

**ANNUAL REPORT  
TO THE UUA GENERAL ASSEMBLY  
June 2010  
UUA COMMISSION ON APPRAISAL**

**Choosing a New Topic for Study**

Since the Commission's involvement with the review of Article II of the UUA bylaws was completed at the 2009 General Assembly, we proceeded to the process of choosing the topic for our next study. We sought suggestions far and wide and received more than 300, many of them through a SurveyMonkey link on our web site. Two of our members, Erica Baron and Don Mohr, maintained a running analysis of the data, and our October meeting was devoted to evaluating it. We determined to have a final deadline for receiving suggestions prior to our January meeting. Meanwhile, we each wrote reflection papers on what would be entailed in taking up a study in each of the several areas that received the most attention in our survey responses.

When we met in January, having had the data analysis updated to include suggestions received since the October meeting, and having read each other's reflection papers, we undertook a detailed process to arrive at the general area of our next study, which we determined to be ministry. During the January meeting, we held a hearing at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Berkeley, California, where the participants were given the opportunity to discuss various potential focuses for a narrowed topic within the general field of ministry.

Following the January meeting, in order to help us choose our narrowed focus and scope, individual Commissioners interviewed eleven people with particular positions related to ministry, including leadership of studies currently in progress:

- Steve Becker, President, UU Small Group Ministry Network
- Karen Brammer, Small Congregations Specialist for the Northeastern District
- Janne Eller-Isaacs, Co-designer and founder, model worship associates and pastoral associates programs
- Robert Eller-Isaacs, President, UU Ministers' Association
- Douglas Gallager, Chair, UUA Board's Excellence in Ministry Working Group
- Deborah Holder, President UU Society for Community Ministries
- Harlan Limpert, Vice President for Ministries and Congregational Support (Through him, we also received comments from District Field Staff: Ian Evison, Robin Nelson, and Richard Speck.)
- Bob Miess, Chair, Lay Ministry Working Group, UU Society for Community Ministries
- Beth Miller, Director, Ministry and Professional Leadership Staff Group
- Don Southworth, Acting Executive Director, UU Ministers' Association
- John Weston, Transitions Director, Ministry and Professional Leadership Staff Group

The questions put to the interviewees were:

- What is the main purpose of any study of ministry you are engaged in?
- What were the main reasons to undertake the study?
- What do you hope to be its outcomes(s)?
- What issues about ministry would you most like to see the Commission study because they are (a) ripe and (b) not being studied by another group?
- How could a COA study on some particular aspect of ministry be helpful to you?
- Do you have any hypotheses about ministry that you would like to see tested?

We shared our notes on the interviews with each other in preparation for our April meeting, when we determined the focus and scope of our study, which is to be completed and published by General Assembly 2013. Preliminarily, we agreed that a successful study will:

- Have a narrow enough focus not to be diffuse.
- Not duplicate other studies.
- Be one coherent whole, not a collection of loosely connected parts.
- Create new knowledge for which there is a pressing need.
- Take a clear position on definite changes we propose.
- Speak to a clearly defined audience.
- Provoke thought, not be merely descriptive.
- Continue the Commission's tradition of providing a valuable resource that lends itself to wide use.
- Demonstrate that the Commission is a vital body needed by the Association.

Starting with thought-provoking ideas from our interviewees, we used a series of writing exercises to arrive at the focus and scope of our study as well as its title, as follows:

***Who's in Charge Here?  
The Complex Relationship between Ministry and Authority***

*Given the unique religious heritage of Unitarian Universalism, our congregational polity, and our diverse present, where does ministerial authority within Unitarian Universalist congregations come from? How is authority exercised and how does it relate to the meaning of ministry? On what authority do we call work done by clergy or laity "ministry"? How does it differ from leadership, acts of kindness, and good works? How clear is it in our congregations who has authority to do what? To whom is one with ministerial authority accountable? Is a lack of understanding of sources of authority partly responsible for keeping congregations and our Association small? How can we both honor our religious history and tradition, and comprehend a source of authority that leads us towards health and growth even while we struggle with issues of authority? Of what help to us in this struggle is it that we are a covenantal faith?*

In the course of the April meeting, we held concurrent initial hearings on our new topic in Boston and Providence, and we discussed different ways to proceed with this study than with previous ones, notably using focus groups and case studies. Erica Baron accepted appointment as Project Manager. We also pursued arrangements for a fall 2010 meeting

in Heartland District and a spring 2011 meeting in St. Lawrence District. Pete Fontneau and Jacqui C. Williams agreed to serve as an ad hoc task force to investigate how we might make more extensive use of electronics to further our work.

### **Attention to Remaining Article II Matters**

As Chair, I kept in touch with UUA Board Secretary Tom Loughrey regarding his follow-up with congregations to make sure they knew about the Responsive Resolution at the 2009 General Assembly charging delegate congregations with putting into action the pledge in the “Inclusion” section that was part of the Commission’s proposed revision of Article II. There was further follow-up to have Tom Loughrey remind congregations to let him know before the 2010 General Assembly of their actions in response to the Responsive Resolution. The several other Responsive Resolutions at the 2009 General Assembly regarding Article II called for actions by the UUA Board of Trustees but did not call for any further action from the Commission.

On behalf of the Commission, Jacqui C. Williams has pursued getting the Commission’s extensive work products related to Article II properly entered into the archives at Harvard Divinity School.

### **Budget Matters**

In the past the Commission was not asked to provide a budget proposal and was not given an accounting of expenditures charged to it. In the spring of 2010, our Treasurer Don Mohr requested this information, and, in the future, we will be able accurately to monitor our expenditures. In the spring, we also learned that the Administration was proposing a reduction of our annual budget from \$34,000 to \$5,000, an amount so low that it would prevent us from doing our work and thus would constitute a de facto dissolution of the Commission, in violation of the UUA bylaw Section 5.8, which created the Commission and mandates its work as an independent, elected body, accountable to the General Assembly.

Consequently, Commissioners Erica Baron, Jacqui C. Williams, and I attended the April meeting of the UUA Board of Trustees, where we succeeded in (a) having it established that the Board, not the Administration, was the proper body to determine the Commission’s funding amount, and (b) having our funding for the coming year restored at least to the level of \$24,000. We also received assurance from Paul Rickter, Chair of the Finance Committee, that the Commission will be consulted in the future about its proposed budget amount.

Respectfully submitted,

Rev. Barbara Child  
Chair, UUA Commission on Appraisal