

District Presidents Association Minutes of the meeting of November 3 – 5, 2005

Attending: DPA Members: Lawrence Anderson-Huang, Ohio-Meadville; Ellen Asprooth, St. Lawrence; Barbara Bates, Mass Bay (Thursday – Friday); Charles Boothby, Northeast; Carleen Dowell, Mid-South; Brian Eslinger, Prairie Star; Emily Lauren Gage, Central Midwest; Connie Haas-Zuber, Heartland; Steve Helle, Florida; Myrtle Hepler, Thomas Jefferson; Eric Kluz, Ballou Channing; Franklin Fry, Mountain Desert; Jerry Muntz, Metro NY; Thomas Pistole, New Hampshire/Vermont;; Leslie Pohl-Kosbau, Pacific Northwest; Elyse Reznick, Joseph Priestley; Bonnie Sachs, Pacific Central; Tom Stapleford, Pacific Southwest; Joe Sullivan, Southwest; Ken Wagner, Clara Barton; UUA Trustee Eva Marx; Director of District Services Harlan Limpert. Guests as noted.

Thursday , November 3

Gini Courter UUA Moderator, reminded us that our conversation last year had two themes: Serving Our Congregations and Changing Culture. She noted progress in Serving Our Congregations as follows.

Reconnect (Radically Rebuild the Relationship between Association Leaders and Congregation Leaders): Registration reimbursement for congregation presidents who attend General Assembly (GA), meetings of congregation presidents and Association leaders at GA; congregation president roundtables in districts. “The local connection is even more important than what we can do at GA,” Gini said. “We can’t create the connection between two presidents 20 miles apart.”

Synchronize: (Gather Association Leadership for Common Dialogue): DPA Summit, meeting for persons elected at GA and representatives from each UUA board committee; the new Effective Partnership Team.

Building Capacity (Train and Empower Local Leaders): UU University at GA this year for presidents and congregation leaders working in membership and finance; district leadership development.

Focus (Grow Unitarian Universalism, Stand on the Side of Love, Work Relentlessly for Justice): Anti-racism training for leaders after GA in odd-numbered years.

To Change Culture we must enhance leadership and embody hospitality (“If we don’t, we shouldn’t be Unitarian Universalists,” Gini said) and relentlessly promote that which moves us forward as a community.

What could be the unique role of the district in enhancing the growth of Unitarian Universalism? “We shouldn’t be talking about what we do for the congregations, but about what we can all do better together,” Gini said. The Effective Partnerships Team, set up after last June’s summit, will address this issue as it works to find solutions and champion critical change.

Blue Blob: There are four District Executive openings right now, Gini pointed out. What if we moved past the concept of a generalist executive for each district and

instead looked for just one executive and three specialists in areas like growth and conflict to work throughout a region (a blue blob on Gini's computer) composed of all four districts?

Friday, November 4

Accessibilities

Vincent Licenziato, representing the UUA Accessibilities Committee, presented a proposed accessibility survey of congregations; the committee plans to take the results of the survey to the board in January. **Members suggested that cognitive disabilities, openness of the RE program to children with developmental disabilities, more detail on limited mobility and a line for "other" be included. Elyse Reznick suggested that accessibilities information about each congregation be included in district directories.** Is there reason for a survey like this to come to our group? In general, **it was felt that district presidents and district staff should be aware of anything to be distributed to congregations.**

Ministerial Training, Settlement, and Compensation

Ken Sawyer, Chair of the Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association (UUMA) Executive Committee, answered questions about ministers and their training. An appropriate job fit, he said, is what leads most persons into ministry: finding that they enjoy doing many things, with none predominant. He said that most ministerial training comes in the internship, that growth training is hit and miss and management training generally comes at the chapter level through the district executive. Are we losing pastoral skills by demanding too much in the way of management? Those who like management go to large churches where they can do that, Ken said, but many prefer to pass management of the church to the lay membership. While students are encouraged to look for practical training in financial matters – personal as well as fundraising and stewardship – academic requirements may take up their time. It is not unusual, Ken said, for a minister to begin a career with \$40,000 in loans and \$15,000 in credit card debt. We are turning out more ministers than there are parish minister positions, and we're not growing new congregations, Ken pointed out. "My impression is that the biggest change in ministry is the need for agility," he said, "figuring out how to put together a living wage from part-time and consulting positions."

