



FOR LEADERS OF UU CONGREGATIONS

# CENTER Connections

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## New UUA.org Active, But Old Site Still Useful

Are you having trouble finding what you need on the new redesigned UUA.org? Information from the old website is still being moved to the new site, but it may be a matter of months before everything gets over there, including the archives of *InterConnections*. Until then, if you can't find what you need on the new site, try visiting the old site, which can be found at [archive.uua.org](http://archive.uua.org). For past issues of *InterConnections* that are not yet on the new site, you can use [archive.uua.org/interconnections](http://archive.uua.org/interconnections). Just remember that at some point in the next few months the old site will disappear and everything will be found on the new site.

## Gulf Coast Volunteer Program Changing

The Gulf Coast volunteer program has been transferred from the Unitarian Church of Baton Rouge to the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee. For more information about volunteering in New Orleans, visit the website at [uusc.org/gulfcoastvolunteerprogram](http://uusc.org/gulfcoastvolunteerprogram). You can also call Peggy Powell at the UUSC in Cambridge, Mass. at 617-301-4322 or email [uukatrina@uusc.org](mailto:uukatrina@uusc.org).

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### MEMBERSHIP

## How Welcoming Do Your Visitors Think You Are?

All of us are welcoming. Right? Visitors come on Sunday morning, and as soon as they step in the door they feel the love, not only from the official greeters, but from everyone else. The people they meet in the foyer, the ones they sit next to in the service, the people in coffee hour, they're all about looking for the new folks and they make eye contact and walk over and strike up conversations and then they invite these folks back the next week.

Maybe. There are, of course, those times when we leave welcoming to other people. And hope they're not leaving it to us.

Sometimes it helps to see ourselves as others see us. To that end, several districts within the Unitarian Universalist Association have developed practices to help congregations discover, through the eyes of a visitor, just how welcoming—or unwelcoming—they are.

They have created "Mystery Worshipper" or "Anonymous Visitor" programs. Here's how it works. A congregation agrees in advance to be part of the program. Then, on a Sunday morning a visitor from another congregation visits the first church, purporting to be a first-time visitor. After the visit the visitor fills out a checklist with items ranging from friendliness to quality of worship. The checklist is shared with the congregation's leadership by the district executive.

Here are excerpts from one visit by a Mystery Worshipper. The congregation and district shall remain nameless.

Since all church visits start with finding the front door—not always an obvious thing—that's where our visitor

started: "As I approached the building, I wasn't sure where the entrance was located. I would have appreciated an architectural feature . . . that more clearly designated the main entrance."

The visitor experienced a warm welcome from a greeter who also explained the layout of the building. "But when I moved beyond the welcoming table, I did not feel that people extended themselves to me. I kept a neutral face, attempting to make eye contact. Most people didn't give me eye contact. If they did make eye contact with me, there was no sign of greeting in their faces."

Seated in the sanctuary before the service, the visitor observed that the service leaders were busy at the front of the room setting up the chancel area. Those actions detracted from what could have been a meditative period, said the visitor.

Three people lit candles for joys and sorrows that Sunday and one of them took up about half of the time, making a lengthy announcement. The visitor wished that the joys and concerns table would have been tidier and arranged differently so that people weren't reaching over burning candles to light new ones. But the visitor appreciated the way the worship leader introduced this ritual.

The visitor noted that several parts of the service could have benefited from more attention—a reader who was unprepared, joys and sorrows that went on too long, and confusion at one point with which hymn verses to sing. The visitor gave high marks to the children's story because it appealed to adults as well.

*Continued on page two*



## INTERConnections

### MISSION

**InterConnections** aims to be relentlessly useful to lay leaders of Unitarian Universalist congregations and the professional staff who work with them, providing information and resources that help make congregations vital.

*InterConnections* is a joint service of the UUA's Congregational Services, District Services, and Communications Staff Groups. It is made possible by congregations' Annual Program Fund contributions and the generosity of individual Unitarian Universalists to the UUA.

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After the service the visitor felt abandoned. "I stood for five minutes with my coffee . . . a few feet away from the food table. I got a few smiles but no one stopped to talk to me. I felt uncomfortable waiting by myself. This was contrasted with the warm connections I had experienced as part of the worship service. I was about to start talking to someone, when the greeter arrived (as he had said he would) and began telling me about Unitarian Universalism and the church. He was excited in his sharing of many things. I'm very appreciative that he kept his word to seek me out after the service."

