

"CONGREGATIONS COME FIRST" INITIATIVE

Updated 12-18-06

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

NAME: Congregations Come First (CCF), an initiative of the UUA Moderator.

PURPOSE: To find ways to remove organizational obstacles to congregational health and vitality.

GOAL: To recommend actions that will ensure equitable and efficient allocation of resources for service and support of our congregations and their missions.

TIME FRAME: A report with recommendations regarding structure, service delivery, and funding will be presented to the UUA Board of Trustees in January 2008.

BACKGROUND: At various times the District Presidents Association, the UUA Board of Trustees, the APF continental committee, district staff members, and others, have explored inequities in the system that are believed to unnecessarily interfere with congregational health and vitality. Each time the individual efforts to correct have come to naught because the systemic issues, such as multiple jurisdictions, funding, and governance could not be addressed.

PROCESS: The team will discuss impediments, possible structure adjustments, service needs and delivery methods, appropriate funding mechanisms, and administration, with congregational, district, and national leaders, both lay and professional, to ensure equity in service delivery among our congregations.

PROGRESS: The team met in February, June, and again in September of 2006 to draft a preliminary proposal. The draft proposal has now been presented to the UUA Board, the District Presidents Association, the Annual Program Fund Continental Committee, the UUA Executive Staff and the District Staff. The team will meet again in February of 2007 to integrate the feedback we've received to date.

CURRENT TEAM MEMBERS: Elected and appointed lay leaders, religious professionals, UUA moderator, and UUA staff. They include:

Laurel Amabile, Director, Annual Program Fund (APF) lamabile@uua.org

Barb Brown, General Chair, Annual Program Fund Committee bbrown@uua.org

Roger Comstock, UUA Trustee rcomstock@uua.org

Gini Courter, UUA Moderator gcourter@uua.org

David Friedman, UUA Trustee dfriedman@uua.org

Nancy Heege, District Executive nheege@uua.org

Rev. Harlan Limpert, Director for District Services hlimpert@uua.org

Elyse Reznick, President, District Presidents Association ereznick@uaa.org
Joe Sullivan, District President jsullivan@uaa.org
Rev. Bill Zelazny, District Executive wzelazny@uaa.org
Rev. Mark Gallagher, Parish Minister, Michael Servetus UU Fellowship, Vancouver,
Washington markgallagher@earthlink.net
Rev. Gary Smith, Parish Minister, First Parish, Concord, Massachusetts gesmith@tiac.net
Rev. Stephan Papa, Special Assistant to the President of the UUA, spapa@uaa.org

FORMER MEMBERS OF THE TEAM INCLUDE:

Bonnie Sachs, District President
Eric Kluz, District President

WHAT YOU CAN DO: Visit our website at
(<http://www.uaa.org/administration/committees/ccf/index.html>) and our blog at
(<http://uuaccf.blogspot.com/>).

II. A SHORT HISTORY OF DISTRICT SERVICES

How did we get into the mess we are in today?

Prior to the consolidation the American Unitarian Association (AUA) had District Executives (DEs) in each District. The Universalist Church of America (UCA) was organized in State Conventions – each had a Superintendent. *After consolidation*, the UUA kept the AUA District organization and placed a full-time, UUA-paid District Executive in each District. *In 1970*, all District Executives were terminated (on the same day) as the result of a severe budget crunch. Shortly thereafter six of the same men (they were all men) were rehired to establish the Interdistrict Representative system, with each staff member serving several districts. Four Districts chose at that time to hire and pay for their own staffers.

In 1982, the study referred to as “D2R2” was completed, calling for 12 regions of equal size and membership. It was not adopted.

In 1983, the UUA initiated a plan to install co-employed DEs in every District. Implementation was planned over a six year period. Most Districts shared costs with the UUA on a 50-50 basis. A few Districts paid a greater share. Sharing percentages and the basis for the “Other costs” figure were derived during negotiations, and were inequitable. *By 1990*, all Districts had a District Executive on a cost-shared basis. Most were full-time. Some shared that person with another District.