Ralph Mero, Director of Church Staff Finances, and John Weston, Settlement Director, joined us and Ken Sawyer to discuss financial and other aspects of settlement. John pointed out that we can't constrain search committees; congregations aren't trained to search, he said, and if they don't put enough effort into it, they may find a bad fit. "Search committees need to spend more time saying 'who we are' rather than 'what we need,'" he said. Search committees now need to be more proactive, he added, and have wider latitude

for contacting members of a potential candidate's previous churches. Ken pointed out that the UUMA does not support this approach. The median stay of a minister is 9 years, John said; if the ministry is longer, there may be insufficient new ideas. He said we don't have as large an oversupply of ministers as the numbers would suggest because the demographics are changing: in the last four years, new ministers were nine years older than 15 years ago, and those ministers will have fewer years of service. There is no official follow-up after a settlement, John said, though the district executive is expected to pay attention to new ministers. After a difficult ending, the minister is asked to spend time in reflection and give the results of that to the Department of Ministry and Professional Leadership, which may do nothing, or suggest a course of study, consideration of a different kind of ministry, or psychological work on whether a call still exists. It may also recommend to the Ministerial Fellowship Committee that the person not be allowed to search.

There are 10 – 12 negotiated terminations each year, of which 2 may be the result of the congregation's desire for a minister as manager. Elyse said that negotiated settlements sometimes don't feel like the result of negotiations, and asked if one month of pay/year of service is in fact a guideline for severance packages or a requirement? Ralph responded that our guidelines seem high because our churches don't pay unemployment insurance and need to provide more generous severance pay. **According to Ken, UUMA compensation guidelines for negotiated settlements are being rewritten now, and all aspects of the guidelines are up for discussion; he noted the suggestion that a lay member be added to the revision committee.**

Ralph pointed out that when surveyed, only 41% of ministers had health insurance. He said that the UUA is planning to establish its own self-insured health plan which would provide savings to congregations and staff; the plan should be ready by January of 2007.

GA Planning Committee

Beth McGregor, member of the Planning Committee, told us that the committee relies on the districts to generate and vet congregational programs for GA. She noted a number of things about this year's GA:

- sponsors must see that workshop presenters are registered at GA, at least for the day of the workshop;
- GA badges must be worn in the convention center (a security issue);
- there will be dedicated time for covenant groups;
- there will be more time for the district ingatherings;
- Gini and Bill and congregation presidents will participate in a double session on Friday;
- there will be no repeat workshops in competition with the first three plenaries;
- the theme this year is right relations, there will be a code of conduct in the front of the GA program book, and the committee would like to life up right relations in all orientations;

- the scholarship program is now congregation-based: applications must come through congregations, and the UUA will match the congregation's donation up to \$250 in addition to the UUA contribution toward registration.
- \$5000 is available for young adult scholarships; those applications may come through CUUYAN rather than a congregation;
- there will be no alcohol at events sponsored by the Planning Committee.

Annual Program Fund

Mary Miles, Director of the Annual Program Fund (APF), and Myrtle Hepler, the DPA's APF Liaison, offered advice about APF work in the district. The APF chair should have an interest in stewardship, strong connections to the association and some understanding of it, and good interpersonal skills. It's important to remind congregations that APF contributions impact the district grant, Mary said, and to share stories about how the Association and districts have made a difference in congregations and in individuals' lives. She also noted that the UUMA chapter has an effect on ministers' attitudes toward giving, and that it is critical for APF chairs to contact large congregations about pledging and offer them a new way to think about generosity: right relationship.