Visitors notice things the rest of us miss. This visitor watched an elderly man struggle with a bathroom door that was partly blocked by another door. Problems such as this often have a simple fix once you notice them.

In summary, this visitor gave the congregation an 8 on a scale of 10. "I appreciated the effort they are making to build a community and a spiritual home. Once I got talking with people, I felt engaged and welcomed. The emotional outreach to newcomers could be enhanced."

**One of the districts** with a Mystery Worshiper program is the Pacific Central District. District Executive Cilla Raughley said a three-part training is required to be a Mystery Worshiper. "It's important to me that all our Mystery Worshipers have a deep sense of what we're trying to accomplish and can write a report that gives useful feedback in a useful way," she said.

The congregation that will be visited gives Raughley six Sundays on which visits would be appropriate, excluding those services which might be atypical. The visitor chooses the actual day of the visit. The visitor is required to make a second visit as well so that the congregation will have two reports to consider.

Only ministers or congregational presidents may make application to include their congregations in the Mystery Worshiper program in some districts. Contact your district office for more information. Raughley can be reached at [craughley@uua.org](mailto:craughley@uua.org) or via the PCD website, [pcd-uua.org](http://pcd-uua.org) and is willing to share information as well as her district's Mystery Worshiper checklist.

Raughley noted that a district does not have to be involved. Two congregations or a cluster of congregations can agree to do this service for each other.

It's time well spent to carefully inspect your premises before visitors arrive, says Deborah Weiner, the UUA's director of Electronic Communication who has presented workshops at General Assembly on being welcoming.

"Can visitors tell where to park? Are there cobwebs in the corners of the nursery? Are the bathrooms clearly marked and clean? Would a fresh coat of paint make a noticeable difference? When people come with children is someone there to show the kids where to go? It also makes sense to make sure that your website is up to date and reflects all that your congregation has to offer visitors, since those that like their experience at your church are likely to go to the web to find out more, she said.

"We also need to provide quality services every Sunday that will inspire and move people and make them want to come back. Focus on excellence in all areas. Have a good street sign, ushers at the doors, and let people know that it's everyone's responsibility to welcome visitors, not just the greeters. Greeting should be a ministry that we are all engaged in."

### RESOURCES

*An excellent hospitality checklist is on the Pacific Central District website, [pcd-uua.org/hospitality.htm](http://pcd-uua.org/hospitality.htm)*

*Salted With Fire, UU Strategies for Sharing Faith and Growing Congregations, edited by Scott Alexander, is available at [uua.org/bookstore](http://uua.org/bookstore).*

*The Membership Journey includes information on welcoming and can be found on [UUA.org](http://UUA.org). Click on Leaders, then Leaders' Library, and search for "membership journey."*

*The following related InterConnections articles can be found by searching in the [UUA.org](http://UUA.org) Leaders' Library, or visit the online version of this article for links to these stories.*

*"To Attract More Visitors, Start with the Bathrooms" (May/June 1998).*

*"Experiences with Welcoming During the 2003 Media Campaign in the Kansas City Metro Area" (Spring 2004).*

*You can also search the Leaders' Library by topic to find additional resources from InterConnections and other UUA departments.*



## Precious Gifts

How are we caring today for the many people who dare get out of bed on a Sunday morning and risk meeting us in hopes that we will provide the religious community they want? . . . Let us treat each visitor as the precious gift they are, just as we were when we first visited . . . This is not rocket science, this is human love.

**UUA Moderator Gini Courter, speaking at General Assembly 2007 about the need to be welcoming to visitors to our congregations.**

## Association Sunday Set for October 14

All congregations are invited to be a part of Association Sunday, scheduled for October 14. Association Sunday is an effort to raise \$1 million that will go to support a national UU marketing campaign, to support congregations in calling ministers of color, and for grants to congregations for their own growth and outreach projects.

Association Sunday is part of the UUA's ongoing Now is the Time campaign ([uua.org/giving/nowis](http://uua.org/giving/nowis)), which has a goal of \$20 million in cash and \$30 million in deferred giving. Association Sundays are being planned as annual events for the next four to five years.

The Rev. Stephan Papa, special assistant to the president for Congregational Giving and Growth Funding, says, "We are asking congregations to think of this as helping the movement grow. We have the same number of members today as we did at the time of the consolidation of the Unitarians and Universalists in 1961. If we want Unitarian Universalism to be there in the future we have to make it happen. The larger we are, the more people will listen to us."

