

District Presidents Association Minutes of the Meeting of November 2 – 5, 2006

Attending: Ellen Asprooth, St. Lawrence; Charlie Boothby, Northeast; Rosemary Donahoe, Ballou Channing; Brian Eslinger, Prairie Star; Franklin Fry, Mountain Desert; Emily Lauren Gage, Central Midwest; Steve Helle, Florida; Myrtle Hepler, Thomas Jefferson; John Malluck, Mid-South; Mary Ellen Morgan, Pacific Central; Jerry Muntz, Metro NY; Thomas Pistole, New Hampshire/Vermont; Leslie Pohl-Kosbau, Pacific Northwest; Elyse Reznick, Joseph Priestley; Jim Sherblom, Mass Bay; Tom Stapleford, Pacific Southwest; Joe Sullivan, Southwest; Ken Wagner, Clara Barton; Donald Zeilman, Ohio-Meadville; Eva Marx, UUA Trustee; Harlan Limpert, Director of District Services. Guests as noted.

Thursday, November 2

Bill Sinkford, president of the UUA, spoke to us, citing marketing efforts with articles placed all over the country (“The UUA is becoming a voice for liberal religious values”) and the new self-funded health insurance plan (“A very small minnow in a very large and dysfunctional health insurance sea”) as recent successes. New and continuing efforts include: a \$50 million capital campaign in its beginning stages; an invitation to congregations to schedule an annual Association Sunday, where members will be asked to contribute to some specific aspect of the work of the faith; a new lifespan curriculum series, “Tapestry of Faith,” which is almost ready and will be available on-line at no charge; and the Youth Ministry consultation, which is in its second year. Half the 1500 youth who responded to the survey which began the consultation said they did not find their spiritual home in a congregation or district. “Clearly, we need to develop more effective ministry to and with youth,” Bill said, urging us to hold district meetings as part of the consultation this spring. Other issues Bill covered included:

Our Theological Schools: Because of the financial fragility of our theological schools, the fact that 70% of our ministers haven’t attend our schools, and the desire for more spiritual grounding among our lay people, the UUA encouraged Starr King and Meadville Lombard to discuss merging and perhaps adding a lay theological center in the East. The schools ended their dialogue without such an agreement; theological education for ministers and laypersons continues to be of concern to the association.

Anti-Racism/ Anti-Oppression: Our early efforts to transform the Association to an AR/AO organization met great resistance. We’ve regrouped and are offering the JUUST Change Consultancy and a new Welcoming Congregation program. “We have a terrible track record settling ministers of color,” Bill said. He noted that with 55 Latino and Hispanic persons currently training for the ministry, we need to prepare congregations for them and raise funds for assistant and associate minister positions for congregations which can’t afford them.

Changes at GA: We’ve made progress by focusing on congregational presidents. The number participating has gone up each year, and the energy

this year around UU University “shows a hunger for that kind of leadership gathering with opportunities to understand how others face the same challenges,” Bill said.

Our churches: Most UU’s experience church as friendly, family-like, and that’s associated with decline. We need to transform friendliness to welcoming, and to treat newcomers as guests. We’re seeing changes in worship led by experiences at General Assembly: hymn-singing before worship, greater depth and a celebratory feeling in the congregation’s prayer and meditation life. The primary challenge for most of our churches is to learn to be comfortable with religious pluralism, Bill said: to see as a blessing, not a curse, that the person next to you believes something different than you believe.

Change: Bill asked that DP’s help to manage the emotional environment during this period of change for the Association. “Change produces anxiety,” he said, “so monitor it, minister to it. Let your districts know that change wouldn’t be attempted if there weren’t anticipated benefits for all.”

Friday, November 3

A Time of Change: Gini Courter, UUA Moderator, also spoke about institutional change, and offered a list of change efforts currently underway and the bodies working on them. The questions being considered include: Mission and Ends: What difference should Unitarian Universalism make in the world? (congregations, at General Assembly the next two or three years); Structure: How can we provide and fund equitably the services and structures needed to support healthy growing UU congregations? (Congregations Come First Team); Principles: What values call and inform us as we live our missions in our congregations? (Commission on Appraisal); and Governance: What type of governance will allow the UUA Board to serve as good stewards of the application of resources to the mission and ends of Unitarian Universalism? (UUA Board). In addition, questions about Leadership: Who will serve as elected leaders of the UUA starting in 2009? (Congregations); and Management: How will the UUA set objectives and manage resources to achieve the Association’s ends, and then measure the results? (Administration) are ongoing.

