

New Orleans Strategic Planning Group Advisory Board

Our charge: The strategic planning group shall envision and design a plan for a vibrant, robust Unitarian Universalist congregational presence in a rebuilt New Orleans. The plan should encompass the vision and needs of particular congregations but be focused holistically and systemically, rather than atomistically, on how Unitarian Universalism might be strongest and most vital in the greater New Orleans area.

Summary of Meetings March 17 and 18, 2006

In attendance: Jyaphia Christos-Rodgers, Wayne Clark, Mary An Godshall, Dick Harris, Marilyn Malone, Marta Valentin, Jim VanderWeele and Mark Westergard

Not Present: Burton Carley (jury duty) and Becky Cureau (pre-arranged conflicting commitment)

North Shore check-in

- The congregation does not expect an interim minister until August. There is some question as to how the expense of an interim minister will be funded.
- The volunteers coming to help are putting a strain on the church. The three New Orleans congregations cannot handle the task of coordinating volunteers. Some question exists regarding what the volunteer coordinator, Marillee Baccich, is to do and how she will interact with the congregations. If Ms Baccich is not responsible for volunteer coordination with the three New Orleans congregations then there needs to be another grant proposal submitted for such a position in New Orleans. There is a need for a volunteer coordinator in New Orleans. A conversation with Meg Riley regarding the need for another position to coordinate the volunteer effort in New Orleans may be appropriate. The new Orleans churches are now experiencing what the Baton Rouge church was experiencing when the Baton Rouge church wrote the Baton Rouge proposal.

Action Item #1: Wayne will talk with Meg Riley to clarify Marillee's role and to explore the possibility of additional volunteer coordination for the New Orleans' congregations.

- The North Shore congregation plans to invite folks from the other two churches to come to North Shore for a function or service.

Community Church check-in

- Jim's visits with Community's partner churches went well. Jim showed slides that Mary An had helped with, and then followed the slides with time for questions. Jim is in the process of considering the most efficient way in which to approach fundraising with partner churches.
- Community has formed a post-Katrina planning committee that will begin its work with an assessment, including an analysis of the number of people attending services and members and pledges but also an assessment of whether Community can provide full services of a church. The committee will attempt to answer the question: "What will it take to get to full church life?"
- Community and First Church are working cooperatively. The churches are meeting together for worship but not much else because there is no space for meetings or for building community between the two congregations.
- A big issue for the Community congregation is to determine how their personality can be maintained as they consider future possibilities with First Church.
- The congregation would like to stay in their building. For now the plan is to gut the building and clean it up in order to keep it from being a nuisance. It may be necessary to demolish the building. Until the FEMA flood maps come out no one has the needed answers. The latest FEMA flood map has the church in a green area (as in, a park area). The congregation is in a waiting mode without information.. The church is having meetings in members' homes regarding recovery (and finding that members are facing many of the same questions the church is facing).
- Wayne encouraged the congregation to take the issue of the building off their plate and focus instead their vision of the future. The vision will determine the kind of building needed to fulfill their vision.. Before building requirements are considered, the congregation needs to answer questions like: Who are we? What spiritual and emotional expectations will need to be met in three years? What would be missed if our church disappeared? What makes us different from other New Orleans congregations?
- Wayne also encouraged the congregation to back away from conversations with an architect. The time for an architect is after there is clarity of vision. Wayne distributed a handout the second and third pages of which contain questions designed to assist with achieving clarity of vision. Wayne suggested that the congregation will be ready to talk about a building when congregants are able to answer the questions in the handout.
- Community and First Churches, working together with their own funds and funds granted through the funding panel, have arranged to have public service announcements about Unitarian Universalism played on the New Orleans public radio station. The funds and wording for the announcements have been delivered to the station. Wayne asked who will track the results of the announcements. In response,

Action Item #2: Jyaphia volunteered to work with Alex (the office administrator working for both First Church and Community Church) to prepare a tracking form, monitor results, and put a data tracking system in place that tracks who comes through the door and what happens then. Jyaphia will share information at the next meeting of the strategic planning group. The public service announcements will run for three months.

