

Summary Report from the Gulf Coast Relief Funding Panel Conference Call December 13, 2005

Present: Meg Riley, Joe Sullivan, Rebecca Cureau, Eunice Benton, Jacqueline Luck and Steve Crump

1. Initial business:

It was reported that the UUA has hired a new 5hr/week communications assistant for the Gulf Coast Relief Panel.

Vote à The panel unanimously agreed that he should sit in on future conference calls and take minutes.

2. The panel received a report by Rebecca Cureau from the New Orleans Working Group:

The two UU Congregations in New Orleans will be gathering in a joint worship service with their ministers, Marta Valentin and Jim VanderWeele. Bill Sinkford will be there and will speak during the service. Bill will also go on a tour led by the ministers of New Orleans with the New Orleans Working Group chaired by Burton Carley.

3. The panel received a report by Joe Sullivan on his visit to New Orleans:

Joe shared his experience and findings from his visit to New Orleans and facilitation of the respective congregational meetings of Community UU and First UU and his attendance of their joint Sunday worship service, which is held at 2:30 on Sundays at a local Presbyterian church. He also toured New Orleans and said nothing in the media had prepared him for what he found.

Both Churches believe they have lost about 1/3 of their congregations to attrition. Community UU feels they have no children returning because of lack of schooling, etc. There were children from First UU in attendance. First UU of New Orleans is recommending that the historic church be cleaned, though they are not sure what will follow cleaning.

4. The panel received a report by Eunice Benton on the state of Mississippi:

Eunice reported on the Mississippi front stating that it is so different from the New Orleans issues and yet very difficult as there is no UU minister serving full time in the affected areas. The Gulf Coast Congregation feels well supported by the larger UU community as do the other Mississippi UU congregations affected. The Gulf Coast congregation is based in Gulfport, and they are trying to discern how to move literally, as there is now some question about the feasibility of building on their property. Joe questioned if this congregation was a strategic congregation for developing UU presence in Mississippi, and Eunice answered definitely, as are other Mississippi congregations who have been under-served.

5. The panel received a report by Steve Crump on the First Unitarian of Baton Rouge:

Steve reported that First Unitarian of Baton Rouge is enthusiastically moving forward on seeking a "Minister to the Community" per their grant which was funded by this Panel. They are looking at a February 1 start up date with the understanding that the grant will continue the designated number of months though starting a month later than proposed.

The Panel reviewed a proposal for *Seed Funding for Grassroots Community Organizing After Hurricane Katrina* presented by Martha Thompson and submitted by NeighborWorks America on behalf of its affiliate Neighborhood Housing Services of New Orleans, Inc. It was noted that this grant of \$20,015.00 is seen as an organizing "first" grant to launch a grassroots community organizing process of evacuees dispersed throughout the South from the effects of Hurricane Katrina. There was discussion concerning employing local experts many of whom are without positions presently, however given the time line it was moved by Joe that we vote on the proposal and seconded by Eunice.

Vote à It was unanimously voted to move forward with this proposal with a mention of concern for future use of local experts. Jacqueline will email Martha for more clarity on concerns aforementioned and concerning the funding of the proposal. Martha responded addressing the concerns.

6. Panel received report by Meg Riley on her meeting with the UUA Administration and Leadership:

Meg readily acknowledges the need for better communication from this Panel, noting that there had been no provision made for this at the time she agreed to chair this panel. She now has help from new communications assistant Erik Kesting and she and the Panel are seeking to improve communications with these various target audiences: the public, UU's in New Orleans and the larger Gulf Coast, those working on Katrina and Rita relief, the financial donors, and the greater UU community. This can be done on UUA and District and Church web sites with streamlined reports with bullets, etc, and through the *World* as the story develops. Erik Kesting is compiling a FAQ document to post on the website. The ministers involved are interested in sharing their stories. It was pointed out that what is needed is a holistic way of sharing the "big picture." Steve suggested noting highlights of each conference call to make this easier.

7. The next conference call of the Gulf Coast Relief Funding Panel will be Wednesday, January 4, 2006.