He notes that UU congregations support many local charities throughout the year with special collections. "Unitarian Universalism is also worth our support. We are the only ones who will do it. It's a way of sharing our faith with others and of being a part of

something bigger than our own congregations."

The Rev. Jim Eller, minister of All Souls UU Church in Kansas City, Mo., supports the campaign. Noting that Kansas City-area congregations were part of the UUA's initial media campaign in 2003, he says: "Association Sunday is a chance to give to growth. When we invest in growth and open ourselves to new people, new and exciting things begin to happen and spiritual and numeric growth often follows. Intention and planning does create positive change."

Eller says All Souls in Kansas City, as well as the Shawnee Mission UU Church in Overland Park, Kans., and the Unitarian Fellowship of Lawrence, Kans., benefited from being test sites for the new UU marketing campaign. "In the process we discovered how to become better at welcoming guests and new members. We discovered that reaching out does work." All three congregations are growing rapidly.

Find Association Sunday resources, including sermons, readings, music, and opening and closing words, and a list of frequently asked questions, at [uua.org/giving/associationsunday](http://uua.org/giving/associationsunday). For more information email [AssociationSunday@uua.org](mailto:AssociationSunday@uua.org), or call Cherisse Haakonsen, congregational giving assistant, at 617-948-6544, or Papa, at 610-902-3090. Association Sunday can be held on other Sundays if October 14 is unavailable.

## FORUM

I read the most recent edition of *InterConnections* and wanted to offer a correction to something written in the "Questions & Answers" section. In your scale of fees for professional services, you offered outdated information about IRS mileage rates. The 2007 mileage rate is 0.485/mile. I have included a link to the IRS website, [irs.gov/newsroom/article/0,,id=163828,00.html](http://irs.gov/newsroom/article/0,,id=163828,00.html) and also the news release that announced this rate.

Cordially,  
Justin Osterman

WASHINGTON—The Internal Revenue Service today (Nov. 1, 2006) issued the 2007 optional standard mileage rates used to calculate the deductible costs of operating an automobile for business, charitable, medical, or moving purposes.

Beginning Jan. 1, 2007, the standard mileage rates for the use of a car (including vans, pickups, or panel trucks) will be 48.5 cents per mile for business miles driven; 20 cents per mile driven for medical or moving purposes; and 14 cents per mile driven in service to a charitable organization.

## The Best Times to Hire A Financial Consultant

From the book *Beyond Fundraising, A Complete Guide to Congregational Stewardship*, by Wayne Clark, the UUA's director for Congregational Stewardship Services (2007, \$18, #4915, UUA Bookstore, [uua.org/bookstore](http://uua.org/bookstore)).

There are some specific situations in which a fundraising consultant is helpful to a congregation. Consider hiring a consultant when:

- The congregation lacks a clear vision.
- Help is needed to create a culture shift from a myth of scarcity to the reality of abundance.
- Few congregants have been willing to work on a fundraising effort or assume leadership roles.
- No one has experience as a fundraiser for religious institutions.
- There is conflict about which fundraising method to use.

Find *InterConnections* online at [uua.org/publications/interconnections](http://uua.org/publications/interconnections).



## Social Justice Staff At More Congregations

At least 13 congregations now have social justice coordinators as paid staff, says Susan Leslie, the UUA's director of the Office of Congregational Advocacy and Witness. They are First Unitarian Society in Madison, Wisc., (Wendy Cooper); All Souls Unitarian in Washington, D.C. (Louise Green); First Universalist in Minneapolis (Debra Rodgers); First Unitarian Church in Portland, Ore. (Rev. Kate Lore); First Unitarian Church of Rochester, N.Y. (Tim Wilson); University Unit. in Seattle, Wash. (Jennifer Bright); Unitarian Society of New Haven, Ct. (Rebekah Menning); Neighborhood UU Church in Pasadena, Calif. (Beth Colcord); Jefferson Unitarian Church in Golden, Colo. (Rev. Nathan Woodliff-Stanley); Unity Church Unitarian in St. Paul, Minn. (Pat Haff); UU Congregation of Atlanta, Ga. (Rev. Marti Keller); First Unitarian Church of San Jose, Calif. (Carol Stephenson); and Unitarian Church in Westport, Ct. (David Vita). The UU Congregation at Shelter Rock in Manhasset, N.Y., is currently searching for a social justice coordinator, says Leslie.

