

Communications Staff Group

Report to the Board of Trustees

John Hurley, Director of Communications

January, 2008

In the office reports below, you will read how our communications staff is expanding the way we communicate with members, congregations, and the wider world. Not surprisingly, technology is at the center of many of these advances.

The UUA Bookstore has a new website at <http://www.uuabookstore.org/> made possible by the introduction of Acumen software, and the UUA website (new this past April) continues to add materials and resources to its collection. Our weekly online magazine, **uuworld.org**, continues to experiment with using Google Adwords to attract newcomers to the magazine and to Unitarian Universalism. Several of us have worked with our marketing firm to create a Google Adwords component for our national marketing campaign. And we now regularly post videos on Unitarian Universalism and the work of the Association on YouTube (recent postings include Bill Sinkford's appearance in Washington, DC, on World AIDS Day, and Bill's holiday letter).

As I noted in previous reports, communications staff have been deeply involved in the national marketing campaign. One aspect of the campaign is the creation of a new "Unitarian Universalist Perspectives" section on [uua.org](http://www.uua.org) with short essays on the relationship of religion in general, and UUism in particular, to issues in contemporary life. We will periodically be adding essays to this section, and I encourage you to visit <http://www.uua.org/visitors/uuperspectives/index.shtml> to read them.

To help congregations and religious professionals in the creation of worship services, Mary Benard, senior editor in our Publications office, has been working with LicenSing Online, Inc. to simplify the copyright permission process for music and lyrics from our hymnbooks. Currently, congregations need to obtain permission from copyright holders directly, but LicenSing Online can make it possible for congregations to purchase annual licenses to use the music in our hymnbooks in worship services. A mailing has gone out to all copyright holders represented in our hymnbooks, and we expect more information early in the new year.

Finally, several recent incidents in congregations prompt me to remind you of the crisis communications advice available from the communications staff group. If you know of a congregation that finds itself in a crisis that might attract media attention, please refer them to me. We can support the congregation and its leaders by advising on statements, press releases, and overall media relations. I am happy to say that we don't often have to provide this service, but in the cases that we do, I know that the congregation deeply appreciates the support we offer.

As always, if you have any questions about these reports or the work of the communications staff group, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Office of Information and Public Witness
Janet Hayes, Public Relations Director
January, 2008

This past quarter our office welcomed two new employees who took over from departing ones. Daisy Kincaid joined us in October as Public Witness Specialist, and Sabe Graham started in December, taking over Erika Nonken's role as Public Information Assistant.

Before she left to travel and pursue graduate studies, Erika coordinated a special chapel service for the dedication of three new portraits of historical Universalist leaders from St. Lawrence University: Ebenezer Fisher, Isaac Morgan Atwood, and John Murray Atwood. The portraits now hang in the hallway of the third floor of 25 Beacon. Erika worked closely with Gene Navias and Janet Bowering in managing many details of the donation and worship service, including producing a special commemorative chapbook. Trustees are invited to drop by if you would like a copy. The IPW office is on the second floor of 25 Beacon.

In addition to staff changes, we navigated several other transitions this fall. The IPW staff have been busy since August supporting major Association initiatives, such as the national marketing campaign and Association Sunday. We're seeing a sharp increase in requests from web visitors for hard-copy welcome packets, a good sign that more "highly motivated" seekers are finding their way to our virtual doors. We've redesigned our welcome packets and media kits to reflect the recent marketing messages and to leverage our increased visibility.

We're also developing a process to better promote Bill Sinkford's many congregational visits and public appearances. In addition to securing local press coverage for Bill and the Association, we're working closely with congregational leaders to give them the skills to continue this important work on an on-going basis. More of our materials and staff time are being devoted to projects that have an educational/training component, and we're trying to incorporate our major public witness priorities in this work, which is otherwise extremely broad in terms of audience, occasion, etc. All of this is an attempt to maximize our resources and to do as much as we can for the Association and our 1,000 congregations. I'm encouraged with the results so far.

Office of Electronic Communication
Deborah Weiner, Director of Electronic Communication
January, 2008

In October, I wrote to update you on continuing content migration to the new UUA.org. We have made substantial headway in that sizeable project. We are approaching 25,000 pages of content migrated to our new site. A new Leadership Resources page has been added to help users find the materials they need more easily. Many topics are available there (see <http://www.uua.org/leaders/leaderslibrary/55644.shtml>) and we welcome

additions (if you think of others that would be appropriate for this listing, you are invited to email us: web@uaa.org). We continue to migrate news and General Assembly content from 2005 or earlier from the “old” website and hope that soon, religious education content will be available on UUA.org as well.