Consultation on Ministry to and with Youth

Megan Dowdell, recent youth representative to the UUA Board, offered an update on the work of the Taskforce on Ministry to and with Youth. In January and February of 2006, the Taskforce will survey youth with different levels of involvement in UU youth ministry, and in April and May, all congregations are encouraged to hold Congregational Conversations about their visions and needs for youth ministry. In the following year, the Taskforce will work with Stakeholder organizations (YRUU, Youth Advisors Network, Liberal Religious Educators Association, and others) and each district will hold a gathering, facilitated by a member of the Taskforce, on how the district and the Association might better serve youth. In July of 2007, a representative gathering will recommend structures, policies and practices for ministry to and with youth. Megan asked that we encourage congregations in our district to identify for the survey youth who have been but are not now involved in religious education, and to participate in the conversations about youth ministry planned for this spring.

Executive Vice President's Update

Kay Montgomery, UUA Executive Vice President, reported on three issues:

- The failure of the Pathways "Fast Start" congregation to grow rapidly as expected has been a disappointment, she said, but many, including the donors who provided a large part of the capital for the project, are glad that we took the risk and have learned from it. Those learnings include: more experience needs to be embedded in the new congregation from the start; there must be a clear relationship with a mentor congregation ("The connection between Pathways and

First Dallas was not deep and abiding, although there was enormous good will,” Kay said;) all understandings between the new congregation and the UUA must be in writing; and benchmarks of progress must be analyzed by the mentor congregation and the UUA. DP’s suggested that a GA workshop on lessons learned be considered, and that attention be paid to the fact that attendance at Pathways averages one and one-half times membership. Copies of the letter about Pathways from Bill Sinkford and Laurel Hallman were distributed.

- UUA Gulf Coast Relief has been a success in terms of help provided, funds raised, and cooperation between the UUA and the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee. Immediate work was with our churches and individuals in congregations, Kay said; now we’re working and making grants to groups within a longer-range plan. We need to recognize the heroic ministry which has gone on, she added, as ministers from all over the country have left their churches and come to the affected areas to help.

- Beacon Press is a “huge success,” Kay said. “It may be the only small independent publishing house that is thriving.”

The Board has done good work on Mission and Vision, Kay said, and is now trying to work governance into that. **Eva Marx, UUA Board liaison to the DPA,** said her personal perspective is that the board’s work on Carver Policy Governance was helpful in helping the board see “what we want to be and where we’re going,” but that she is not sure that Carver will work with that mission and vision.

Inter-District Sharing, Friday Evening, November 4

Tom Pistole, New Hampshire/Vermont: The district is in good health, with a new program consultant and a new APF representative. Work continues on consolidation with Northeast. APF giving has recovered from the drop following turmoil around the non-renewal of the District Executive four years ago.

Ken Wagner, Clara Barton: There was a unanimous vote to raise district dues to \$22 to sustain a program consultant. The district board has been in policy governance for several years, and continues to work on the details of that system.

Tom Stapleford, Pacific Southwest: The district is in policy governance and has a great executive team. The board is working on identifying the indicators it will use to measure achievement; they have the “what,” now they need the “who,” and the “at what cost.”

The UU presence in Sacramento makes a difference in the state and is a satisfying inter-district effort (not a district program, but supported by PSWD and PCD boards.)

Brian Eslinger, Prairie Star: The District Executive is looking at affinity clusters to make better use of her time; the religious education consultant is going to $\frac{3}{4}$ time and the district will hire a $\frac{1}{4}$ time consultant for youth and young adults.

Lawrence Anderson-Huang, Ohio-Meadville: The district is working on its new shared district executive relationship with St. Lawrence, and Lawrence is working on getting the board to support the relationship and be happy.

Elyse Reznick, Joseph Priestley: Pledging of board members and key leaders has begun as they kick off a district endowment fund; their ¼ time development consultant has been really helpful with that process and with getting out information about the district at the same time. The district plans an old-fashioned revival, part worship service, part keynote, for the Sunday afternoon following its annual meeting.

