- Auction off a sermon topic.
- Auction off a worship service focus.
- Ask children and youth in the religious education program to create artworks on "What it means to be a Unitarian Universalist," and auction off the art.
- Ask people to bring loose change to drop into a "GA delegates fund" jar. Children and youth in the religious education program can count the money and report progress toward the goal of supporting all the delegates your congregation could send to *General Assembly*.
- Put double-sided tape around the perimeter of your sanctuary, and ask people to put quarters on the tape. Children and youth could calculate how many quarters your sanctuary would hold, and how many times you'll need to fill the tape to fund your GA delegates fully.
- Put "GA delegates" trees in the room where you have refreshments after worship, and ask people to pin currency on the trees until they are full. Keep adding trees until you've raised enough money to pay the expenses of all the delegates your congregation is entitled to.

- Put a "GA delegates fund" box next to the refreshments you serve after worship, and ask people to drop paper currency into the box every time they take a cup of coffee or a snack.
- Organize a fashion show, with a suggested donation of \$10/adult. Ask people to model what they think GA delegates should wear.
- Ask someone who loves to bake to donate a "Bread of the Month," and auction it off.
- Ask someone who loves to garden to donate a class in organic gardening, and auction off the class.
- Ask a masseuse to donate massages, and auction them off.
- Auction off musical performances to be used as offertories.
- Ask people to make contributions in honor of people they love, and create a book of photos and short writings about the people being honored. Display the book in a prominent place, with an explanation inviting people to make additional contributions.
- Organize an evening of Circle Suppers with each adult asked to donate to the fund.
- Ask youth in the religious education program to offer babysitting services and donate what they earn to the fund.
- Auction off a portrait photograph.
- Ask people to donate used books, and hold a silent auction of the books.
- Ask people to sponsor children and youth in the religious education program in a trike/bike ride in the parking lot.
- Organize a "Pooch and Pet Parade," and ask people to sponsor the animals.
- Ask quilters to create a wall hanging to celebrate the life of your congregation, and auction off the quilt.
- Ask knitters to knit watch caps, hats and mittens, and auction them.
- Organize a weight loss contest, and ask congregational members to sponsor people losing weight.
- Organize a "Stop Smoking" effort, and ask congregational members to sponsor people who want to quit smoking.
- Ask people to donate Frequent Flyers miles to get delegates to GA.
- Organize a special musical event such as a choir performance, instrumental concert, or SingAlong. Ask audience members to make donations to the fund.
- Ask a composer to create a special piece of music, and auction it off.
- Ask someone to write a play about someone from Unitarian Universalist history, and ask children and youth in the religious education program to put the play on, for donations to the fund.
- Ask someone to act out scenes from the life of a famous Unitarian Universalist, with proceeds going to the fund.
- Organize a Health Fair where people can get their blood pressure checked and get information on nutrition and exercise. Ask people attending to make donations to the fund.

- Hold a contest for the *Most Creative Fundraising Ideas*, and use the winning idea to organize a fundraising event to raise money for the fund.
- Organize a sleepover, and ask parents and caregivers of those attending to make donations to the fund.
- Organize a bake sale, with proceeds going to the fund.
- Auction off the services of a handyperson who will make small repairs in people's homes.
- Ask people to donate CDs and DVDs, and hold a silent auction.
- Ask someone who knits or crochets to make a "GA afghan," and auction it off.
- Ask someone who's bilingual to offer six conversational sessions in a language other than English, and auction off the sessions.
- Organize a Dance Marathon, and ask dancers to get sponsors who will make donations to the fund.
- Create a "GA Curtain of Currency" by asking people to pin currency to a curtain hung in the social area of the congregation.
- Ask cooks to contribute Dinner for Four, with everything frozen in disposable containers. Auction off the dinners.
- Auction off mending and clothing repair services.
- Auction off a class in basic automotive maintenance services, including changing a tire and changing the oil.
- Auction off a "Get Organized!" session, with someone who will come to your home or office to help you get a room organized.
- Ask people to donate hotel room costs through particular hotel chains.
- Organize a class in how to play bridge, poker, Mahjongg, canasta, and other games, and ask participants to make donations to the fund.