Several congregations also have coministers who have a primary focus on social justice, including the Rev. José Ballester at First UU Houston, and the Rev. Martha Niebanck at First Parish in Brookline, Mass.

Contact Leslie at [sleslie@uua.org](mailto:sleslie@uua.org) with additions to these lists.

## UU World Introduces Congregational News

*UU World* magazine launched a new section, "Congregational Announcements," in its Fall issue. Congregations may place a brief announcement of up to 50 words in any issue at a discounted rate. This section is for congregations to celebrate milestones and lift up the special people that bring joy and meaning to the congregation.

For more information about placing a congregational announcement visit [uuworld.org/advertising](http://uuworld.org/advertising).

## General Assembly at Home

Order CDs and DVDs of many General Assembly 2007 presentations at [uua.org/events/generalassembly/2007/30756.shtml](http://uua.org/events/generalassembly/2007/30756.shtml). Audio CDs are \$12; DVDs are \$20.

Presentations from previous GAs, back to 2002, are also available.

## TOOLBOX

# Staffing for Social Justice Has Church-Wide Benefits

The Rev. Nathan Woodliff-Stanley is minister of social responsibility at Jefferson Unitarian Church in Golden, Colo. (760 members), but the title doesn't tell everything. At some congregations social justice is a separate entity, as is music and religious education. But at Jefferson, Woodliff-Stanley is charged with infusing social justice throughout all aspects of congregational life. He works with JUC's Social Responsibility Council, but he also interacts with JUC musicians, religious educators, and others, helping to add a social justice focus to those programs.

"We don't think of social justice as exclusive work," he says. "If it's a separate entity sometimes that helps keep it marginalized. When you really connect it with other parts of the church community it can make it even more powerful."

**Here's how it works** at JUC. Children and youth in the religious education program have a social action Sunday every other month when they do church and community projects. "Nathan often works with the kids, helping with ideas and drawing out the kids on why we're doing these projects, and why they're important," says Sara Lacher, JUC youth religious educator. "These Sundays are very well attended." And at a social action weekend in April, 431 of the church's 760 members participated.

Woodliff-Stanley and Minister of Music Keith Arnold have worked together to bring appropriate music to services that have social justice themes. He and the Social Responsibility Council have talked about creating an adult education curriculum composed of core social justice topics.

Dee Ray, chair of the council, notes, "Just having Nathan here, his pulpit presence, his support, it's made a world of difference. It's given social justice more credibility with the congregation. In the congregational survey we take annually, social action used to be toward the bottom. This year we were ranked third."

Woodliff-Stanley brings resources to the eight social justice task forces at JUC, but does not lead them. "I help make connections between them. A lot of what I do is connecting and behind the scenes," he says. He preaches approximately monthly and includes topics beyond social justice.

Social justice is only part of his portfolio. He also does some pastoral care and starting this fall he is responsible for the Continuous Religious Education program at JUC. He says, "We often assume the ideal for a congregation is a full-time dedicated social justice coordinator. That's out of reach for most congregations, and it's not the only way to go."

Dividing his time is a necessity, given limited resources for staff positions at JUC. But it works well because social justice has an impact on all of his responsibilities, he says. "And we chose to use the Minister of Social Responsibility title for me, even though I am also doing other things, so that we could demonstrate that social justice is a priority here and that it is ministry."

For a full description of Woodliff-Stanley's job, email him at [nathanws@jeffersonunitarian.org](mailto:nathanws@jeffersonunitarian.org). JUC modeled its social justice program after one at First Unitarian Church in Rochester, N.Y., and uses as a guide the book *The Prophetic Imperative* (Skinner House, 2000), by the Rev. Richard S. Gilbert, minister emeritus of the Rochester congregation. Gilbert was interim minister at JUC several years ago and helped inspire the social justice program.

Woodliff-Stanley's position was initially made possible by a \$100,000 donation four years ago by a member of the congregation to develop social justice work. He started at half time and is now full time. The position is now almost fully funded through the church budget, and the grant has almost been phased out. Woodliff-Stanley is one of about 13 paid social justice coordinators at UU congregations. For a complete list, see the story at left.



## NOURISHING THE SPIRIT

# When Worship Becomes Cultural Misappropriation

**W**hen we sing an African-American spiritual during worship does that act honor another culture or is it cultural misappropriation? Can we hold a Seder if we're not Jewish? Can our children make Native American dream catchers in religious education classes?

