

Communications Staff Group

Report to the Board of Trustees

John Hurley, Director of Communications

October, 2007

The organizational structure of the UUA staff can sometimes seem opaque, so for new board members and veterans alike, it might be helpful to clarify who we in the Communications Staff Group are and what we do.

The Communications Staff Group is composed of four offices: Information and Public Witness, with responsibility for public relations, information responses, archives and artifacts, and the welcoming of visitors to UUA headquarters; Electronic Communication, which oversees the UUA.org website and the hundreds of email lists we sponsor; Periodicals, which publishes our quarterly *UU World* print magazine, our weekly *uuworld.org* web magazine, and *InterConnections*, our newsletter for congregational leaders; and Publications/Bookstore, which publishes Skinner House Books, religious education curricula developed by the Lifespan Faith Development staff group, the UUA directory and pamphlets, and which, through the Bookstore at 25 Beacon and online, sells these and other items to the public. You will find details of the work of these offices in the reports below.

With the retirement of Tom Stites this past June, Chris Walton now exercises editorial responsibility for our three periodicals. Also in June, Janet Hayes was promoted to the position of Public Relations Director with supervisory responsibility for the Information and Public Witness office.

As you will read below, the past several months have been busy ones for the staff group. We are exploring new ways to communicate with our members, congregations, and the general public, and to share stories of congregational life. I hope the reports below will give you a sense of the wide-ranging work of the staff group, and I invite you to contact me with any questions you might have about that work.

Office of Information and Public Witness

Janet Hayes, Public Relations Director

October, 2007

For several months following General Assembly, the IPW staff have promoted stories about the UUA's actions to the news media. Two issues that have had far-ranging impact in the national BGLT community were the responsive resolution supporting transgender people and the call to repeal the Department of Defense's "Don't Ask/Don't Tell" policy. These stories are still appearing in local and community papers, demonstrating the power of this kind of prophetic witness.

Over the summer Janet Hayes, Public Relations Director, worked with staff in the UUA's Congregational Services Department and partners at the New England Adolescent Research Institute (NEARI) to debut a new online safety training program developed by NEARI and Rev. Debra Haffner of The Religious Institute for Sexual Morality, Justice, and Healing, whose manual *Balancing Acts* was adapted for the new resource. Janet developed talking points and trained spokespeople from UU congregations, and the team provided an AP reporter with an exclusive story about how UU communities are using safe congregation policies to respond to news that a former sex offender wishes to join their congregation. The story was carefully developed over several months, and the time and care paid off. The article was picked up approximately 200 outlets around the country, and placed UUism at the forefront of this important work.

Other major projects supported by the IPW office in recent months include the UUA/UUSC's marking of the 2nd anniversary of Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans and the launch of the UUA's national marketing campaign. IPW staff have also offered support for the Bay Area regional marketing campaign and a range of Public Witness initiatives.

Over the past year, Erika Nonken, Public Information Assistant, conducted more tours of the UUA than the previous year. These tours are offered to UUs, often coming-of-age groups from around the country visiting Boston in the spring and summer on "Heritage Trips." Specifically, Erika welcomed:

- 51 tours (a 24% increase over last year)
- 909 people (a 23% increase)
- 69 congregations (a 17% increase)

Starting last spring, Erika has been responding to a growing number of information requests from seekers new to Unitarian Universalism, thanks to the new UUA.org website. Erika recently helped to compile archival images for the historic section of the new DVD *Voices of a Liberal Faith*. She has also been coordinating the October dedication of three portraits of historic Universalists that were donated to the UUA by friends of St. Lawrence University. Graduates of the Universalist theological school at St. Lawrence, along with their friends, family, and colleagues, will gather at 25 Beacon on October 2 to dedicate the portraits. Bill Sinkford and Dan Sullivan, president of St. Lawrence, will participate in the ceremony.

Office of Electronic Communication
Deborah Weiner, Director of Electronic Communication
October, 2007

When I last wrote to you, we were on the verge of re-launching UUA.org. That re-launch went off smoothly on April 2 with the support of a cross-departmental team from Information Technology Services and Communications. Now, five-plus months after re-launch, the Office of Electronic Communication and our content providers are working

on Phase 2 of our content migration, continuing to move documents from the 'old' UUA.org and adding new content.

There are numerous additions and enhancements that have been made to UUA.org over these last months (too many to individually mention here) but chief among them is the enhancement of our search engine which functions independent of Google in specialized areas on the site (social justice statements, leaders library, worship web). The new search engine allows for a full text search of a specific area, and an enhanced Boolean search as well. The results of early use are encouraging and show the extensive and growing list of resources we are adding to the website on a daily basis.