Jerry Muntz, Metro New York: This is their first year implementing policy governance; they had to backtrack on means and executive limits policies approved last year which were seriously flawed.

Charlie Boothby, Northeast: They are getting to know New Hampshire/Vermont and working out ways to consolidate activities. The district has taken \$10,000 from a certificate of deposit and pledged it toward a community development financial institution to set up a revolving housing development loan fund; the UUA will match it and the Treasury Dept., through the Community Development Financial Institution program, will match that sum.

Leslie Pohl-Kosbau, Pacific Northwest: A growth foundation, separate from but linked to the district, has a ¼ time staff person who is also a minister in the district. Their policy governance board has been struggling, but had a breakthrough at its August retreat. The Fairbanks, Alaska, congregation has dedicated a new building.

Steve Helle, Florida: The Chrysalis Way intentional development program for new congregations has been working very well, with three groups about ready to become congregations and another four ready to start the process. There have been some hassles with the Young Religious Unitarian Universalists and staff in the district. The board is redoing its “ends” policies.

Bonnie Sachs, Pacific Central District: The district has its first board member from Hawaii, and hopes to have one from Nevada soon. They have redefined their program consultant position, now called Director of Faith Development, to include growth as well as religious education. The board is working to become a learning organization, meeting every other month to look at and discuss serious issues in depth. “It’s a lot of fun, but hard to plan for,” Bonnie says.

Connie Haas Zuber, Heartland: The district’s fall training institute is on schedule with three tracks; they’ll approve and charge their search committee next weekend. The “blue blob” idea causes her anxiety and hope, Connie says - she’s glad the DPA keeps her alive to possibilities.

Emily Lauren Gage, Central Midwest: The relationship between district leadership and district ministers has been transformed, and there are exciting things going on, including ten emerging congregations. They’re getting together their DE search committee.

Joe Sullivan, Southwest: The board had ambitious plans for the district, but all that changed with the hurricane. As a faith community, he says, they’ve been blessed by the ministry of ministers and others from everywhere. Anne Heller, interim DE, organized managing partner churches and ministered to the ministers involved. They are in search for a new DE and are looking at policy governance.

Frank Fry, Mountain Desert: After three years of developing a new model for the district, their justice ministries service area and communications service area are doing well; they will try to get the others up and running this year. A new congregation is developing in Taos.

Carleen Dowell, Mid-South: The district has named a Committee on District Services, similar to a Committee on Ministry in a congregation, with a minister, the board vice president, a past president of a district congregation, and an RE representative. This year, the district has an environmental theme: Living Simply, Spiritually, Sustainably, and has formed a district green team. They've had a proposal to make their nominating committee more involved with leadership development, perhaps setting up a talent bank for the district. Mississippi now has its first professional UU minister in many years.

Myrtle Hepler, Thomas Jefferson: The district has had a series of temporary District Administrators, and now has an Interim District Executive with a search committee in place.

Eric Kluz, Ballou Channing: The District has a great DE and consultants, and is blessed to have Eva Marx, former president of the district and UUA Trustee, available; recently, Eva has been facilitating a group of congregation presidents in the district. The district is involved in discussions about social justice networking across the state.

Ellen Asprooth, St. Lawrence: A district Social Justice Council has just begun its work, and a district Financial Resources Group is working on several new efforts to increase fundraising for congregations, the district, and the APF. The district is beginning a new flexible-bordered cluster system and is working on its shared DE relationship with Ohio-Meadville.

Saturday, November 5

Anti-Racism Workshop

Ian White Maher offered us a tour of a photographic display related to his presentation on "Black Men as Ritual Sacrifice." His discussion of that issue was followed by a question-and-answer period.

