

Report to the UUA Board of Trustees
From the District Services Staff Group
April, 2008

"Listening to Experience" DVD from the November Growth Consultation

By the time the April Board meeting occurs, board members may have received a DVD entitled, "Listening to Experience". 5,000 copies have been produced, and are being distributed, along with a letter from Bill Sinkford, to UU Ministers, seminarians, theological school professors and instructors, and hundreds of key lay and professional leaders throughout the Association.

This just-completed DVD captures the wisdom and experience of twelve ministers from some of the fastest growing UU congregations in America who gathered for three days last November to talk about how to increase the number of Unitarian Universalists in the world.

During the conversation among these twelve ministers, they responded to questions posed by the Rev. Alice Mann of the Alban Institute. "

They included:

1. "What is the saving message of your congregation?"
2. "How does your congregation help people move inward and outward on their spiritual journey, and how does this relate to congregational growth?"
3. "What institutional, organizational, and practical nuts and bolts need to exist in order for a congregation to grow and keep growing"?
4. "What are the obstacles or roadblocks to growth?"

It is hoped that ministers and key lay leaders will watch this DVD together over several meetings and benefit from the wisdom they have to share. A list of questions to discuss - the same ones that served as the basis for conversation in Louisville - is included in the packaging, as are the names of the participating ministers.

Examples of Other Activities Occurring in the Districts:

Prairie Star District

The Prairie Star district board and its staff and volunteers recently agreed upon a "quick win" as it relates to promoting growth and vitality in their congregations. It involves stepping up their efforts to recognize congregations for their growth in membership - both to honor them and so that others might learn from them.

At their Annual Conference in April, nine congregations will be honored in Omaha by being named "Gold Star" congregations for continuous growth over the last three years, either in numbers of members or in percent growth.

They are also recognizing a number of "Green Star" congregations for growth in numbers or percentage in the past year.

Central Midwest District

In an admirable example of "congregations helping congregations", the Fox Valley UU Fellowship in Appleton, WI is responsible for supporting four small congregations nearby over the past 15 years. They've helped Green Bay, Ripon (Prairie Lakes), Manitowoc and Fond du Lac. Manitowoc (Lake Shore) is the newest; Green Bay & Ripon share a minister; Fond du Lac (Open Circle) recently affiliated (and former national NOW president Judy Goldsmith is their president this year!) They all tell of outstanding support from FVUUF.

In the southern part of the CMWD district, the Carbondale UU Fellowship has been instrumental in getting two emerging congregations up and running - Mt. Vernon, IL and Cape Girardeau, MO. Carbondale has been working with these groups for over two years. Carbondale is a 2007 Breakthrough Congregation.

St. Lawrence District

In this election year, the St. Lawrence District Assembly will include a workshop entitled "Democracy as a Religious Principle: UU Values in the 2008 Election," featuring speakers on "What Churches Can and Cannot Do in the Campaign," "Voter Registration," and "Moral Dimensions of Political Issues."

Ohio-Meadville District:

In yet another example of "congregations helping congregations", The Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Erie PA has taken a small group in Oil City, PA, under its wing as a "satellite congregation" with the intention of nurturing a new population of Unitarian Universalists in the artist town of Oil City., PA. The owners of the restored Latonia Theatre have donated the use of their space for the new group. If interested, see the YouTube video about Oil City at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zJhoXYfewQE>. This was produced by the people who own the Latonia Theatre.

Using the new Transitions Office guidelines for part-time consulting ministry, two OMD small congregations recently succeeded in finding consulting ministers who will emphasize growth work in the churches. And two more small congregations are now starting the process.

The OMD staff are offering a newly developed cluster-based spring training event for congregations that want to strengthen congregational youth ministry and create a cooperative cluster-based ministry as well.

Joseph Priestley District

A White Allies group of ministers are meeting with the local UUMA chapter to explore racism and what they can do to work against it.

District staff are once again offering Healthy Congregations training to teams from four congregations.

The Washington Ethical Society has applied for membership in the UUA and JPD. They are being assisted by the district and national staff of the UUA.

UU Leadership Team Institute (UULTI) is scheduled for July 28-August 3 where we will have several tracks and lenses. The goal is 150 participants from the four "NRG" Coop districts (Joseph Priestley, Metro New York, Ohio-Meadville, and St. Lawrence).

Pacific Southwest District:

A new "Contemplative Youth Ministry Covenant Group" is being formed in the PSWD. It will explore the vision and practice of contemplative youth ministry through reading and dialogue. The objectives of this covenant group are twofold: to deepen the spiritual lives of participants by reflecting upon the relationship between their inner lives and outer work in youth ministry; and to explore how participants might inspire a contemplative approach to youth ministry in our congregations.

At the conclusion of this covenant group, participants will be encouraged to lead a new covenant group with the same objectives and focus with groups of youth, youth advisors, religious educators, and ministers from their cluster. The group will engage in monthly phone dialogue and ongoing list-serve communication for six months.

Massachusetts Bay District:

The district is continuing their new program "The Art and Craft of Leadership" in which they present specific programs in congregations and invite other congregations to participate. The most popular topic so far has been "What Happens When We Grow" which looks both at factors that promote growth as well as dynamics that occur in a congregation that is growing that they can begin to prepare for. A new model for "Spiritually-Based Strategic Planning" is being created which takes into account the particular planning dynamics of a congregational polity system and also the needs of adaptive rather than technical leadership in these times. It is being piloted at The First Parish in Brookline.

Ballou Channing District

For the first time in decades or maybe a century, UUs in the Ballou Channing and Mass Bay Districts will be able to participate in a full-fledged revival on May 17. In place of their standard spring conferences the districts have joined in planning a real revival - a day of "preaching, singing and praying" that will feature sermons by four ministers, religious education programming for children and youth, contemporary and historic UU and U & U music and small discussion groups on religious/spiritual topics.

The District has engaged a consultant, using Chalice Lighter funds, to study the feasibility of starting a new congregation using the cell church/home church model. This spring research is being conducted on location and demographics. Assuming the results show the good potential for starting such a congregation, work will begin in the summer to organize one or more small groups that will be the foundation of the new congregation.