



MEMORANDUM

To: UUA Board of Trustees

From: Rev. Susan Frederick-Gray, President, and Carey McDonald, Executive Vice President

Re: Update on UUA staff programs and operations

Date: October 20, 2022

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This memorandum provides a written update on key areas of work for the UUA staff for the October meeting of the UUA Board of Trustees.

Organizational Updates

Digital First Organization

The UUA is moving ahead in becoming a “digital first” organization, where operations are primarily online with a central office facility and focused opportunities for in-person work. This builds on the flexibility and staff connection practices built through the COVID pandemic, including a weekly all staff Thriving Thursdays block. Staff travel costs remain projected at budgeted levels, down approximately 40% from pre-pandemic, and teams have mostly focused their in-person travel for staff retreats. In the coming years, we will be cultivating organizational norms for a digital first workplace, such as exploring multiplatform all staff meetings with multiple satellite locations.

Note that we are avoiding making any decisions about usage or changes to the UUA’s space at 24 Farnsworth for the time being, while we explore the reality of a digital first organization. The building and the InSpirit bookstore are open to the public from 10 am to 4:00 pm on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays. We entertain a limited number of rentals, including now the UU Service Committee. We will likely want to engage these facilities-related topics with a new president. We remain committed to working closely with Beacon Press on any decisions since they are currently the largest users of the space.

Human Resources and JEDI

In September, Rob Molla left the UUA after 15 years as Director of Human Resources. We are currently in the early stages of hiring his successor. In the interim, Carey McDonald is taking on direct supervision of the Human Resources team of three staff members, and the HR Director’s duties are being split between Carey and the rest of the team. The next HR Director will focus on implementing plans for core system improvements, including the payroll/HR software platform ADP, completing a compensation equity review for staff, and revising HR policies and the employee manual.

We have revised the UUA’s workplace and event COVID safety guidelines to defer to CDC recommendations going forward, rather than trying to determine our own safety guidelines. Masks and vaccines continue to be required for staff, and staff are expected to take rapid tests before travel.

Our workplace commitments to Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (JEDI) are focused on a few new areas this year: developing a new multimodal framework for the staff learning and practice community, engaging consultants focused on transformative healing practices, and intentionally discussing boundaries and feedback practices. We continue to support the JEDI Team, which had an August retreat, as well as staff identity-based affinity groups. We hosted the fourth BIPOC staff retreat online and in Provincetown, MA in September.

Supporting Presidential Transition

Working with the UUA Secretary and the Election Campaign Practices Committee, we have developed guidelines that explain the UUA staff support available to nominated presidential candidates and their campaigns. This includes hosting candidate forums, communication through various channels, coverage through UU World, and administering the voting software. At the same time, we are refining plans to recognize the close of President Susan Frederick-Gray's tenure, including events at GA and an opportunity for donors to financially support a key priority in Susan's honor. In the months ahead, we will be working with the Board to create transition plans to onboard a new president.

Adaptive Challenges

In August and September, UUA staff at every level of the organization engaged a series of conversations called "What's Up in Unitarian Universalism?" We imagine this type of annual landscape assessment could be part of an annual planning cycle. The conversations identified the following:

Challenges

- Exhaustion, burnout, trauma mindset, need for pastoral connection
- Staff pressures (need to be flexible and adapt, rising conflict, shortages of leaders), which are also becoming lay leader pressures
- Will people and money "come back"? Unsure of purpose/direction for faith communities post-pandemic
- Acute dynamics for religious education, children, youth and families

Strengths

- Continued commitment to multiplatform worship, accessibility
- Willingness to collaborate and experiment
- Increased community partnership in ministry and in justice and organizing
- Letting go of some things, and focusing on connection (quality over quantity)

These adaptive challenges and strengths inform the investment in mission and programmatic areas outlined in this memo. We would like to explore annual ways of bringing these conversations to the Board and engaging them across our Association.

Mission and Programmatic Updates

The following highlighted areas are key investments in the mission and programmatic priorities of the UUA, especially related to recommendations from the 2020 Widening the Circle of Concern report. A handful of other areas of new program development are also in process, and we will plan to report on those in future Board meetings.

Mosaic Hub

We are excited to be bringing together the UUA's work on anti-racism and multiculturalism for congregational leaders under a single umbrella, the Mosaic hub. The mission of the Mosaic Hub is to

offer resources, connection, support and inspiration for dismantling racism and oppression, and fostering belonging and liberation, in UU congregations and communities. A core cross-staff team has formed, with Co-Director of Lifespan Faith Engagement Anna Bethea as the project lead. The Mosaic Hub work includes lifespan curricula development, facilitated learning and practice communities for congregational leaders, an online resource library, and a new web portal and communications approach via an email list. We are hiring a two-year project manager position and have allocated dedicated project funds. The Mosaic team is planning for a formal launch in early 2023.

Children, Youth and Families

We are focusing energy and attention on the steep declines in religious education participation, concerns arising from professional religious educators, and the challenges families are facing. This year, we will be hosting “Threshold” conversations with professional religious educators to talk about the future of faith development. These are imagined as a follow-up to the Essex conversations from two decades ago that developed the next generation vision for faith development in our congregations. As approved in the FY23 budget, we are hiring a program associate to develop resources and conversations on revitalizing ministry with children, youth and families

Additionally, following a year of planning, we have consolidated our regional youth staff and programs together into the Lifespan Faith Engagement office and hired Shannon Harper as LFE Co-Director for Youth and Emerging Adult Ministries. The new YEA team in LFE will be working on a national youth strategy and unified programmatic approach to ensure opportunities are standardized across regions in the coming years.

Virtual Hymnal

We are beginning the process to develop a virtual hymnal as the primary successor to the UUA’s print hymnals. This will provide a flexible, subscription-based platform to offer the musical resources needed for vibrant and inclusive worship in our congregations and communities. We have been in conversation and partnership with the Association for UU Music Ministries (AUUMM) about the scope and priorities of this project, and have developed a concept paper which outlines the goals and approach. In the coming months, the UUA plans to appoint a virtual hymnal advisory group and hire a two-year part time project manager (included in the FY23 budget) who will report to the Minister of Worship Arts and collaborate with the Publications Office. The advisory group, working with the project manager and other UUA staff, will engage a broad range of stakeholders in developing the full project plan to bring this to life. That plan will set forth the editorial, musical, financial and technological determinations about the platform and establish how the collection is managed.

Lay Leadership Development

We know that developing pathways for lay leadership development continues to be a priority for the UUA. In addition to sustaining and aligning our existing leadership development trainings and online resources, we are hiring a lay leadership development associate as approved in the FY23 budget. This role will do outreach to leaders, including graduates of UUA leadership trainings, and create opportunities for leaders to both network and identify places within the larger Association where they can offer their gifts. We continue to work with appointed and elected leaders to improve support for volunteers in the UUA. This includes ongoing collaboration with district boards in the Pacific Western Region to move towards regional integration.