

**Unitarian Universalist Musicians Network Professional Development Day
Wednesday, July 18, 2012**

Musician as Religious Elder

Rev. Susan M. Smith

Through our Unitarian ancestors, we can trace our Congregationalist heritage directly to the puritans of the Massachusetts Bay Colony and our current practices to their Cambridge Platform of 1648. Therefore we are meant to be led by a circle of lay and ordained elders working together to teach the faith and keep the covenants. These ordained elders held one of two titles “Preaching Elder” and “Teaching Elder.” This commission of the musician to serve as Teaching Elder can seem a daunting task far removed from providing music for worship. The work of the religious elder in congregationalism was and is to teach the faith and to keep the covenants. To function as this kind of leader in a congregational system requires self-differentiation and a sense of one’s own authority. This training session will explore the historic and modern roles of congregational elders, systems thinking and professional boundaries.

Biography

Rev. Smith has been District Executive of the Southwestern UU Conference for six years and previously worked as an emerging congregations consultant for the Florida UU District. She has served as parish minister to congregations in Texas, Michigan and Florida. She has been Chair of the UUA Commission on Social Witness and President of two district chapters of the UU Ministers Association. She is a magna cum laude graduate of the Perkins School of Theology at Southern Methodist University where she was recipient of the B’nai Brith Award in Social Ethics. Besides her M.Div., she also holds a B.A. and M.A in speech and theater. She lives in her hometown of Shreveport, Louisiana with her husband and adult daughter and sings soprano in the choir of All Souls UU Church there.

Syllabus

We Would Be One: Introduction to the Congregationalist Way
Come, Sing a Song with Me: S.H.I.F.T. Principles in Systems Thinking
Guide My Feet: The Self-differentiated, Non-Anxious Leader
Break Not the Circle: Change and Conflict Management

Readings

For those seeking Music Leadership Credentialing, the following readings are required. For others, they are suggested. Both are available from the UUA Bookstore.

Peter Hughes, ed., *The Cambridge Platform: Contemporary Reader's Edition* (Boston: Beacon, 2008).

Peter Steinke, *Congregational Leadership in Anxious Times: Being Calm and Courageous No Matter What* (Herndon, VA: Alban, 2006).

Credentialing Candidate Assignments

Pre-Assignment: Each candidate should prepare a two-page case study, briefly introducing a professional situation with a boundaries, role or conflict challenge. This case study should

include a brief sketch of the congregation's size, age and demographics. Avoid using names, but assure that roles of the persons involved are clear. If a resolution was reached, include it. Email your case study to Rev. Smith at ssmith@uua.org or mail to her at 211 Dogwood Road, Shreveport, LA 71105.

Post-Assignment: These case studies will be discussed during the session for candidates. Afterwards, expand on the case study while addressing these questions:

1. What are the issues involved?
2. Are the covenantal relationships explicit, implicit or null?
3. Where can the S.H.I.F.T. concepts in systems thinking be identified? (Self-differentiation, **H**omeostasis, **I**dentified Patient, **F**amily Field, **T**riangling)
4. Who might have functioned better and how? Are elders functioning as elders?
5. What resources are available to those involved in the case?

Email your post-assignment to Rev. Smith at ssmith@uua.org or mail to her at 221 Dogwood Road, Shreveport, LA 71105 by January 2, 2013.