To explore these areas further please visit:

Social Justice Statements: <http://www.uua.org/socialjustice/socialjustice/index.php>

Leaders' Library: <http://www.uua.org/leaders/leaderslibrary/index.php>

WorshipWeb: <http://www.uua.org/spirituallife/worshipweb/search.php>

Another enhancement is the new search of our staff listings, which are maintained through a dynamic database. When you visit our staff page (About Us > Professional Staff) you can get a quick link for all staff by last name or by staff group, or you can search for a staff member by name or category. Soon, a similar program will be in place for maintaining listings of your names and the names of those serving on UUA committees as well. See <http://www.uua.org/aboutus/professionalstaff/index.php> for a demonstration!

Flyers about the new UUA.org were mailed to all congregations in April and a flyer about our Leaders' Library was mailed in our September congregational packet. We continue to seek submissions for our new "Congregational Life" section, featuring stories on many aspects of the lives of congregations. We also continue to seek writing from our ordained clergy for the "From the Minister's Study" feature, as well as podcasts and other pieces that might enrich our new "Spiritual Life" section.

This isn't all that's going on in the Office of Electronic Communication. We've been pleased to partner with a cross-disciplinary group of staff and consultants on the development of materials to support the UUA's first national marketing campaign in over fifty years. Bill Sinkford announced the campaign to our congregations and communities on September 12, and before you gather in Boston for your October meeting, our first ad will have appeared in *Time* magazine. Next month, our first advertorial will appear in *Time*. This is an exciting time to be a UU and a wonderful opportunity for our website to deliver our faith to the larger world. We're glad to be part of it!

Periodicals Office

Chris Walton, Editor

October, 2007

UU World's **mailing expenses** are increasing 20% - 25% due to changes in the US Postal Service's periodicals rate, which went into effect July 15. We are actively looking for

ways to offset some of the increase: We signed a contract with a company that will handle our international mailing at reduced rates. We are also rebidding our printing contract and exploring the shipping options offered by three major presses. Unfortunately, none of the printers can offer dramatic savings off the new rate.

As I explained in my Fall “From the Editor” column, the new postage rates unfairly hit smaller national magazines with steep increases while giving discounts to the largest-circulation magazines. *UU World* and the UUA have signed on to a campaign by independent public-interest magazines (including *The Nation*, *Mother Jones*, and *National Review*) urging Congress to investigate how these changes came to pass.

UU World introduced a new form of classified advertising in the Fall issue called “**Congregational Announcements**,” which let congregations place brief celebrations and other notices in a special section in *UU News* at discounted rates. We are advertising this opportunity to church leaders through the Congregational Mailing. See uuworld.org/advertising for more information. The magazine is also launching a new push to invite **gift subscriptions** to the magazine, including give-away copies for use in congregations. See uuworld.org/subscriptions for more.

UU World’s web magazine, ***uuworld.org: liberal religion and life***, continues to attract new readers. New forms of aggregation by other news media, including CNN.com, are featuring *uuworld.org* stories on readers’ personalized homepages. We’ve continued to see readers promote our stories using “viral marketing” methods like blogs, social-networking sites (like MySpace), and social-news sites (like Reddit.com, which sent 12,000 readers to a single story in one day in July, an unprecedented surge for us).

We are continuing *uuworld.org*’s **marketing campaign** through the Google AdWords network, and will expand it to further the reach of the UUA and Bay Area marketing campaigns in October.

We invite you to sign up for *uuworld.org*’s **weekly email newsletter**, which highlights each week’s news and other content. Visit uuworld.org/subscriptions/emailnewsletter.shtml.

Finally, Don Skinner, Sonja Cohen, and Josh DeGregorio have focused this summer on transferring ten years’ worth of ***InterConnections* articles** into the new UUA.org “Leader’s Library,” which now features almost one quarter of the newsletter’s archives.

Publications and UUA Bookstore
Patricia Frevert, Publishing Director
October, 2007

Skinner House Books

For the 12 months ending in August 2007, Skinner House sales were \$318,487—nearly even with sales for the same period one year ago. Skinner House has published these new titles:

In Praise of Animals: A Treasury of Poems, Quotations and Readings, collected by Edward Searl (April 2007) \$14.00
Amethyst Beach: Meditations, Barbara Merritt (May 2007) \$8.00
Crisis and Change: My Years as President of the Unitarian Universalist Association, 1969-1977, Robert Nelson West (May 2007) \$18.00
The Seven Principles in Word and Worship, edited by Ellen Brandenburg (June 2007) \$12.00
Meet Jesus: The Life and Lessons of a Beloved Teacher, Lynn Tuttle Gunney (June 2007) \$12.00
How to Bury a Goldfish and Other Ceremonies and Celebrations for Everyday Life, Virginia Lang and Louise Nayer (July 2007) \$15.00

