

Communications Staff Group

January, 2007

Report to the UUA Board of Trustees

John Hurley, Director

The Communications Staff Group, made up of the Office of Information and Public Witness, the Office of Electronic Communication, Periodicals, and Publications/Bookstore, enters the new year with exciting projects either already underway or about to begin. Not surprisingly, several of these initiatives revolve around innovations in the way we communicate with both Unitarian Universalists and the wider world.

Deb Weiner's report from OEC will update you on the progress toward a new and improved UUA website, a huge project that includes migrating pages from the "old" website (i.e., the one that we see and use right now) to the "new" uua.org, the redesigned website that will be unveiled on April 1st.

Chris Walton's report from Periodicals notes that daily readership for *uuworld.org*, the Association's weekly web magazine, has doubled over the past year. Periodicals is at the forefront of staff forays into e-marketing, a topic you'll no doubt be hearing more about in the coming months.

The report from the Office of Information and Public Witness includes information on the office's increased advising of ministers and congregations involved in public witness work. Unfortunately, some of this consultation was in response to acts of vandalism against our congregations, but in almost every case, the ensuing media coverage was extremely positive.

Finally, Patricia Frevert's report from Publications/Bookstore contains the good news about an increase in sales of Skinner House publications. Bookstore sales are down, however, as the sales spike of *Singing the Journey* levels off, but holiday sales and GA sales hold hope for at least a partial surge to previous sales levels.

All in all, the Communications Staff Group enters the new year with enthusiasm for our work and excitement about the challenges that lie ahead. As always, I encourage you to contact me by email or telephone, or to come by my office while you are in Boston, if you have any questions or comments about the work of the staff group.

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Office of Information and Public Witness

The IPW office has seen a significant increase in congregations and clusters asking for advice and assistance with their public witness/public relations efforts. Janet Hayes has been working with a group of lay leaders in the Baltimore-Washington area to help them develop the knowledge and resources to do more strategic public witness work. Janet also collaborated with a large UUA staff and volunteer team to coordinate media outreach efforts for the southern California marketing campaign. The team was pleased to secure several news articles, including a large feature article in the *LA Times*. In addition, John Hurley and Janet Hayes have been advising two staffers in newly-created public relations positions: one working for a group of Chicago area congregations, and one on staff at First Unitarian in Portland, Oregon.

Hurley recently advised two ministers in advance of their television appearances: Kathleen McTigue, who appeared on Fox TV's *The O'Reilly Factor* speaking out against government-sanctioned torture, and Rob Hardies, who appeared on CNN's *Anderson Cooper's 360* program that focused on the changing face of American Christianity. In the weeks leading up to the midterm elections, Hurley spoke with clergy and lay leaders about political speech that complies with IRS guidelines for tax-exempt entities; this work resulted in coverage for Rob Keithan and the Washington Office in a recent *Boston Globe* piece.

The IPW team worked closely with the Washington Office for Advocacy to plan and support Bill Sinkford's appearances on World AIDS Day. Sinkford's comments at an audio press conference in advance of the his Washington, DC, events included in an item on the CNN website

Hurley and Hayes have also been handling an increasing number of crisis communications issues this fall. Several UU churches have recently suffered vandalism and the IPW staff has helped them respond to media inquiries, reach out to their communities, and use these opportunities to witness for their values. Please remember that the UUA website includes a Press Room with a database of media items on Unitarian Universalism (congregational stories, public witness issues, ministers, etc.); the database now includes more than 1,000 entries, and you can find it at <http://www.uua.org/pressroom/articlelist.php>

Over the past few months the UUA's Information Assistant, Erika Nonken, has done a considerable amount of work for the new UUA.org website. Drawing from her daily work answering questions about our faith and suggestions from the UUA.org redesign team, she structured and designed a prominent section of the new site for people who are unfamiliar with Unitarian Universalism. Topics covered in this section include our

principles, beliefs within our faith, the flaming chalice symbol, our history, worship in UU congregations, congregational life, and social justice and diversity. Nonken drafted and entered the text for 50 pages into the new Content Management System. She continues to work on formatting these pages for the web with help from Julie Albanese in OEC.