In the 1990’s Districts began co-employing additional staff referred to as Program Consultants. In most cases, the District paid 75% of the cost, while the UUA provided 25%. Duties vary according to District preference.

In about 1992, the District Presidents group began agitating for a voice. They first asked to be allowed to vote at GA. This plan was not approved by the delegates.

In 1997, Moderator Denny Davidoff convened the first Summit meeting of District Presidents, Trustees and DEs with the Moderator. Subsequent Summits were held in '99, '02, '04 and '05. The last summit authorized the effort now called Congregations Come First.

During this time, several attempts were made to equalize services provided to the Districts and to rationalize the "Other Costs" figure. (Refer to the accompanying Power Point presentation to see the range of Other Costs by district). Also, the formulas for determining Fair Share and the District Grants were regularly reevaluated. No system has been found for the APF which has been considered fair by all.

Three other studies bore on the question of how to achieve the most equitable and efficient delivery of services from the UUA to its member congregations. These included: Structure and Services (2001), mainly focused on the location of staff; "To Be of Use" (2002), an effort to codify District services to congregations; and a Leadership Development conference (2003) sponsored by District Services which resulted in UUA efforts to catalog trainings done, and to try to fill the gaps. Rev. Harlan Limpert was hired to staff the UUA office of Lay Leadership Development.

In 2006 the Congregations Come First project began.

III. VALUES

Certain values and desired outcomes underpin the work of *Congregations Come First*:

Right Relationship: In accord with our covenant, the system should promote right relationship through funding and resource allocation. Cumbersome, commercial and divisive characteristics of the present multi-sourced national and district systems strain relationships.

Equitable: Access to services and allocation of resources in support of congregational health and vitality should be more equitable. Congregations should not be advantaged or disadvantaged by location or legacy district characteristics.

Openness: The funding and resource allocation system should be open and easily comprehensible.

Quality & Timeliness: High quality specialized services should be directed in a timely fashion to where they can have the greatest impact on congregational health and vitality.

Spirit of Generosity / Stewardship: The system should encourage our most generous spirit of faithful stewardship rather than compliance or avoidance.

Connection: In accord with our covenant of mutual support among congregations, the system should support meaningful connections both in the process of funding and in healthy congregation services delivery (e.g., through church-to-church mentorship and peer support).

Capacity: The system should have a greater capacity to serve congregational health and vitality by expanding meaningful opportunities for UU's to apply their leadership talents and passion beyond their own congregation.

Accountability: Accountability is avoided by the current multi-sourced (district and association-wide,) cumbersome funding and resource allocation systems.

Innovation & Entrepreneurship: The system should encourage and support innovation at the local (congregation, cluster, region) level.

DESIRED OUTCOMES

Our desired outcome is to have increasingly healthy UU congregations in deepening connections of inspiration and support providing vital service to their members, communities and the world.

IV. UUA DELIVERY OF SERVICE TO CONGREGATIONS – CCF PROPOSAL

We are proposing moving the delivery of field services to congregations from the Districts to regional offices. There would be 5-7 regions whose boundaries would be co-terminus with State boundaries. Regions would be created and staff assigned to ensure equitable delivery of services to each and every congregation.

With this new structure, a major shift would occur in how the Association's objectives and programming decisions are made. Presently many program decisions are made by national and/or district staff working on their own. In the future, congregations would set the direction and focus of the Association by establishing "Ends" policies at General Assembly. Staff at National and Regional levels would then develop programs based on the Ends policies.

This model assumes no staffing and no fund-raising for staff by the Districts. Financing means are discussed at the end of this report.

HEADQUARTERS

Headquarters staff would provide generalized services which are the same for all congregations and are best done at the national level. It will also do other things like

raise funds, administer funds and so forth. A list of likely services to congregations from headquarters includes:

- Interpret Ends stipulated by the delegates at General Assembly
- Materials development, publication, and distribution (for faith development, training syllabi, social justice, anti-racism, etc.)
- Maintain UUA website
- Research and development
- Support for professionals, professional education and certification, and professional development (ministers, professional religious educators, administrators, musicians, etc.)
- Social justice issue development
- Advocacy and witness
- National conferences, including General Assembly

SERVICES TO LARGE CONGREGATIONS

One service team would be established to provide all services to large congregations other than those which come directly from headquarters.

