

## **Identity-Based Ministries Report to the Board of Trustees June 2007**

If you visit one of our congregations as a facilitator in the Beyond Categorical Thinking program, one of the first things you get shown is “the ramp”. It generally is a big and important project for a congregation to undertake—and well worth celebrating.

Yet the most common disability in our congregations is people with hearing problems. In second place—people with vision difficulties.

We probably wouldn't have known that if we hadn't created and staffed the Office of Accessibility Concerns in 2003.

Identity-Based Ministries has been a part of the UUA for 6 years now. We were a small group then. Five staff members comprised the group and discussed the future (Taquieta Boston, Danielle DiBona, Keith Kron, Barb Greve, and Simona Munson). People of color and Latina/o and Hispanic people were having difficult times in our congregations in many places. Many of our ministers of color and Latina/o and Hispanic ministers were having a very difficult time. The marriage equality work was in its infancy. *Welcoming Congregation* work was going well, but then what? And were we really being inclusive of bisexual and transgender people?

Identity-Based Ministries (Id-BM) was created to help answer these questions. Unitarian Universalists understood that race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and gender identity and expression were justice issues. We knew we had to make our congregations more accessible for people with disabilities, though at the time this wasn't seen by most as a justice issue. Id-BM was created to help our marginalized constituencies and to collaborate with UUA staff to make all of the UUA's work more inclusive, welcoming, progressive, and faithful to our principles.

Six years later, we've seen progress. We have reason to hope.

- We will begin field tests for Building the World We Dream About. Forty-five congregations are hopeful to field test a curriculum that will create a different, deeper conversation, a new understanding, and a call to action around the issues of race and ethnicity.
- Our work on Beyond Categorical Thinking and with the Diversity of Ministry Team has helped more congregations be open to calling a minister who is not necessarily white, straight, and/or able-bodied and instead to finding the best match for them. We've had a retreat for ministers and seminarians who are Latina/o and Hispanic and ministers of color to provide support.
- Marriage equality work is now a part of the entire Association and not just a part of OBGLTC.
- Congregations are trying new assistive listening devices and members now have access to not only the UU World on tape but also more UU publications in electronic form and on tape. There is an accessibility list serve.
- Over half of our congregations are now *Welcoming Congregations*. The largest contingent in the Boston BGLT Pride Parade last year was us, over 1000 strong.

Our work here is not just our work. Id-BM has collaborated with Advocacy and Witness, Communications, Congregational Services, District Services, Human Resources, Lifespan Faith Development, Ministry and Professional Leadership, and Stewardship and Development to make all of these things possible. To make this the work of Unitarian Universalism. To live our principles.

What is next?

- Id-BM has just hired Laura Spencer as Program Associate for Racial and Ethnic Concerns to work specifically with youth and young adults who are people of color and Latina/o and Hispanic. This may well allow Sofia Betancourt, Program Coordinator in the Office of Racial and Ethnic Concerns, to work more intentionally with our member congregations, as well as providing much needed support for our youth and young adults on these issues.
- Beyond Categorical Thinking will be improved to reflect Unitarian Universalism and the issues our ministers face now in regards to their identity.
- A workshop beyond the basics of transgender issues is being field tested. (Interweave, with OBGLTC support and encouragement, is working on a short curriculum on bisexuality—written by bisexual UU professional leaders).
- A Marriage Equality list serve for UUs will be started.
- We are beginning as a faith to understand how accessibility work is a true justice issue and move toward seeing people with disabilities as the whole people they are.

Id-BM will continue to help the Association live a vision of true theology of justice and wholeness. We will continue to live a vision where Unitarian Universalism will become a more multiracial, multiethnic, multicultural place. We will work to help promote understandings of how issues of racism, classism, heterosexism, sexism, ableism, and ageism keep people from joining our congregations. We will support those folks who remain Unitarian Universalists with identities that have often been marginalized in our country and in our congregations. We will do this by working with marginalized constituencies and with congregations and by helping UUA staff more effectively widen their work to be naturally inclusive.

The last six years have been rich in opportunities for Id-BM to aid Unitarian Universalism in moving beyond the ramp, in living our welcome, and in building the world we dream about. Who knows what we will continue to learn, but we will continue to work for justice, live our principles, and deepen and grow our faith.

Respectfully submitted,

Id-BM Staff

Taquienna Boston, Director

Sofia Betancourt, Devorah Greenstein, Keith Kron, Simona Munson, Parva Fattahi