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Office of Electronic Communication

The Office of Electronic Communication is making great progress in implementing our new content management system (CMS). All UUA.org pages have been redesigned (our design work was completed by Matrix Group International, based in Virginia). Those designs are now being deployed using a content management product developed by CrownPeak Technology of California.

The CMS separates web content from design and enables work groups (at this phase, members of the UUA staff) to maintain their web pages using browser-based forms in Internet Explorer. Over sixty staff members have been identified as CMS “authors” and are being trained throughout December, January, and February.

UUA.org is the public face of the Association on the web. When preparing web content we must ensure that we are providing high quality, professional, and reliable information for visitors, leaders, and members of our congregations. Publishing content in a consistent format and style goes a long way toward achieving that goal. In order to migrate our content and maintain a consistent user experience on our website with multiple content providers at work, we have created a UUA.org Standards & Style Guide which resides in the public part of our site. This resource will guide content creators in the presentation of consistent content, style and usability standards.

Other recent highlights include the following:

- We have created public [Website Relaunch Project](http://stage.uua.org/aboutwebsiterelaunch/) web pages (<http://stage.uua.org/aboutwebsiterelaunch/>) for staff and other interested parties to keep them abreast of updates and progress. It will also allow them to see how decisions were made in creating the new site.
- The new ["Visitors" area](http://stage.uua.org/visitors/index.shtml) has been created and content written and entered into the CMS. (<http://stage.uua.org/visitors/index.shtml>)
- The Stewardship & Development staff group is now transferring their content into the "Giving & Generosity" area. Other staff groups will follow with content migration.

- Content on email lists has also been migrated. Content relating to the UUA's bylaws, committees, awards, the Board of Trustees and financial advisor is being migrated now, and Social Justice Statements will follow soon.
- Images for new pages are being developed for all sections of the site; photo album concepts and styles for content authors to include images are also being developed and refined.

We're sure we'll have much more information to provide you prior to the April Board meeting, which will be near our Phase 1 launch date (March 31st). Stay tuned!

During this time of intense content migration activity, it's important to keep in mind that the capacity of the OEC to accommodate new work requests is limited. We continue to handle materials which are urgent, time-sensitive, and news-related. Other projects are being delayed and, in many cases, returned to the individual requesting them, with the suggestion that those individuals post their own materials following the public launch of our new website. To date, the constituent response has been supportive and understanding, and we appreciate the support of the Board as we work to provide better web services.

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Periodicals Office

The Winter 2006 issue of *UU World*, which went in the mail November 1, included an on-the-ground report by Michelle Bates Deakin about organizations assisted by the UUA-UUSC Gulf Coast Relief Fund. Other major features included William F. Schulz's provocative essay, "What Torture Has Taught Me," Warren R. Ross's look back at the Washington DC-area growth initiative led by A. Powell Davies in the 1950s, and an excerpt from William Murry's new Skinner House book on religious humanism. The Spring 2007 issue will go in the mail February 15 with a cover story on ethical eating.

One trend we're trying to interpret: We've experienced a pronounced drop-off in the number of letters to the editor in the last year, which may be a result of the shift to quarterly publication along with the rise of electronic forums for discussing Unitarian Universalist life. In the Winter issue we introduced a new column in the Letters section that highlights some of the notable online conversation readers might enjoy.

Our web magazine, *uuworld.org*, continues to perform well. Daily readership has nearly doubled since this time last year. To expand the site's reach, we launched several new forms of marketing this quarter. Several are examples of low-cost "viral marketing":

- Weekly announcements of new articles are posted to the "Unitarian Universalists" LiveJournal community (<http://unitarians.livejournal.com/>) and to the magazine's

own LiveJournal page (<http://uuworld.livejournal.com/>). These announcements generate a steady stream of traffic to magazine articles and are distributed to hundreds of readers.

- A MySpace page for the magazine promotes *UU World* and provides links to recent articles (<http://www.myspace.com/uuworld>). MySpace is the largest online community of youth and young adults in the world.
- StumbleUpon, a popular web service that highlights web content recommended by other users, has sent more readers to particular *uuworld.org* articles than any other viral marketing device so far. (<http://www.stumbleupon.com/>)

At the beginning of November we also launched a marketing test using Google's AdSense program. Ads promoting *uuworld.org* run daily on Google's search network and throughout Google's content partner network. The average user who responds to an ad reads several pages and stays several minutes, a sign of real engagement with the site. We are currently spending \$10 a day on this campaign, and reader response suggests we could productively invest more if we had the funds. We are using Google Analytics and StatCounter at almost no cost to monitor site traffic and reader behavior.