- Community voted at its congregational meeting to: (1) join Common Good (an organization that asks candidates questions and does follow-up), and (2) support asking questions regarding affordable housing in New Orleans. These same two questions will be presented at First Church's congregational meeting. Community's president-elect will help make the presentation at the First Church congregational meeting

First Church Check-in

- The remediation project is close to being completed. The whole building is sealed now. The stairs to the second floor have been removed but it is a priority to get the second floor of the building up and running. The remediation project is moving more quickly than planned. A design team has been formed. That team is charged with creating ideas concerning the congregations return to the building. Among the subjects being discussed are accessibility and "re-building green." The design team will report this Sunday (March 19th) for the first time to discuss emerging ideas.
- One building-related idea that will be considered is creating a commercial grade kitchen to make it available for weddings and rentals, as well as to allow teaching of culinary arts, with possible changes to the fellowship hall to make it available for wedding receptions. Likewise such space might be available for other UU groups to have conferences. First Church is thinking about the space in terms of possibly sharing it with Community Church.
- First Church and Community Church are talking about the possibilities of future sharing of resources (building, programs, worship, religious education). It is clear that each congregation will need to make their own individual decisions. The congregation understands that their church is their congregants, not their building. This is an on-going theme that Marta will continue to lift up.
- First Church shares Community's frustrations regarding programming as a result of insufficient space. Marta is looking at renting space for a night on some regular basis for spiritual programming.
- The tri-church group will continue working together. A joint outdoor tri-church service is being planned for Earth Day. Tri-church meetings are resulting in bonding among the folks involved in the planning process.

Action Item #3: The suggestion was made to invite the Gulfport and Hammond churches to the tri-church Earth Day celebration, as well as inviting them to the next tri-church meeting. **[Who will be responsible for making this contact?]**

- Marta plans to update the First Church web site with a focus on: Why would someone want to come to our church?
- Marta did a fundraiser (a New Orleans-style dinner) with the Arlington, Massachusetts congregation. They had a full house. She did a pulpit exchange in Cambridge, Massachusetts that was very successful. She spoke at the Episcopal Divinity School. First Church is adding another partner church, Stamford Connecticut.
- First Church will have a visit from the choir of one of its partner churches. Marta is responsible for the logistics. Wayne commented that this is a perfect example of why we need someone to coordinate the logistics on visitors and volunteers. We need someone to manage all of these people that want to come down and help.

Action Item #4: **Mark**, on behalf of the district, inquired regarding why there are no partner churches from within the district. **Mark** will check the district web site to see if there is a description of how to become a partner church with the New Orleans churches. **Mark** also agreed to work with Eunice Benton, Mid-South District Executive, to get the New Orleans churches on the new Southwest District Executive's radar screen as the highest priority,

Action Item #5: The group was unanimously supportive of making a financial gift to Jefferson Presbyterian Church to show our appreciation for their support. **Jim** will present a proposal to the Funding Panel, asking for a \$1,000 grant to be given to Jefferson. Both First Church and Community Church will contribute \$500 so that the total gift will be \$2,000. **[Note: The Funding Panel has approved the request.]**

Action Item #6: **Wayne** will gather and share information about UUA and UUSC contributions to the local community. Wayne will also provide names of the local organization recipients, as available.

Contributions and Resources

In an effort to create financial transparency, each congregation prepared a list of financial contributions received since Katrina. The information was shared with the group so that each New Orleans congregation is now aware of contributions received by the other congregations. The information is for Advisory Board use only and will not be distributed.