Open Space at GA: Gini described in more detail the plan to work on mission and ends for the Association at the next two or three General Assemblies using Open Space Technology. The idea behind Open Space, she said, is that if you allow people into a process where they answer a question in which they are interested, about which they are knowledgeable, and for which they feel passion, nothing but good can happen. To use the process for this purpose, first the UUA Board will approve a big question (Gini’s working draft: “How shall we associate together and embody our promise to move from comfort to covenant, from corporation to association, from consumption to service, from criticism to appreciation, from privilege to solidarity?”) and a number of related domains (for instance, public policy, inclusion, congregational health and vitality.) At GA this June, the program will be altered to allow delegates and others in attendance to spend considerable time over several days working on the big question through

discussions of issues identified within domain groups. At the end of GA, delegates will vote on the priorities which have been identified by participants within each domain. The results will go to the UUA Board, which may have draft ends ready for discussion and adoption at the '08 GA, or may suggest further Open Space work with discussion and adoption in '09.

UUA Trustees will want time at district assemblies to talk about Open Space. "They'll want to communicate about the question," Gini said. "We want to get people talking and thinking about it so that they'll be ready for Open Space – not to offer them training about how to do it."

Other News About GA '07:

- There will be no congregational presidents reception on Wednesday. Instead, Gini Courter and Bill Sinkford will, between them, visit all district ingatherings.
- AR/AO Training for Leaders on Monday morning after GA is open to DP's or their successors.
- Open Space will run during time slots which also include workshops. The most desirable workshop slots – those with no Open Space scheduled at the same time – are slot #2 on Thursday and the last two slots, on Saturday evening and between the two plenary sessions on Sunday.

Plans for '08 Elections: Gini said campaigning for the next UUA election is planned to take place by videoconference which can be viewed by all districts at once, with DVD's available to congregations. She suggested that we all consider making better use of videoconferencing.

Part-Time Ministers: In response to questions about support for congregations sharing ministers and hiring part-time ministers, Kay Montgomery, Executive Vice President of the UUA, said there is a reluctance to do part-time "maintenance" ministry. The trick, she said, is to figure out how to get a congregation to commit to a minister and to a ministry. DPA members suggested that it might be necessary to empower district staff to say no to requests from congregations which are not transformational, or to specify what a congregation must do to get the services it wants.

Charlie Boothby, Northeast president, pointed out that an alternative is to have a small church specialist on the staff who works only with small churches and meets their specific needs.

Kay reported that the first planned large-start congregation, in Texas, had recently called Anthony David as minister, and Joe Sullivan, Southwest president, said the congregation, though still small, has energy and leadership. Things are being done differently at the next large-start, in Pennsylvania, Kay said, noting that the minister there has experience with start-ups. Elyse Reznick, Joseph Priestley president, said that nearby congregations are concerned about having a new large congregation in the neighborhood, but they are working with it.

Comprehensive Campaign: "Now Is the Time" is the new comprehensive campaign, and "Growing Our Faith Through Growing Our Numbers" the theme for Association Sunday, October 14, 2007. Stephan Papa, Special Assistant to

the President for Congregational Giving and Growth Funding, said funds from Association Sunday will be used in a national advertising campaign.

Annual Program Fund: Laura Amabile, new director of the APF, said district APF chairs should have an appreciation for the bigger picture, place a high value on our Association, be comfortable asking for money, and get excited about what the Association could do if we had “the missing million.” She added that APF chairs want to be part of their district boards, though many of them are not.

Myrtle Hepler, Thomas Jefferson president and our representative to the APF, added that the district chairs need access to congregation fiscal year information and payment history. Discussing APF giving later that day, DP's had a number of suggestions for increasing APF contributions:

- look at individual church histories and talk with the highest-return church first;
- talk with every church, no matter how small or how poor the giving history;
- emphasize Chalice Lighter grants;
- encourage the APF chair to work directly with individual churches;
- help churches raise funds for their own needs;
- emphasize relationship-building.