As Unitarian Universalists we take pride in being open to many religious traditions and cultures and we often draw from them in our own worship. But when we do, it's important that we be aware of how we're using those words and symbols of other cultures, says the Rev. Sofia Betancourt, program coordinator in the UUA's Office of Racial and Ethnic Concerns.

Cultural misappropriation is a complicated issue, says Betancourt, but one which we need to think about. "We talk about needing to become more multicultural if we want to attract people who are different from us. At the same time we have to have some understanding of what has value in different communities."

**Something as simple** as changing a word in a song can have a deeper meaning than we might first think. Betancourt notes that Ysaye Barnwell, of the musical group Sweet Honey in the Rock, has pointed out that changing the word "Master" to "Father" in an African-American spiritual might make some people feel more comfortable, but it disrespects the original meaning. "Having a group of enslaved people choose a god as their master rather than the slave owner is a hugely powerful theological statement," says Betancourt, paraphrasing Barnwell. "To change Master to Father for our own comfort is doing a huge disservice to that community."

Before using a piece of music, a reading, or an artifact from another culture, research it, she says. "Ask yourself how you are in relationship to that culture and why you are using it." Include information about it in the service so people understand its original significance.

The Rev. Danielle DiBona, first vice

president of Diverse & Revolutionary Unitarian Universalist Multicultural Ministries and a member of the General Assembly Cultural Appropriation Consultation Team, appointed in 2006 to monitor cultural appropriateness at GAs, adds, "If you're getting ready to do something in your congregation and you wonder if it might be cultural misappropriation, then step back and think about it further."

But make a distinction between education and misappropriation, says DiBona, who is descended from the Wampanoag Native American Nation. "There's a difference between teaching children about a culture by making dream catchers or masks and using parts of a culture's religious practices in our own worship services."

It can take courage, says DiBona, for someone, especially a person of color, to confront misappropriation in a worship service or elsewhere. "If I do that, what I don't want to be told is that I misunderstood what I experienced or that it was done as a way of honoring my tradition," she says. "That defeats the conversation. What is helpful is to have a conversation about the meaning of ritual and how my people lost their language and way of life to genocide and now their religion is being taken too."

"If you want to honor Native Americans or other groups then start by making a relationship with those groups in your community. It will enrich them, and we will benefit as well."

### RESOURCES

For questions about what might constitute misappropriation, contact the UUA's Identity-Based Ministries staff group at [idbm@uua.org](mailto:idbm@uua.org), or the UU Musicians Network at [uumn@uumn.org](mailto:uumn@uumn.org) or [www25.uua.org/uumn](http://www25.uua.org/uumn).

"Cornrows, Kwanzaa, and Confusion: The Dilemma of Cultural Racism and Misappropriation," an article by the Rev. Marjorie Bowens-Wheatley is at [uua.org/leaders/leaderslibrary/culturalmisappropriation](http://uua.org/leaders/leaderslibrary/culturalmisappropriation).

### New Book, DVD Titles From the UUA Bookstore

These titles are available from the UUA Bookstore, [uua.org/bookstore](http://uua.org/bookstore), or 800-215-9076.

*Charge of the Chalice: The Davies Memorial Unitarian Universalist Church Growth & Diversity Story*, by the Rev. John Crestwell Jr. The story of a small church that went from eight percent diversity to nearly 40 percent in six years. Davies is a 2007 Breakthrough Congregation, designated by the UUA's Growth Team. (\$18.95, #7324)

*Stories in Faith: Exploring Our UU Principles and Sources Through Wisdom Tales*, by Gail Forsyth-Vail. Nineteen tales illuminate our Seven Principles and six Sources. Culled from different cultures and faith traditions, each story is accompanied by reflections on its meaning for Unitarian Universalists and its applicability to life in our congregations and families. By the religious educator of the North Parish of North Andover, Mass. (\$15, #5276)

*Ideas for Worship*, a DVD of segments taken from the first UUA Conference on Contemporary Worship. Offers fresh ideas on worship that you can use in your congregation. (\$8, #7321)

*The Seven Principles in Word and Worship*, the Rev. Ellen Brandenburg, editor. Fresh perspectives from seven ministers who joined the ministry after the Principles took their current form. Essays, prayers, and worship readings on each Principle. (\$12, #5274)

*Meet Jesus: The Life and Lessons of a Beloved Teacher*, by Lynn Tuttle Gunney, religious educator at Mount Diablo UU Church in Walnut Creek, Calif. Picture book for children ages four and up. Introduces children to Jesus, focusing on his life and lessons of kindness, peace, and tolerance. Includes Bible passages upon which the text is based. (\$12, #4747)

### About InterConnections

*InterConnections* is published quarterly and sent free to members of governing boards and professional staff of congregations. It is also online at [uua.org/publications/interconnections](http://uua.org/publications/interconnections). Sign up for email announcements when each new issue is online at [lists.uua.org/mailman/listinfo/interconnections-l](http://lists.uua.org/mailman/listinfo/interconnections-l).



