

Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations 2008 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 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. We are currently on target to implement a version of Policy Governance, a governance model developed by John and Miriam Carver and used by many of our districts and several congregations, when the new UUA President takes office in July 2009.

The current focus of our governance work is developing "ends." This is where we begin to define the things we want the UUA to accomplish, for whom and at what cost. At 2007 General Assembly, we used a process known as Open Space Technology to give UUs at GA the opportunity to consider what our mission should be. At the 2008 General Assembly, we will further examine our priorities using an Appreciative Inquiry process. These exercises will inform the Board by helping us to define the values and priorities that should guide our work.

Excellence in Ministry

We have begun a process of exploring excellence in ministry, based on a sense that the health and vitality of our congregations is directly tied to excellence in ministry. But how do we define "excellence" and how do we achieve it? The Board asked the Panel on Theological Education (POTE), which distributes grants in support of ministerial development, to study the best way to use its grants to ensure excellence in ministry. Because the much of the grant money distributed by POTE has historically gone to the two UU-affiliated divinity schools (Meadville Lombard Divinity School and Starr King School for the Ministry) and these schools depend on these grants, this is a complex conversation. Plans are currently underway for a major consultation on excellence in ministry, organized by the Panel on Theological Education and involving all stakeholders, to be held in late 2008.

Independent Affiliates

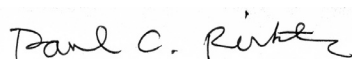
For the past five years, we have been reflecting on the purpose, positioning and potential of independent affiliate status as part of a comprehensive and ongoing examination of the mission of our Association. This conversation led to us to two conclusions: that we needed to change our rules to encourage broader connections among Independent Affiliates and our member congregations; and that the Board needed to have a closer connection to our Independent Affiliates than we have had in the past. Although this change has been controversial, we are hopeful that it will lead to a stronger and more focused denominational structure.

In 2007, the Board implemented these changes, which resulted in a great reduction in the number of Independent Affiliates, from about 50 to about 7. As a Board, we hope to build close relationships with these remaining Independent Affiliates and we believe that this smaller number will enable us to make genuine connections with these organizations and any others we approve as Independent Affiliates in the future. None of this is intended to criticize the fine work that the many former Independent Affiliates are doing and will continue to do. We are encouraging organizations that no longer have Independent Affiliate status to build collaborative relationships with similar organizations and consider seeking Independent Affiliate status for a council of related organizations.

Youth Ministry

Last summer saw the completion of a major review of our ministry to and with youth. The Youth Ministry Summit compiled the findings of several years' worth of consultations and made a series of recommendations for how we might improve our youth ministry. A major focus of their recommendations is excellence in congregationally-based youth ministry. Now is the time to begin implementing these recommendations and a working group has been created to do this work. This is a time of change and there has been some miscommunication about developments in this area. However, the Board has been clear that we need to make sure that there is continuity of youth programming during this transition to a new youth ministry structure and that youth leaders need to be closely involved in the decision-making process.

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