Congregation Presidents Concerns: Eva Marx, DPA liaison from the UUA Board of Trustees and member of the Board's Congregations Working Group, reported that challenges cited by congregation presidents at GA focused on governance, with low responses to social action and religious education. Eva also noted that this year at GA, congregation presidents are scheduled for a workshop with Bill Sinkford and Gini Courter on Thursday and a networking meeting on Saturday.

Katrina Relief: Joe Sullivan reported that more than \$3,500,000 has been raised by the UUA - UUSC Gulf Coast Relief Fund, with about 1/3 of that going to rebuild our congregations in the devastated area and 2/3 committed to the most marginal communities. The UUA Board, he said, has committed to work for a Unitarian Universalist presence in a rebuilt New Orleans. About one million dollars remains in the fund, Joe said, and volunteer workers will be coming to help in the area through next summer. He added that an AR/AO training curriculum has been developed for volunteer workers.

At this point the DPA went into executive session to hear and discuss the Congregations Come First presentation. Elyse Reznick and Joe Sullivan, DPA representatives on the team, with the assistance of Harlan Limpert, member of the team as Director of District Services, reported on the team's work thus far.

Saturday, November 4

Breakthrough Congregations: Three of the four '07 Breakthrough Congregations have been selected. They are: First Unitarian Church of Portland, Oregon, which has seen 35% growth in six years, from 819 to 1102; All

Souls UU Church of Kansas City, Missouri, which has grown from 326 to 458 – 40% - in six years; and Carbondale Unitarian Fellowship of Carbondale, Illinois, which has grown by 58% in six years, from 112 to 177. A fourth congregation will be selected in January.

More About GA: UU University will be held again this year by popular request; as many as 600 persons are expected to participate in this leadership experience which will run from noon, Tuesday, June 19 - noon Wednesday, June 20, just before General Assembly. Gil Rendle, Senior Consultant at The Alban Institute, will be the keynote speaker. Rendle is the author of *Holy Conversations: A Handbook for Strategic Planning in Congregations*; *Behavioral Covenants in the Congregation*; and *Leading Change in the Congregation: Spiritual and Organizational Tools for Leaders*. Because he has worked with middle judicatory staff on denominational and congregational change issues, his presentation might be of particular interest to DP's and district board members. Harlan Limpert, Director of District Services, announced that Brian Eslinger, Prairie Star president, will join Elyse Reznick on the planning committee.

New CD's: *Drive Time Essays 2: The Best of InterConnections*, *Breakthrough Congregations '06*, and *Ideas for Growth* CD's will be sent to congregation presidents soon with a letter from Bill Sinkford.

District Work Priorities: Harlan pointed out that the purposes of UUA staff are to support the health and vitality of Unitarian Universalist congregations as they minister in their communities; to open the doors of Unitarian Universalism to people who yearn for liberal religious community; and to be a respected voice for liberal religious values. Specific roles of district staff members are to serve as the "First Call for Help" to congregations and coordinate UUA services in support of congregational life; to help congregations manage change and assist congregations in time of conflict or trauma, to serve as a conduit of resources from the UUA to congregations and among and between congregations; to identify, recruit, train and support lay leaders to provide services to congregations; to provide training in Transformational Leadership; to provide support to professional religious leaders; to manage the administration of the district office; and to seek feedback from others on how to be more effective. Harlan reviewed briefly for us his own goals for the year, and asked that we, along with staff and other leaders in our districts, consider staff purposes and roles along with the needs of our district to create priorities that will best serve our congregations.

Evaluation of Co-employed staff: Harlan said he has not done the initial district executive evaluations which he had offered to send to start the process. Some districts have gone ahead with evaluations, and some policy governance districts are using monitoring reports as assessments. Harlan said that however evaluation is done, we should be working closely enough that there should be no surprises in the assessments. It was suggested that a small committee put

together a staff assessment outline; Myrtle Hepler offered to work on that with Harlan.