Among items recently added to the website:

- Information on the UUA national large congregation conference: <http://www.uaa.org/events/largecongregations/2008/index.shtml>
- A new staff intranet
- Enhanced google search on uua.org so that the search now includes items from uuworld.org and UUA Bookstore

We continue to seek submissions for our new “Congregational Life” section, featuring stories on many aspects of the lives of congregations. We also continue to seek writing from our ordained clergy for the “From the Minister’s Study” feature, as well as podcasts and other pieces that might enrich our new “Spiritual Life” section. We appreciate your help in carrying the word about these new sections; if people wish to submit content for consideration, email webeditorial@uaa.org and clearly indicate the subject matter in the subject line of the message.

On other fronts, Julie Albanese, Assistant Website Director, recently returned to work following the first part of a well-earned sabbatical (the second portion of her leave occurs in the spring). We note that more than 25,500 individuals (unique addresses – no duplicates!) are subscribed to UUA email lists (there are more than 250 of them currently). Use of UUA.org has continued to grow and we now have nearly 5,000 visitors per day; 30-35,000 per week, with nearly sixty percent of those visiting new to our site.

The OEC continues to play an active role in supporting implementation of the UUA’s national marketing campaign on several fronts. We have provided analysis and commentary of traffic coming to UUA.org through the Time Magazine campaign, and a test of advertising using Google Adwords and keywords is now underway with some early positive results showing up. We’re pleased to be engaged in reaching individuals previously unfamiliar with our faith through such means and have enhanced the pages of UUA.org to appeal to these customers. We’re engaged in early discussions around the possible uses for -- and constituencies served by -- staff group blogs, and we’ll soon be focused on putting up a new UUA elections website.

In this season of giving and hope, there is much to be grateful for. We join our colleagues in wishing you and yours a joyous holiday season.

Periodicals Office
Chris Walton, Editor
January 2008

UU World is wrapping up the process of rebidding our **printing contract**. We have several competitive bids, but none offers significant savings in our printing budget.

In November, *UU World* introduced a **discounted subscription rate** for congregations seeking extra copies for promotional use. Six congregations have taken advantage of the offer so far, ordering 59 subscriptions at \$8 each. Contact Circulation at 617-948-4654 or circulation@uaa.org for more information.

The Fall 2007, Winter 2007, and Spring 2008 issues of *UU World* have featured **“Congregational Announcements,”** a new form of classified advertising that lets congregations place brief celebrations and other notices in a special section of *UU News* at discounted rates. Only a handful of congregations have taken advantage of this opportunity so far. See www.uuworld.org/advertising for more information; a reservation form will be distributed in the February and March 2008 Congregational Mailings.

UU World's web magazine, *uuworld.org: liberal religion and life*, is adding a new blog in February. “The Interdependent Web” will offer weekly highlights from the *UU* blogosphere and other independent online media (YouTube, for example), using our very successful “Unitarian Universalists in the Media” blog as a model.

UU World reaches 126,000 households. Our weekly web magazine, *uuworld.org*, is averaging 800+ visitors a day and is approaching 2,000 email newsletter subscribers. We invite you to sign up for *uuworld.org's* **weekly email newsletter**, which highlights each week's news and other content. Visit www.uuworld.org/subscriptions/emailnewsletter.shtml.

Publications and UUA Bookstore
Patricia Frevert, Publishing Director
January, 2008

Skinner House Books

For the 12 months ending in November 2007, Skinner House sales were \$310,000, about even with sales for the same period one year ago. Looking back further, Skinner House sales have grown more than 25% since 2001.

There has been a good response to our most recent titles:

In Praise of Animals: A Treasury of Poems, Quotations and Readings, collected by Edward Searl (April 2007)
Amethyst Beach: Meditations, Barbara Merritt (May 2007)
Crisis and Change: My Years as President of the Unitarian Universalist Association, 1969-1977, Robert Nelson West (May 2007)
The Seven Principles in Word and Worship, edited by Ellen Brandenburg (June 2007)
Meet Jesus: The Life and Lessons of a Beloved Teacher, Lynn Tuttle Gunney (June 2007)
How to Bury a Goldfish and Other Ceremonies and Celebrations for Everyday Life, Virginia Lang and Louise Nayer (July 2007)
Worship That Works: Theory and Practice for Unitarian Universalists, Wayne Arnason and Kathleen Rolenz (October 2007)
A Wind Swept Over the Waters: Reflections on 60 Favorite Bible Passages, John Nichols (September 2007)
The Fellowship Movement: A Growth Strategy and Its Legacy, Holly Ulbrich (October 2007)
Come Into the Circle: Worshiping with Children, Michelle Richards (December 2007)

Skinner House is will be publishing these new titles in the coming months:

Wrestling with Adulthood: UU Men Talk about Growing Up, edited by Ken Beldon (February 2008)
Seven UU men share their personal stories.

