

## **Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations 2005 Board of Trustees Annual Report**

The Board of Trustees is the governing body of the Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations. The Board consists of 20 District Trustees elected by each District and four at-large, including one youth trustee, who are elected by delegates to the General Assembly (GA). Delegates to the GA also elect the President and the Financial Advisor, who participate in all Board meetings, and the Moderator, who chairs the Board. In addition, a youth observer is elected by the youth community at GA to participate in Board meetings. This year, our youth observer has been Jazmin Luz Santoz-Rosado.

The Board meets four times a year, three times in Boston and once at General Assembly. Much of the Board's work is carried out in working groups, where issues are analyzed in detail and motions framed for presentation to the Board as a whole. These working groups, which reflect the purposes of the association as stated in UUA bylaws, are Congregations, Growth, Living Our Faith, and Our Association.

Full reports of each Board meeting are available online at <http://www.uua.org/TRUS>. In addition, go to this address to view the entire packet of materials distributed to Board members before each meeting, including committee and staff reports, agendas, and correspondence.

Two key ideas inform all of our work. One is our long-standing commitment to becoming an anti-racist, anti-oppressive, multi-cultural institution. The other is our interest in fostering the health and vitality of our member congregations. Both of these key ideas are present throughout our work and are reflected in each of the items included in this report.

### **Consultation on Ministry to and with Youth**

This project remains a high priority for the Board of Trustees. This two-year grassroots process aims to revision, strengthen, and deepen our commitment to youth ministry across our Association of Congregations. The Consultation began with individuals and congregations and then proceeded to the larger institutions and organizations that provide services and support to youth.

First a **Youth Survey** sought input from all youth currently or recently associated with continental or congregational youth programming. The average age of respondents in the 1,399 surveys returned was 15. The good news is that 91% of the respondents reported feeling welcome at worship services, 89% believe they are treated respectfully, and 87% feel that their opinions are valued. However, the fact that only 53% felt that the congregation is their spiritual home underscores the timeliness of this project.

Intergenerational **Youth Ministry Congregational Conversations** held in April and May 2006 throughout the U.S. and Canada provided the opportunity to explore how congregations can provide ministry that fosters the spiritual growth of youth, including better integration of youth into congregational life and expanding our vision of what youth ministry might be. Recognizing that youth participation can revitalize adult worship and other programming, these conversations will also help identify what congregations, districts, and the Association can do to promote more meaningful and varied youth ministry.

## **UUA Health Insurance Plan**

Unitarian Universalists have supported efforts to address the fact that millions of Americans are without health insurance, but there has been little progress in this area from our political leaders. In addition, our UUA health insurance plan with Blue Cross/Blue Shield of Massachusetts was cancelled in 1998 and over 400 ministers and other staff of our congregations currently lack health insurance. This is an intolerable situation and our UU values call on us to act.

In April 2006, we approved the launch of a national health insurance plan for the employees of our congregations. This will be the first national UUA health insurance plan for congregational staff since 1998 and is the result of years of study and planning by our Compensation, Benefits and Pension Committee as well as careful scrutiny by our Finance Committee and Financial Advisor. This Preferred Provider Organization (PPO) plan administered by Highmark Blue Cross/Blue Shield is a completely portable, national plan that will cover employees and dependents, including domestic partners. We offer open enrollment to those who work at least 1,000 hours per year or are retired on Medicare. Congregations are asked to pay 80% of the employee's premium. The financial risk for this plan will be borne by the UUA. However, we have carefully structured the financial plan to manage our risk and are confident that the plan is likely to succeed.

The success of this new health insurance plan is dependent on having a critical mass of ministers and other staff members enrolled. Therefore, we urge congregations and their staff members to strongly consider signing up. If enough employees have signed up by October 15, 2006, we will launch this plan on January 1, 2007. For more information contact the UUA Compensation Consultant in your district.

## **The Pathways Rapid Start Large Church**

The Pathways Review Panel was appointed by President Sinkford for to review the Pathways Church project in the Dallas/Ft. Worth area—our Association's first effort using a new model to engender rapid growth that leads to a large congregation. The panel, consisting of Rev. Dr. Stephan Papa, Rev. Nancy Nelson Elsenheimer, and Larry Ladd, evaluated what happened and documented what was learned.

**Celebrations:** Although the Pathways Rapid Start Large Church did not develop according to expectations, there is much to admire and celebrate: the minister, staff, and leaders of Pathways Church for their courage, creativity, and dedication to developing this liberal religious community; the UUA staff for their bold vision; the Dallas/Ft. Worth metro area UU leaders for their gallant collaborative commitment to this vision; and the donors for their generosity and trust. A new and wonderful congregation has been created that has been willing to try new things most of us are afraid to do, such as experimenting with a new style of worship. With the highest per unit average pledge of any of our congregations (\$2,858), they are an inspiration to all of us. We have learned much from this experiment and everyone involved should be honored and thanked.