## UUSC Creates New Social Justice Sessions For Small Groups

New Small Group Ministry sessions on vital social justice topics have been developed by the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee and are available for congregations to use this fall. The topics are living on democracy's edge (based on author Frances Moore Lappé's book *Democracy's Edge*), Drumbeat for Darfur, the human right to water, and the living wage.

The sessions, developed by Carie Johnsen, ministerial intern at the UUSC, are available at [uuscs.org](http://uuscs.org). Click on the Covenant Groups link. Johnsen said the topics mirror social justice campaigns of the UUSC and are part of a two-way approach by the organization. "Rather than congregations just coming to us and supporting our programs, we wanted to give something back to congregations," says Johnsen.

Each topic includes four to six sessions. They are also suitable for social justice groups and religious education classes and could also be used to develop worship services. All topics come with action steps that groups can take. The sessions are available to all congregations now. The UUSC is hoping that some congregations will be willing to field test the sessions to help the UUSC understand how congregations use them. Johnsen, who can be reached at [cjohnsen@uuscs.org](mailto:cjohnsen@uuscs.org), says the UUSC hopes to develop more topics in 2008.

## UU Video for Visitors

Look for a mailing to your congregation this fall from the UUA's Office of Congregational Services that will include an 8-to-12-minute DVD about Unitarian Universalism. It will include information on UU theology, religious education, history, and social justice. The intended audience is visitors and orientation classes. The DVD will be part of a packet of materials designed to help congregations be more welcoming in advance of a national ad campaign.

### Leadership Tools

Find useful information for leaders in the [UUA.org Leaders' Library](http://UUA.org/Leaders/Library) at [uua.org/leaders/leaderslibrary](http://uua.org/leaders/leaderslibrary).

## LEADERSHIP

# Keeping Church Conflict Within Healthy Limits

When a congregation on the east coast had to decide whether to sell its former parsonage, a beloved old building that needed lots of work, the process began painfully. An emotional congregational meeting ensued when members were asked to vote, without being given the skills to negotiate strong differences.

Over the next year three leaders from within the congregation worked on educating members about the larger financial context of the issue and engaged them in deep conversations about the church's mission. When it was suggested by some that the leaders might favor one side over the other, a consultant from a UUA district office was called in. The consultant built on the earlier work and helped the congregation develop agreements for managing difficult conversations, changing the tone from adversarial advocacy to respectful inquiry. The consultant also trained leaders in how to prepare for a congregational meeting, including making sure everyone had a chance to speak and that people spoke only for themselves. In the end the congregation decided to sell the building and even those who didn't agree with that outcome acknowledged the process was fair.

**What's a congregation** to do when conflict threatens? "The best thing is to seek help before it gets to that point," says the Rev. Terasa Cooley, district executive for the UUA's Massachusetts Bay District. "If there's even the slightest hint that something is going on that the congregation might not be able to resolve by itself, call your district executive. And do it early."

Cooley can tell you what not to do. "Don't wait until after you've done a survey or held a big congregational meeting. I can't tell you how many times I get a call, 'We did a survey about our ministry and now we need to talk with you about what to do with the information.' At that point it's three-quarters too late for me to help. I find surveys to be the most unhelpful instrument to assess ministry." The

problem, she says, is that they allow anonymous negative comments and can polarize a congregation.

Direct communication is important. Don't leave anonymous notes or letters for a minister or board president, says Cooley. And don't expect a committee on ministry to solve a problem you might have with a minister. Speak with the minister about it.

The Rev. Susan Manker-Seale, minister at the UU Congregation of NW Tucson, has worked with congregations in crisis. It's not uncommon, she said, for congregants to focus misplaced anxiety on the minister or board president rather than dealing with the real issues. It's important to redirect that anxiety, she says, and to treat all parties with respect.

"Be aware that any change in congregational life can bring conflict," she adds. "There is a loss involved in any change. People don't always know what to do with their feelings when change occurs."