Director of District Services Report

Salaries: **Harlan Limpert** noted that salary adjustments made this year were well-received. Most district staff are not paid as they ought to be, he said: we haven't done as good a job increasing salaries for district and headquarters' staff as for ministers. He would like to see an 8% increase for co-employed staff next year, and he will tell boards in search that they new DE's salary should be higher than that paid to the last. It's important to know what we expect from staff, and to keep them aware of how they are doing, Harlan said. That is going pretty well right now, with staff creating their goals and Harlan doing the initial assessment (DP's will be asked to respond to that assessment.)

Breakthrough Congregations: Congregation presidents have each received a copy of the CD of breakthrough congregation presentations at GA, along with a thank you letter from Bill Sinkford. Next year's breakthrough congregations are: First Unitarian Society of Madison, Wisconsin; Unitarian Universalist Church of Annapolis, Maryland; UU Fellowship of San Luis Obispo County, California; and UU Fellowship of the Eastern Slopes, Chocorua, NH.

Cooperation: Cooperation and communication among district staff seems to be happening more, Harlan said, and feedback from staff is that it helps them to find out what others are doing well. He wants to continue to work on breaking down barriers, blowing up bureaucracy that makes life difficult, and encouraging people to focus on vital, healthy congregations. Harlan said he'd like to be known for growth: numerical growth; maturational growth producing a deeper experience of faith; organic growth in which the institution is evolving in ways that contribute to the effect of our faith; and incarnational growth making our values and ideals real in the world.

Measurements of Impact

"Measurement should be an on-going agenda item," said Joe Sullivan, reporting on the work of the Task Force on Measurement. "We need to find things that work and reflect the health of our movement; if we're going to do meaningful goal-setting, at least some of it should be measurable." The task force' report is not an effort to impose a structure on a district that is not in line with goals the district sets for itself. Rather, it points out that we can all learn from each other, and we can share what we have measured. **The task force suggested as potential measures of the effectiveness of district staff: Sunday attendance (we already measure membership); attendance, percent of congregations represented, percentages of young people, and number and percentage of congregational presidents at District Annual Meetings; number and percentage of congregational presidents at presidents gatherings; number and percentage of congregational presidents attending GA; and change over time of the percentage of congregations with professional leadership.** This list, predicated, Joe said, on the belief that attendance equals engagement, raised a number of questions. Can district staff influence Sunday attendance? Is attendance on Sunday a valid measure of commitment? What about attendance at social justice, caring, small group activities during the week? Should RE attendance be tracked separately? Shouldn't we be measuring more than numbers? **After considerable discussion, we recommended that Harlan ask districts to report the numbers on the original list above.**

Congregations Working Group Report

Eva reported on the UUA Board Congregations Working Group's plans for GA. Response to last year's congregation president meetings at GA included comments that the organization of the meetings was top-down, that they spent

too much time being told what they needed to talk about. This year's general meeting is planned not as training, but as a board conversation with its owners, and may include questions such as: what are your dreams? your frustrations? what's the one thing you need that you don't have? what are barriers that prevent you from communicating with neighbor congregations? Organization of networking meetings will also be less directive, Eva said. **It was suggested that it is important for DP's to attend the presidents meetings to emphasize the connection between the district and the UUA.**

At the last two GA's we've had a "summit" meeting of DP's, UUA trustees, and selected staff. Results of the meetings' facilitated discussions have been referred to the Effective Partnerships Team. **We agreed that there should be a summit again this year (we may be asked to pay for our own meals) and that the Effective Partnerships Team should report on its work at that time.**

Policy Governance

Several DP's whose districts use policy governance described the form and its use in our organizations. **Connie** explained that policy governance came from the concept of servant leadership, in which the board serves the owners of the organization, and from frustration with the way boards typically operate. In policy governance, the board looks outward and forward, giving permission to an executive to do what is necessary to achieve the ends envisioned by the board. This form works in a district, where the board hires an executive, but is problematic in a congregation, where the minister is called. It was suggested, though, that a similar form of governance may work in some congregations.