This team might be housed at headquarters, or it might be linked to a regional staff hub, or be geographically dispersed.

REGIONS

The regional offices would provide some generalized services to all congregations within the region. These might include:

- Interpret Ends created by the delegates to the General Assembly
- District/regional meeting and conferences
- Youth/YRUU/Young Adult/Campus ministries
- Ministerial transition support (MSRs, Exit & Transition interviews)
- Compensation consultants
- Congregation health assessment consultation
- Newsletters

Each regional office also would have staff teams that would provide specialized services to small and mid-sized congregations. Each team would provide such size appropriate services as:

- > Conferences and trainings
- > Phone and e-mail consultations
- > Consultant visits to individual congregations
- > Peer support networks (across congregations)
- > Educational materials and consultation on:
 - Lay leadership development
 - Management and administration
 - Congregational evaluation / assessment
 - Ministerial start-up
 - Conflict management
 - Programming
 - Other size-sensitive features of congregational life

Additionally, each region would be equipped and staffed to assist new start congregations with training, orientation, advice and consultation.

DISTRICTS

Districts would retain the responsibility to foster lateral relationships among congregations and to encourage covenantal relationships, and to elect District Trustees to the UUA Board.

This proposal envisions no changes to District boundaries as they exist at present. Many changes to accommodate these recommendations will occur in the use of technology, in our ability to organize for state-wide political influence, in our governance, etc.

V. FINANCING – CCF Proposal

The Annual Program Fund Continental Committee has struggled for years with the formula for establishing the Fair Share and the District distribution. In recent years the UUA Board and the Committee have discussed creating a generosity-based funding plan utilizing covenantal relations between congregations and between the Association and the congregations. Both groups would like to move on from a fee-for-service mentality surrounding the APF.

To address these concerns, we recommend making the APF comparable to a church canvass. This would entail the following changes:

- 1 Do away with the Fair Share system. In its place, ask congregations to canvass each other for the Annual Program Fund; large congregation to large congregation, midsize to midsize, those who might see themselves as “covenantal” neighbors.

- 2 Intentionally train an army of consultants (experienced lay leaders and volunteers). to use covenant language around growth and generosity-based stewardship. Disburse these trained consultants around the region.
- 3 Model good right-relations language, generosity-based stewardship in this covenantal neighbor approach. Provide good information (ministry to the world and why a congregation should support this good work in the world), insure thorough feedback (we have listened to each other, helped to find or offered assistance for a neighbor in trouble.)
- 4 The exact model to use for stewardship (congregational ask of each other for pledging support) is yet to be determined. It is anticipated the model will be developed using right relation, covenantal language and a mission/ministry vision of our association which would provide congregations the opportunity to generously support our association's ministry in the world. While we have used different models to determine what is "fair" in the past (e.g., we've used both percentage of budget and per member), no particular model, formula or other dollar amounts are being proposed at this time. We would appreciate your input.

With these changes, and with the move to a regional service delivery structure, several current uses of funds would become available to finance these recommendations. They include: the money spent on the shared District Executive system, the money raised for District dues, and the District share (rebate) currently offered in the APF system. Hopefully, this would also eliminate some of the duplication which occurs now between Headquarters staff and field staff.

VI. ISSUES ADDRESSED

This proposed structure is designed to address a number of obstacles – real or perceived – with the current structure of service delivery. Among these are:

1. **Equitability of service delivery.** Service delivery is separated from the historical boundaries that were established to provide governance to the Association. These boundaries have led to significant divergence of services to congregations. Service delivery has varied according to District size and to congregational location within the District. Regions can be designed to ensure that every congregation receives its fair share of service, regardless of size or location.
2. **Accountability of staff.** There is a clear line of authority and evaluation to hold staff accountable to Ends developed by congregational delegates at General Assemblies and articulated by the UUA Board.
3. **Critical mass for service provision.** By organizing in larger units, services can be tailored to particular congregational and regional needs. Specialists can be hired as needed to serve different-sized congregations and different functional needs.
4. **Elimination of the duplication of effort or confusion over where congregations go for services.** Programming and activities that at present are

provided by both national and district offices will be consolidated and provided at the level that is more effective and efficient. Clearer lines of roles, responsibilities and authority can be drawn.

