



## SOUTHERN REGION



### An Update on the GIFT Program

In 2012, the UUA and the Southern Region embarked on a new course to improve how we share our resources to support the larger faith. *GIFT*, Generously Investing For Tomorrow, is intended to be a simpler and more equitable program for providing the resources that enable the UUA and the Southern Region to serve our congregations and to represent our values and priorities at levels we could not do as individual congregations.

So, how are we doing? Anytime a change as large as this takes place, something that affects every congregation in the Region, there will also assuredly be some confusion. The *GIFT* program requests are based on maintaining the overall giving levels in the districts and to the Annual Program Fund (APF), and specifically does not ask for MORE support on the whole. The majority of congregations see no change or a reduction in support requests from previous years, however, this does mean that some congregations are asked for increased commitments. So it was as we began *GIFT*, but as we have come to adapt it, the following factors have come to be more widely understood throughout the Region:

- *GIFT* is more equitable than the Annual Program Fund formula and district support it replaced. Under the former system, contribution requests were based on reported membership counts. With no standard definition of a member, some congregations carried a larger share of the contributions. Additionally, membership felt like a “poll tax” to some under the old system; prompting discussions about whether someone was an “actual member” not because of their level of engagement, but because of the cost their membership incurred for the congregation.
- *GIFT* represents our contributions to *both* the UUA and to the Region. Under *GIFT*, there is a Unified Ask, and a Unified Gift, a more concrete expression of the fact that we are supporting, and supported by, both local and national programming and staff.
- The *GIFT* formula is not based on a percentage of our total budgets, but of our certified operating expenses so the basis of calculation is on factors common to all congregations.
- *GIFT* is designed on the basis of 7% of our reported certified operating expenses which enables us to resource the Region and the UUA at the same level as previously – no increases were built in.



Most congregations find their contributions are at about the same or less than under the old system. For those of us facing higher contribution goals under *GIFT*, the UUA has worked, and will continue to work when requested, with those congregations whose circumstances may call for additional time to meet the new contribution formula. The first year of the program, congregations were accorded



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full Honor Congregation status when contributing at 5% or higher. This year, contributions of 6% or above will be considered Honor, but this too is meant to only be a temporary “stopping place” on the way to the full 7%. Next year, 7% contributions will be Honor level.

Overall, the *GIFT* program is accomplishing the goals we hoped for it, with across-the-region giving levels comparable to where they were in earlier years. We would like to do better, with as many congregations as possible 7% GIFT. Part of enabling that goal is to ensure everyone is fully informed about the program and knows where to go with questions and issues.

- Over the next few months, we will post-FAQs about the *GIFT* program on the Southern Region website biweekly; we invite you to review and invite your fellow Unitarian Universalists to do the same.
- *GIFT* will be a featured discussion item on the upcoming Regional assemblies April 17-19; your participation is very important. We ask that District and congregational leaders use these tools and this time to ensure our members know about the *GIFT* program and how it serves our priorities.
- Questions? Feel free to reach out to your Regional Primary Congregational Life Staff Contact for any general questions about the *GIFT* program; they will respond or will put you in touch with someone who can help.
- If you are looking for guidance on how to calculate your operating expenses, please use the guide on the UUA website, or feel welcome to reach out to the UUA’s Stewardship and Development Office, via the dedicated email address, southerngenerosity@uua.org.



We’re charting a new course for the UUA with *GIFT*. This is about far more than just providing resources or “paying the bills.” *GIFT* honors our covenant with each other to build and sustain Unitarian Universalism, and invites us to think beyond the walls of individual congregations and needs in a fair and transparent way. Working together, *GIFT* allows us all to contribute in a way that is more just, encourages growth, and brings our relationship to one another into greater focus. As we move towards the close of the second year of *GIFT*, we look forward to recommitting to our covenant with one another.

Thank you for your leadership and your dedication. Together, we can bring more justice, more light, and more Unitarian Universalism to the Southern Region.

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