How well does PG work in districts? **Steve**: his district, which has been using PG for 5 or 6 years, has "gotten much better" – better organized, more efficient – during that time, though it's not easy to tell how much is due to policy governance and how much to a strong DE. **Connie**: PG is a good way to operate on a program scale, but her district chose the wrong DE. **Elyse**: PG has empowered her district's staff, and the smaller board attends well. **Tom**: the key was that the DE knew where he wanted to go; "the thing you get with policy governance is clarity about who is doing what to whom." **Leslie**: "Because everyone has to agree, we have better discussions on a more participatory board." In response to a question, **Bonnie** said her district had considered PG carefully and decided not to change to that form. Some advice to districts considering PG: a district executive in a PG district needs a CEO's skills; board members need to be visionaries, not the doers usually elected to a district board; a board should budget about \$2,000/year for training during the study phase of PG; transition to PG will take 2 – 5 years; it's better to start with a speaker than with a book, but the best of the books is ***The Board Member's Playbook.: Using Policy Governance to Solve Problems, Make Decisions, and Build a Stronger Board*** by Miriam Carver and Bill Charney.

Business Meeting, Saturday, November 5

June Minutes

Minutes of the DPA Meeting at GA in Fort Worth were approved. as distributed.

President's Report – Eric Kluz

Eric's report was distributed; he said that his notes from the October meeting of the UUA Board will be available at the UUA website soon.

Treasurer's Report – Steve Helle

The Treasurer's report was distributed. Steve noted that the DP travel line is slightly over budget; however, since the **Board of Trustees observer's expenses will be very low this year, and task force business has been handled by email or phone, there is no need to raise the travel equalization fee at this point.**

Nominating Committee

Emily Gage reported for the nominating committee the slate of officers for the '06 – '07 year: President: Elyse Reznick; Vice President: Ken Wagner; Secretary: Ellen Asprooth; Treasurer: Steve Helle; Nominating Committee: Charlie Boothby, Connie Haas-Zuber, Joe Sullivan. The report was accepted; elections will be held at the June DPA meeting.

General Assembly

Debriefing: We agreed to hold an informal debriefing meeting at the end of GA, and to follow up with an email report for those who cannot attend.

Workshop: The DPA is entitled to a workshop at GA. For the last two years, Harlan and Lynda Bluestein have offered a workshop for congregation presidents. This year, members felt that a presidents workshop would not be necessary because of the UU University. We agreed to offer a workshop on the nominating committee, a human resource development issue of interest to congregations of every size and governance style and to district leaders. **Lawrence, Brian, Leslie, Joe, and Ellen will put together the workshop; Joe will start the email discussion.**

Disaster Relief

Should the DPA recommend that each district issue a Chalice Lighter call to benefit churches damaged or destroyed in the recent Gulf Coast disasters?

Some districts don't allow their boards to interfere in Chalice Lighter choices; in addition, some members felt that it would be inappropriate for the DPA to do more than share information and support the DP's in affected areas. **Joe suggested that we revisit this issue at a point where a Chalice Lighter call could be linked to a specific project, as is the norm for calls. We took no action on the issue.**

Blue Blob

DP's of the four districts comprising the "blue blob" (Connie, Emily, Myrtle and Joe) reported that they are willing to continue the regionalization discussion, but want clarity on how the plan will benefit the districts. Harlan will try to arrange a weekend meeting with Gini in December for that purpose. The DP's are also concerned about the timing, and feel that it is imperative that each district have an operating executive working with its board. The districts will continue to search for their own DE's skilled in organizational development and the ability to find and recruit lay leaders, role change could happen after the staff is in place. **Eric and Bonnie, our representatives to the Effective Partnership Team, would like to hear feedback from the meeting with Gini.**

Next Meeting

We will meet next on Wednesday, June 21, at GA in St. Louis. Details about the meeting, the summit, and the UU University preceding GA will be sent to presidents as they become available.

- Ellen Asprooth, Secretary