

Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations 2007 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. 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.

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 are: Congregations, Our Association, Growth, Living Our Faith, and Governance.

There are two guiding commitments that shape the work of the Board. First, we are committed to being an anti-racist, anti-oppressive and multicultural institution. Each of our meetings involves process observations using that lens, discussion at Board meetings often revolves around these issues, and we require training in this area for Board members and for Board-appointed committees. Second, we are committed to being open and transparent in our processes and communications. We seek to make openness and transparency integral to our institutional culture. 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.

Underlying all of our work is an understanding that the UUA is an association of congregations. That means that we see everything we do as a Board, in one way or another, as attempting to foster the health and vitality of our member congregations.

Governance

For several years, we have been studying our governance structure, specifically how we hold each other accountable, how we manage the tension between making policy and implementing policy, who casts the vision, how the Board relates to congregations, and what "right relationship" between all these elements looks like. The UUA Board has been asking itself these questions, and one result is our continuing work to reform the governance model of the UUA. Our commitment to move to a customized form of "policy based" governance is growing as we explore it more deeply. A new Governance Working Group was formed in January 2007 to bring more focus and resources to this work and we plan to transition to a new governance model in conjunction with the installation of the next UUA President in June 2009.

At GA 2007 in Portland, Oregon, we are engaging in a process called “Open Space Technology” (OST) in an effort to arrive at a clearer sense of what our congregations believe the UUA should be and do in the world. We expect the OST process to provide an opportunity for all to help us decide what the "ends" of Unitarian Universalism are and how our association of congregations can work to achieve them. As this work continues, 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.

UUA Health Insurance Plan

In October 2006, the Board approved the launch of a national health insurance plan for the employees of our congregations and on January 1, 2007, the plan went into affect. This is the first national UUA health insurance plan for congregational staff since 1998 and has been based on 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 covers employees and dependents, including domestic partners.

Thus far, about 600 employees have signed up and about 1000 individuals (these employees plus their dependents) are receiving health insurance benefits from the plan. The financial risk for this plan is 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. In the first months of the plan, the finances appear to be very solid.

Lifespan Religious Education Curriculum

The creation and rollout of "Tapestry of Faith," a wide-ranging web-based set of curricula for all ages continues in design, development, and testing. The development process is complex, driven by high quality standards, and installation of the early modules is now happening. A key point is that these curricula will be offered at no cost to all congregations, so that money will no longer be a barrier to their use. We have high hopes for the progress that is being made in this area.

Congregations Come First Initiative

The Congregations Come First (CCF) Team was formed by UUA Moderator Gini Courter to explore ways to remove organizational obstacles to congregational health and vitality. The CCF team's goal is to make recommendations to ensure equitable allocation of resources for service and support of our congregations and their missions. The CCF team is made up of representatives of the District Presidents Association, Annual Program Fund Committee, district staff, UUA Board, and UUA administration and also

includes two parish ministers. This is a long-term effort to "think outside the box" and will be reporting to the UUA Board in the coming year.

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 shapes Unitarian Universalism. The Board understands that the health and vitality of our congregations form the foundation of our Association and that our congregations are not served by Independent Affiliates operating in isolation or being an alternative for congregational life.

The Board is now implementing changes to our rules that reflect an intentional shift to redirect how organizations outside congregational structures relate to our Association of Congregations. The Board is now accepting into Independent Affiliate status organizations that provide strategic cooperation, collaboration, or dialogue between organizations with different beliefs, perspectives or interests. The Board understands this refocusing to model the values and principles of Unitarian Universalism, which 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 which 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, including partnering with other groups to create entities or councils that meet the new criteria.

Consultation on Ministry to and with Youth

Since the Summer of 2005, this grassroots process has aimed at revising, strengthening, and deepening our commitment to youth ministry. The Consultation began with individuals and congregations and has extended to districts and other organizations. Many congregations have directly participated in the process. A Summit meeting of key adult and youth leaders will gather in July 2007 to interpret what has been learned and decide on next steps.

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 only describes a few of the key issues we addressed in the past year. On all issues involving the UUA and Unitarian Universalism, we welcome your comments, questions and concerns. We urge you to contact your district trustee or one of your at-large trustees. We thank you for the privilege of serving you.

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