Skinner House is publishing these new titles in the coming year:

Worship That Works: Theory and Practice for Unitarian Universalists, Wayne Arnason and Kathleen Rolenz (October 2007) \$16.00
A Wind Swept Over the Waters: Reflections on 60 Favorite Bible Passages, John Nichols (September 2007) \$15.00
Come Into the Circle: Worshiping with Children, Michelle Richards (November 2007) \$15.00
Wrestling with Adulthood: UU Men Talk about Growing Up, edited by Ken Beldon (February 2008) \$15.00
The Fellowship Movement: A Growth Strategy and Its Legacy, Holly Ulbrich (October 2007) \$14.00
Sonata for Voice and Silence, 2008 UUA Meditation Manual, Mark Belletini (May 2008) \$8.00
The Cambridge Platform: A Contemporary Reader's Edition, edited by Peter Hughes (March 2008) \$8.00
A Child's Book of Blessings and Prayers, Eliza Blanchard (June 2008) \$12.00

Check the Skinner House website at www.uua.org/publications/skinnerhouse for up-to-date publication information and new titles.

Skinner House in the News

Meet Jesus: The Life and Lessons of a Beloved Teacher was reviewed in Publishers Weekly, 6/25/07: "Taking a liberal approach intended to reach a potentially broad audience that includes non-Christians, Gunney presents a sweeping look at Jesus' life. The author focuses—employing summarized parables and other lessons—on Jesus' role as an accessible and very human teacher rather than on his divinity as the son of God. Jesus' birth, death and resurrection are mentioned briefly in the accepted Christian contexts, including Christmas Day and Easter. But rather than a Biblical timeline, young readers will likely come away with a more general sense of how Jesus might have lived as a man sharing new ideas about kindness, love and respect. The simple presentation can serve as a discussion starter and impetus to further explore either the Bible or other texts. Conteh-Morgan's

cartoonish ink-and-watercolor illustrations keep the overall tone of this volume cheery and light. Bible passage references are included.”

An excerpt from *Prairie Soul: Finding Grace in the Earth Beneath My Feet* by Jeffrey Lockwood appeared in the July-September 2007 issue of Conservation Magazine.

Writing the Sacred Journey: The Art and Practice of Spiritual Memoir by Elizabeth Andrew was featured in the Resources section of Volume 18, Number 2, 2007 of WATERwheel, the quarterly newsletter of the Women’s Alliance for Theology, Ethics and Ritual.

UUA Bookstore

GA 2006

The UUA Bookstore hosted more than 25 authors in the Exhibit Hall this year, including Daniel Ellsberg, Robert Fulghum, Kathleen Norris and Thom Hartmann. Bookstore sales in Portland, Oregon, were very strong: \$119,000, second only to the 2003 GA in Boston.

Sales

For the 12 months ending in August 2007, Bookstore sales were \$1,246,000--down 14% from the same period one year ago; the downturn is due primarily to falling sales for Singing the Journey, the hymnbook supplement published in June 2005.

New in the Bookstore

Sacred Service in Civic Space: Three Hundred Years of Community Ministry in Unitarian Universalism, Kathleen Parker. Chronicles the work of UU lay leaders and ministers in the areas of social justice, chaplaincy, authorship, the arts and education. (Meadville Lombard) \$18.00

Charge of the Chalice: The Davies Memorial Unitarian Universalist Church Growth & Diversity Story, John Thomas Crestwell Jr. The story of a small church that grew from 8-percent diversity to nearly 40-percent diversity in just six years. (Movement Ministries) \$18.95

Here If You Need Me: A True Story, Kate Braestrup. Personal memoir of a journey from grief to faith. Author is chaplain for the Maine Warden Service and is affiliated with the First Universalist Church in Rockland, Maine. (Little, Brown) \$23.99

UUA Publishing

Stories in Faith: Exploring Our UU Principles and Sources through Wisdom Tales, Gail Forsyth-Vail (August 2007) Lifespan Faith Development, \$15.00

UUA Directory 2008 (October 2007) \$25.00

Our Whole Lives: Sexuality Education for Young Adults, Ages 18-35, Michael Tino, Laura Anne Stuart, Sarah Gibb Millspaugh (January 2008) Lifespan Faith Development

Sexuality and Our Faith: A Companion to Our Whole Lives, Young Adults,
Mandy Keithan, T. Michael Rock, Lynn Young (January 2008) Lifespan
Faith Development