At this point, the DPA went into executive session to continue discussion of the Congregations Come First presentation.

Business Meeting

Minutes: The minutes of the meeting of June 21, 2006, were approved as distributed.

President's Report: Elyse Reznick, said that much of her time has been taken up by her membership on the Congregations Come First Team, which includes representatives of the UUA Board of Trustees, the DPA, the Annual Program Fund and the District Staff; she will remain a member through CCF's final report to the UUA Board of Trustees in January, 2008. Elyse has also continued to serve on the UUniversity organizational team, and has attended UUA Board meetings as observer for the DPA. She said these experiences have been enlightening and very rewarding, and encouraged other DP's to consider UUA committee work if offered such an opportunity.

At the request of the UUA Board, Elyse asked DP's to: make sure that district assemblies don't conflict with UUA Board meetings (board schedule is on the UUA website); reserve an annual meeting workshop for the UUA trustee; work with the UUA trustee to inform congregations about the Open Space Technology which will be used at General Assembly '07; and review with the district board the recommendations of the Special Review Commission set up after incidents involving youth and including allegations of racism at the '05 General Assembly.

Treasurer's Report: Steve Helle, Florida President, reported that all district travel equalization fees have been paid. A little over half of the fee covers travel expenses for DP's for this (November) meeting; the rest covers travel for the Board of Trustees observer and for DPA representatives on task forces and committees and defrays expenses for the June meeting. Steve said he sees no reason to change the fee for the next two or three years. He recommended that we raise our mileage reimbursement rate from 14 cents/mile to 30 cents/mile; that recommendation was approved. He also recommended that we add the DPA President and Vice-President as signatories on our accounts; that recommendation was also approved. Steve noted that expense forms are in Section 3, page 4 of the DP handbook.

Equitable Sharing of Health Care Costs: In response to our request at the June DPA meeting, Harlan offered a chart detailing changes to district bills due to the new UUA health care plan and additional changes should we agree to combine the charges and divide them equally by number of staff. Dividing charges equally would protect districts from cost swings due to staff changes and remove insurance status as a possible factor in hiring decisions. It was

suggested that instead of dividing the costs equally, each district's portion of the total bill should be based on its total payroll, as is the practice in most large corporations. In addition, we agreed that the entire benefits bill, not just the health care portion, should be combined and divided in this way. A motion was approved recommending to Harlan that he pursue the steps necessary to revise the district assessment covering co-employed benefits to a percentage of payroll basis.

Nominating Committee: The nominating committee – Charlie Boothby, Joe Sullivan, and Emily Gage substituting for Connie Haas Zuber - recommended the following officers for 2007-2008: President: Ken Wagner, Clara Barton; Vice President: Jerry Muntz, Metro New York; Secretary: Mary Ellen Morgan, Pacific Central; Treasurer: John Mallock, Mid-South; APF Liaison: Dick Jacke, Pacific Northwest incoming; Nominating Committee: Charlie Boothby, Northeast; Joe Sullivan, Southwest; and Don Zeilman, Ohio-Meadville. Elections will be held at our June, 2007, meeting.

Website: The DPA pages on the UUA website need to be updated. We would prefer a more user-friendly site, which would include information we need from the current handbook. DP's were asked to review the contents of the handbook and send suggestions for change to Mary Ellen Morgan. It was noted that officers in particular should check their position descriptions for current accuracy.

General Assembly Workshop: As we have no clear need for a GA workshop this year, we agreed to give our slot to the Director of District Services to use at his discretion.

Next Meetings: We will meet from 9 am – 3 pm (with breakfast preceding and lunch at mid-day) Wednesday, June 20th, at General Assembly in Portland, Oregon. Incoming DP's are invited to attend, though outgoing DP's vote at the meeting. Elyse said there has been some discussion about holding a summit – a meeting of DP's, some district staff members and UUA trustees – at this GA. More information on this subject, along with a request to let meeting organizers know which incoming presidents will be attending, will be sent out this spring. The second 2007 DPA meeting has been scheduled for November 1 – 4 in Boston.

Respectfully Submitted,

Ellen Asprooth