District staff cannot consult with a congregation unless they are invited, generally by the minister or board chair. "If we get a call from a member, we are obligated to ask them if they've talked with the minister," says Cooley. "If they haven't I tell them I'll need to tell the minister we had this conversation." The exception is situations involving ministerial misconduct.

## RESOURCES

Find contact information for district offices online at [uua.org/aboutus/professionalstaff/districtservices](http://uua.org/aboutus/professionalstaff/districtservices).

The UUA Ministry and Professional Leadership staff group has a ministry assessment tool, *Assessing Our Leadership*, available at [uua.org/documents/mpl/assessingleadership.pdf](http://uua.org/documents/mpl/assessingleadership.pdf), and a *Congregational Self-Assessment Packet* at [uua.org/documents/ftp/congselfassessment.pdf](http://uua.org/documents/ftp/congselfassessment.pdf).

The book *Holy Conversations*, by Alice Mann and Gilbert Rendle, available from the Alban Institute at [alban.org](http://alban.org), includes ways congregations can resolve issues with a minimum of conflict.



## MONEY

# Helping Your Members Afford General Assembly

**S**ending lay leaders and congregational staff to General Assembly can be one of the best things we do to ensure the vitality of our congregations. But GA is expensive. Registration is close to \$300. A hotel room can be \$500 or more. Add meals and airfare and you've spent \$1,200 to \$2,000.

The cost of putting on the convention can't be altered much, says Jan Sneegas, director of the UUA's GA and Conference Services Office. "GA as it is currently configured requires big modern convention centers, which are expensive to rent. We work to make GA a break-even event."

Attendees wanting to save money can choose less expensive hotels, stay in a college dorm and eat in the cafeteria (a block of dorm rooms is usually reserved), or arrange a home-stay with local UUs. A downside: these facilities tend to be farther from the convention center. As GA approaches look for a page on the GA website called GA on a Budget, listing inexpensive lodging and restaurants.

Walt and Caron Wells, of All Souls UU Church in Kansas City, Mo. (541 members) are GA regulars. They stay in one of the big convention hotels to minimize walking, but try to find a shopping center food court for meals, avoiding the more expensive food in the convention center and hotels.

They spent about \$1,150 in Portland this year, plus air fare. "Every time we look at the total we think about whether we want to do it again," says Walt. All Souls does make some occasional small grants to attend GA.

The Planning Committee provides some scholarship money in the GA budget (for more information see [uua.org/events/generalassembly](http://uua.org/events/generalassembly)). A matching grant from the applicant's congregation is required. There has been money left over for the past two years, says Sneegas. Some GA expenses may be tax deductible especially for those who actively represent their congregations.

The UUA currently pays part of the

costs of bringing congregational presidents to General Assembly. Beyond that it is up to congregations themselves to help delegates, says Sneegas.

Some are trying. First Unitarian in Portland (1,100) has a \$5,000 fund to help pay costs of GA and district events. At one small northeast congregation a retired minister pays the way every year for the current minister. The Central Unitarian Church of Paramus, N.J. (187) pays GA registration fees. "It's there primarily to keep an awareness of the Association," says past president Lisa Horton. The UU Congregation of Castine, Maine (49), covers the first \$1,250 of costs for each delegate (two attended this year). "We think it's important that folks get the GA feeling about this faith of ours," says President Kent Price.

**At Portland**, former board member Arnie Pickar was among those who lobbied for a GA fund. "We recognized there wasn't a lot of knowledge in the congregation about the Association. Now we have an awareness of denominational issues we didn't have before." The fund pays two-thirds of the GA registration cost. (See article at right).

The Gulf Coast UU Church in Gulfport, Miss., may get the prize however. The loss of about half its members after Hurricane Katrina and the flooding of the site for its proposed building forced it to recreate itself. This spring, with 28 members and a new, drier building site, it took about \$10,000 from its building fund and used it to pay most of the costs for four lay leaders to attend GA this year.

Says Vice President Shelly Taylor, one of the four, "We decided the best use of our money was to invest it in the up-and-coming leadership of the church. And it was wonderful. GA completely renewed my spirits and it was very educational and we made lots of contacts. Being there is going to make a difference for our church."

Taylor says she hopes the congregation can maintain the practice of paying GA costs. "It's a lot of money, but it's worth it."