5. **Competition for funds between Districts and the UUA is eliminated.** Rather than two entities trying to raise money and congregations needing to calculate two sets of “dues” and write two checks there will be a single funding raising program.
6. **Divergences in district funding formula eliminated** The program of trying to rationalize the “other costs” that is not related to actual costs and varies widely between districts in the district funding formula is eliminated. All funds are raised at national level and go to regions to support the staffing and programming services to be provided

VII. CONTEXT

Moderator Gini Courter has prepared a time line showing how several current initiatives will come together to create a modernized UUA. These initiatives include; the board’s work on Policy Governance, The Commission on Appraisal’s review of our Principles and Purposes, Congregations Come First, and the use of Open Space Technology to enable delegates to set Ends for the denomination. The CCF report is scheduled to be delivered to the Board in January, 2008. This date coincides with the beginning of the next Presidential election. Candidates will be invited to attend that board meeting.

The time line is shown by Appendix A.

VIII. WHAT WE ASK OF YOU

We are eliciting your help in this endeavor. Your insight and thought provoking questions will help with establishing a unique and daring proposal that will strengthen our service to Unitarian Universalist congregations.

Talk with your friends about what is exciting about this new proposal.

Talk about what obstacles would need to be addressed.

Talk about what doesn’t seem possible to do.

Talk about how crazy those CCF members are to even make this proposal.

AND THEN LET US KNOW WHAT YOU THINK:

Access our Blog at (<http://uuaccf.blogspot.com/>).

APPENDIX A

This is a summary of the various groups and processes involved in institutional change and their current timelines -- easy to diagram on a piece of newsprint, but not so easy on a computer, so here it is as a table for your consideration.

The Questions	Considered By	Process	Timeline
MISSION AND ENDS: What difference should Unitarian Universalism make in the world?	Congregations	Open Space Technology (OST) process at GA 2007 and, if necessary, 2008. Decisions and reports from 2007 OST process returned to Board for reflection of Board and President, then returned to delegates for further OST work, feedback, or ratification.	Initial work at General Assembly 2007; further work possible in 2008; affirmation of ends by delegates in 2008 or 2009
STRUCTURE: What services and structures will support healthy, growing UU congregations as they live their missions in the world? How can we equitably and generously fund those services and structures?	Congregations Come First (CCF) team	Meetings beginning in February 2006; preliminary direction and recommendations reported to all partners (UUA Board, District Presidents, District Staff, APF) for feedback in fall of 2006	Final report to Board in January 2008
PRINCIPLES: What values call and inform us as we live our missions in our congregations?	Commission on Appraisal	COA processes beginning June 2006	Report to delegates for vote at GA 2009
GOVERNANCE: What type of governance will allow the UUA Board to serve as good stewards of the application of resources to the mission and ends of Unitarian Universalism?	Board	Examination of governance, focus on policy governance, development of policies	In process
LEADERSHIP:	Congregations	President and Moderator	Elections at GA

<p>Who will serve as President/ CEO starting in 2009? Moderator? Trustees? District Presidents?</p>		<p>elections Trustee At Large elections District Trustee and District President Elections</p>	<p>2009 District Elections</p>
<p>MANAGEMENT: How will the UUA plan, set objectives, manage resources, deploy the human and financial assets needed to achieve ends, and measure and report results?</p>	<p>Administration</p>	<p>Ongoing Measurement processes change likely following changes in governance</p>	<p>Process and personnel changes possible following 2009 elections</p>

CELEBRATION
consolidation

2011 is the 50th anniversary of