Each congregation also shared information about the current status of its people resources (members, pledges units, average worship attendance, average religious education attendance)

and financial resources (budget, building fund, and endowment fund. The following resources information was reported:

**Pre
Katrina**

Congregation	Members	Pledge Units	Budget	Avg. Worship	Avg. RE	Endow/Bldg Fund
North Shore	XXX	XX	XXXXXX	XX	XX	XXXXXX
Community	XXX	XX	XXXXXX	XX	10 to15	XXXXXX
First	115	XX	XXXXXX	XX	XX	XXXXXX

**Post
Katrina**

Congregation	Members	Pledge Units	Budget	Avg. Worship	Avg. RE	Endow/Bldg Fund
North Shore	72	52	118,453	60	12	0
Community	59	51	100,000+/-	20 to 25	0	287,317
First	82	30	XXXXXX	XXX	XX	XXXXXX

Cash-Flow Projection Spreadsheets

Wayne met with the representatives from each congregation to discuss cash-flow projections. Each meeting lasted between 30 and 60 minutes. In each of the three (North Shore, Community, First) meetings, Wayne reviewed the projections that each congregation had been previously prepared.

Although the details will be kept confidential, the projections indicate that, *even with an aggressive growth plan*, each congregation would have an extremely difficult time maintaining their own separate buildings.

Visioning a Vibrant UUA Presence in a Rebuilt New Orleans

To begin a New Orleans-wide strategic planning process, Wayne suggested creation of a mission statement for each of the five previously determined categories; Denominational Connection,

Lifespan Religious Education, Marketing/Visibility, Community Outreach, and Worship and Music. (The original brainstorming document is attached for easy reference.) Two categories were selected and each group member chose to work on one of the two mission statements.

After the two statements were developed, Wayne asked each group to take their statement and match it with the original brainstormed list to create specific goals to support each statement. The statements and goals follow:

Lifespan Faith Development (Jyaphia, Dick, Marilyn)

Our mission is to create an intergenerational atmosphere which promotes inquiry, learning, thinking, compassion, responsibility, humor, and social justice such that people want to be part of our community and UU youth consistently become UU adults.

Goal 1: Mobilize adult, young adult, and youth as leaders of the New Orleans environmental and literacy movements.

Goal 2: Participate in exciting religious education, campus ministry, and summer camp programs.

Goal 3: Sponsor a school (charter or private) that demonstrates and promotes inquiry, learning, critical thinking, compassion, social justice, and the seven UU principles.

Goal 4: Develop a Center for Ethical Living to provide opportunities for reflection and action that is linked to our New Orleans-wide social justice organizing.

Community Outreach (Jim, Marta, Mary An)

The community outreach program of Unitarian Universalism of New Orleans weaves together our demands for justice, a sustainable environment and ethical living.

Goal 1: Develop a food ministry that includes a food pantry, nutrition education, creative culinary arts training, and food for summer day campers.

Goal 2: Join and participate in the Common Good Initiative.

Goal 3: Create a Cultural Arts Center and sponsor an on-going series of art shows, lectures, and musical presentations.

Goal 4: Work with other New Orleans congregations to develop a coordinated disaster escape program.

At the end of Friday's meeting, and again at the end of Saturday's meeting, Wayne led the group through an evaluation exercise:

Likes

and

Wishes

- *Wayne's direct and frank talk about \$
 - *Working on new mission statements
 - *Marilyn's willingness to host the meetings
 - *Eating lunch together at Marilyn's
 - *Balanced seriousness and laughter
 - *We have struggled past bumps and moved on
 - *The attention given to each person's ideas
 - *Everyone brought their complete self
 - *That we impressed Wayne with the quality of our work
 - *Our high energy
 - *How well Mark fits in with us
 - *The Saturday 9:00 am to 2:00 pm timeframe
 - *Individual time spent with Wayne and Mark
 - *Practical ideas and information/Concrete examples
 - *Mark's willingness to take notes and draft a summary
- *That Burton and Becky were here
 - *That we could get together more
 - *Could transfer our energy to congregations
 - *That Mary An + Fia will share our energy on Sunday with their congregations
 - *We had a clear roadmap of next steps

Special thanks to Mark Westergard for his outstanding notetaking during the meetings.

Respectfully submitted,

Wayne