## Author Presenting Church Workshops On Men's Issues

Neil Chethik, author of two books about men and a former leader of the UU Men's Network, is offering Men/Relationship Weekends for UU congregations. The weekends include separate sessions for men and for couples plus a Sunday morning sermon.

He says, "With this array of programming, I'm able to make several unique contributions: 1) bring a message from a man that is both male-positive and pro-feminist; 2) demonstrate that the church cares not only that marriage is extended to all, but that the quality of each relationship is as fulfilling as possible; and 3) stimulate men's community-building in churches."

Chethik, a member of the UU Church of Lexington, Ky., is author of *Voice-Male: What Men Really Think About Their Marriages* (Simon & Schuster, 2006), and *FatherLoss: How Men Deal With the Deaths of Their Dads* (Hyperion Books, 2001). He has appeared on both ABC's "Good Morning America" and NBC's "The Today Show" speaking about men's issues.

Contact him at [nchet@aol.com](mailto:nchet@aol.com).

## Delegates Have Duties

First Unitarian Church, Portland, Ore. requires delegates to General Assembly not only to attend plenary (business) sessions, but to find a way to share GA information when they return home. Delegates caucus before GA to discuss denominational issues. After GA they gather for a potluck/debriefing and contribute information for a church newsletter article. Says Portland member Arnie Pickar, "We wish to assure that the use of church money is for the legitimate purpose of conducting church business. On a few occasions we have actually withheld stipends when the conditions were not met."

## Handbook Now Online

A key resource for congregational leaders, *The Congregational Handbook* is now available on the new UUA.org website at [uua.org/leaders/leaderslibrary/congregationalhandbook](http://uua.org/leaders/leaderslibrary/congregationalhandbook).

Don't worry about copyright: Make all the copies of *InterConnections* you want for others in your church.



## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

In this feature we seek out answers to questions of broad interest, drawing on experts in congregations, the UUA, and elsewhere. To submit a question, write to *InterConnections*, 8800 Norwood, Leawood, KS 66206, or email [interconnections@uua.org](mailto:interconnections@uua.org).

**Q** A 16-year-old girl whose parents do not attend our church is attending our Exploring Membership class. She assures us that her parents are OK with this, however I am concerned about allowing someone under the age of 18 to sign our membership book without our knowing what the parents think about it. How do other churches handle these situations?

**A** "A 16-year-old is a minor, and his/her parents or caregivers may have strong feelings about becoming a member of a faith community/congregation/church," says Helen Bishop, a former UUA district executive.

"I hope we would all encourage a 16-year-old to be in dialogue with her/his caregivers or parents about what it means to be a member of a faith community so their family dynamics would be strengthened," she says. "I believe that's in the best interests of the young person, the family, and the congregation as well. If there are family dynamics that preclude that kind of dialogue, that's important for congregational leaders to know about that as well, so as not to get into the middle of a con-

flict situation between the young person and his/her family." Most states do not allow people under 18 to vote on matters that are legally binding, Bishop notes.

**Q** We could use some help in revitalizing our youth group. Are there resources for that?

**A** Jill Schwendeman, director of youth programs at the thriving White Bear Unitarian Universalist Church in Mahtomedi, Minn., has written a book, *When Youth Lead: A Guide to Intergenerational Social Justice Ministry*, which seems likely to become an important resource for youth group leaders and congregations that want to develop or reenergize youth groups.

Schwendeman explains why it's important for congregations to include youth voices, noting in the chapter titled "Youth as Ministers," that youth prompt congregations to question the status quo, and that they often say things in a different way than adults, thus adding to understanding.

She describes how to grow a youth program, the importance of adult support and how to get it, and how youth

can be involved in social justice. She devotes almost 50 pages to 101 youth projects "to build a better world."

*When Youth Lead* is available at the UUA Bookstore, [uua.org/bookstore](http://uua.org/bookstore) (\$15 #4914).

**Q** Is there any kind of certification process for musicians in our congregations?

**A** The UU Musicians Network has developed a three-to-five-year certification process for UU musicians. Candidates must have served as a professional musician in a congregation for at least one year. Each candidate will work with an advisor and a sponsor to develop musical leadership and create a portfolio demonstrating these competencies. A Leadership Development Board will evaluate the portfolio and recommend the candidate for certification.

Coursework will be completed at home and at UUMN gatherings. Cost is \$350 annually, not including fees for the annual UUMN conference. Congregations are encouraged to support their musicians by including this fee in the music leader's professional development budget.



**INTER  
Connections**

*For Lay Leaders of UU Congregations*

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