Finally, a team of editors met with staff from the Office of Electronic Communications to plan the transfer of *InterConnections* content into the new CMS-powered UUA.org website, and OEC is developing customized templates to accommodate *InterConnections* in its new format.

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Publications Office and the UUA Bookstore

UUA Bookstore Sales

UUA Bookstore sales were \$1,347,536 for the 12 months ending November 2006. This is a decrease of 2% from the same period one year ago--due largely to the gradual flattening out of the sales of the hymnbook supplement, *Singing the Journey* (published in June 2005, with sales of \$475,000 to date).

New and Recent Titles from the UUA

Coming of Age: A Treasury of Poems, Quotations and Readings on Growing Up, collected by Ed Searl (December 2006) Skinner House, \$15.00

When Youth Lead: Intergenerational Social Justice Ministry, Jill Schwendeman (January 2007) Lifespan Faith Development, \$15.00

Beyond Fundraising: The Complete Guide to Congregational Stewardship, Wayne Clark
(March 2007) \$18.00

In Praise of Animals: A Treasury of Poems, Quotations and Readings, collected by Ed
Searl (April 2007) Skinner House, \$14.00

Amethyst Beach: Meditations, Barbara Merritt (May 2007) Skinner House, \$8.00

*Crisis and Change: My Years as President of the Unitarian Universalist Association,
1969-1977*, Robert Nelson West (May 2007) Skinner House, \$18.00

How to Bury a Goldfish and Other Ceremonies and Celebrations for Everyday Life,
Virginia Lang and Louise Nayer (July 2007) Skinner House, \$15.00

Skinner House Sales

***In the 12 months ending November 2006, Skinner House sales were \$313,166--
up 8% from the same period one year ago.***

Skinner House Books in the News

Joshua Searle-White, author of *Magic Wanda's Travel Emporium: Tales of Love, Hate
and Things In Between* will sign books and tell stories at River Road Unitarian Church
(RRUC) on Saturday, December 9, in the church sanctuary at 7:30 p.m.

Meg Barnhouse, author of *Did I Say That Out Loud? Musings from a Questioning Soul*,
will be interviewed by Dr. Kathleen Hall, on "Live An Intentional Life," KEST 1450,
San Francisco, December 14th at 10 A.M. EST

Evensong for Families: An Eight-Week Series of Gatherings is reviewed by Peter
Bowden on The UU Small Group Ministry Network web site at
<http://smallgroupministry.net/adventures/>.

Gatherings: Small Group Ministry for Men is reviewed by Peter Bowden on The UU
Small Group Ministry Network web site at <http://smallgroupministry.net/adventures/>.

New Books Available from the UUA Bookstore

End of the Wild by Stephen Meyer. Urges readers to move away from the current haphazard strategy of protecting species in isolation, and instead create trans-regional "meta-reserves," designed to protect ecosystem functions. (MIT Press) 2006 \$14.95

Dark Ages: The Case for a Science of Human Behavior by Lee McIntyre. Calls for another scientific revolution, in which we apply a more rigorous methodology to human behavior--even if it threatens our cherished religious or political beliefs about human autonomy, race, class, and gender. (MIT Press) 2006 \$24.95

God's Universe by Owen Gingerich. Shows that an individual can be both a creative scientist and a believer in divine design, and that the very motivation for scientific research can come from a desire to trace God's handiwork. (Harvard University Press) 2006 \$16.95

God and the Welfare State by Lew Daly. Explores the ideas and history behind President Bush's emphasis on faith-based groups as key providers of social services. Although the present initiative isn't effective (it primarily helps churches, not poor people), Daly argues that a policy more faithful to the ideas behind it might actually work. (MIT Press) 2006 \$14.95

Zen Master Who? A Guide to the People and Stories of Zen by James Ishmael Ford. Profiles modern Zen teachers and institutions, including D. T. Suzuki and Alan Watts, as well as the emergence of liberal Buddhism in North America. (Wisdom Publications) 2006 \$15.95