**Recommendations:** Future growth projects should heed the major learnings from the Pathways Rapid Start Large Church effort. For example, large church plants need a focused project manager to enhance capacity to manage accountability; the terms of the covenant of all those

contributing to the project should be more specific; the plan should be as realistic as possible, grounded in experience and tested by skeptical view; staffing should be gradual and financially prudent; and marketing needs to remain a major part of the plan.

While the panel expressed strong support for growth as our Association's number one priority, they raised questions about the value of a generic planning model for Rapid Start Large Churches, believing that more attention should be given to growth strategies that build upon our Unitarian Universalist strengths.

## **Governance**

For several years, we have been studying our governance structure, specifically how the UUA functions and the roles that congregations, Board, and staff play in determining and furthering our goals. In our polity, we have a long history of independence as well as aspiring to do great things in community that we cannot do separately. This includes independent individuals who gather in congregations, and independent congregations that gather together in districts and as an association. A web of independence and interdependence runs through all of these relationships and is the strength of our association.

Recognizing the strength of both our independence and our interdependence, we are now seeking greater clarity on how our association of congregations actually works. For example:

- What roles should congregations and their leaders play in UUA decision making?
- Who is responsible for determining our goals for the future and implementing those goals?
- How are the UUA Board and staff accountable to our member congregations?

We are eager to obtain clarity on these and other issues because we are inspired by the idea of creating a UUA that can more effectively empower our member congregations to fulfill their missions in the world.

## **Special Review Commission**

After a sequence of unfortunate events involving youth of color before and at General Assembly in Fort Worth in June 2005, the Board issued an open letter expressing concern about these events and the wish that we might learn from them. The UUA President and Moderator then formed a Special Review Commission to gather the first-hand stories of those involved in these events and to make recommendations to our UU community.

This Special Review Commission has completed its work and has created a report of its findings and recommendations. They call for all UUs to come to General Assembly "prepared to practice hospitality, greeting one another as members of a religious community and behaving as gracious guests" and that "attendees live our Principles in all interactions with everyone they encounter." They further recommend that we have protocols for seeking help when serious problems arise, that everyone wear nametags to all GA events, and that youth be involved in all levels of GA planning. The UUA Board of Trustees has committed to implementing the recommendations of the Special Review Commission. Their full report is available online at <http://www.uua.org/TRUS/apr06/D2a-src.pdf>.

## **Independent Affiliates**

We have been reflecting on the purpose, positioning and potential of independent affiliate status as part of a comprehensive and ongoing examination of the mission of our Association. This decade-long conversation about Independent Affiliates has supported a growing sense of focus and clarity about how relationships with and between congregations and affiliate organizations shape Unitarian Universalism. The Board understands that the health and vitality of our congregations form the foundation of our Association and that Independent Affiliates operating in isolation or as an alternative to congregational life are not serving our congregations.

The Board has approved rule changes that reflect an intentional redirection of how organizations outside congregational structures relate to our Association of Congregations. The Board will now be looking to accept into Independent Affiliate-status those organizations that provide strategic cooperation, collaboration, or dialogue between organizations with different beliefs, perspectives or interests. This refocusing will model the values and principles of Unitarian Universalism that hold that we can work together in community to transform institutions and the world. If the work that we do as Unitarian Universalists is not grounded primarily in congregational life or done in the context of relationships that model our value for interdependence, we run the risk of existing as a collective of liberal ideologies and theologies rather than as a faith community.

Organizations that do not meet the new criteria for independent affiliate status may choose to explore new ways of engaging directly with our congregations and districts. Other organizations may wish to partner with other groups to create entities or councils that do meet the new criteria.

In closing this report, we want to especially acknowledge the support we receive from Kay Montgomery, UUA Executive Vice President, and her assistant, Nancy Lawrence. Kay and Nancy work tirelessly to ensure that we have everything we need to do our work and serve with intelligence and good humor, grounded in years of service to the Association. Thank you, Kay and Nancy!

This report can only describe a few of the issues we addressed in the past year. On all the issues involved in the UUA and Unitarian Universalism, we welcome your comments, questions, and concerns, both at General Assembly and throughout the year. We thank you for the privilege of serving you.

Paul Rickter, Secretary  
Rev. Pam Allen Thompson, Assistant Secretary