The Cambridge Platform: A Contemporary Reader's Edition, edited by Peter Hughes (March 2008)
The foundational 17th century text, with modernized spelling and punctuation for contemporary readers. Includes an introduction by Alice Blair Wesley.

Sonata for Voice and Silence, 2008 UUA Meditation Manual, Mark Belletini (May 2008)
The senior minister from Columbus Ohio and chair of the UUA Hymnbook Commission builds his meditations on a musical metaphor.

A Child's Book of Blessings and Prayers, Eliza Blanchard (June 2008)
Graces, prayers and blessings from Hindu, Sioux, Islamic, Jewish, Christian and Unitarian Universalist traditions, to name only a few, Highlights the common threads that can unite people of all faiths. Beautifully illustrated in full color. Hardcover. Ages 4 and up.

Through Prison Bars (working title), John Speer (June 2008)
The story of one congregation's work with prisoners. Members of the H.D. Thoreau Congregation of Fort Bend County, Texas, conducted a creative writing workshop for prisoners and eventually launched a program that allowed prisoners to serve anonymously as tutors and writing

mentors to college students. The author describes how they set up these programs, what worked and what didn't.

Still Kicking (working title), Ric Masten (June 2008)

Poetry with humor, wit and candor, from the "Troubadour and People's Poet of Carmel."

For more about these and other Skinner House titles, check the UUA Bookstore website at <http://www.uuabookstore.org/>.

Skinner House in the Press

Louise Nayer, co-author of *How to Bury a Goldfish: and Other Ceremonies and Celebrations for Everyday Life*, was interviewed about the book by Wireless Flash News, an independent news agency that provides exclusive feature and entertainment news to radio and TV stations, newspapers, and magazines across the United States and around the world. The article, titled "Burying Your Goldfish Will Help Your Teen," appeared on their news wire September 25, 2007.

The Fellowship Movement: A Growth Strategy and Its Legacy by Holley Ulbrich was reviewed in the *Anderson Independent-Mail News* (Anderson, South Carolina) on November 30, 2007. Here is the link:

<http://www.independentmail.com/news/2007/nov/30/approachable-and-scholarly-look-unitarian-universal/>

Skinner House Plans for GA 08

At General Assembly this June, Skinner House will honor those receiving preliminary fellowship with a complimentary copy of *The Cambridge Platform*, edited by Peter Hughes, with an Introduction by Alice Blair Wesley. The book is available for purchase, at the UUA Bookstore.

UUA Bookstore

Web Redesign

The Bookstore web site has been completely redesigned, making it easier for regular customers to find a particular title, and for new customers to get a good introduction to our books and services. The new site will enable us to improve customer service, including turnaround time. Please visit us at www.uua.org/bookstore.

Staff

One sign of the Bookstore staff's stability is that we have two employees taking partial sabbaticals this year. Customer Service Representative Morgan Neyland took the first part of his leave this past summer, and Assistant Manager Laura Jean Miller will be taking the first part of hers in February and March.

Sales

For the 12 months ending in November 2007, Bookstore sales were \$1,224,547--down 9% from the same period one year ago; the downturn is partially due to falling sales for Singing the Journey, published in June 2005.

New Titles in the Bookstore

So Help Me God: The Founding Fathers and The First Great Battle Over Church and State, Forrest Church. This vigorous history offers a new vision of our earliest presidents' beliefs, reshaping assumptions about the debates that still affect us today. (Harcourt) \$28.00

What on Earth Have I Done? Stories, Observations, and Affirmations, Robert Fulghum. An armchair tour of everyday life as seen by one of our favorite essayists, a man with two feet planted firmly on the earth, one eye on the heavens and, at times, a tongue planted firmly in his cheek (St. Martin's Press) \$22.95

Promising Futures: The Unexpected Rewards of Engaged Philanthropy, Margot Welch. A group of philanthropists who invest in poor kids by paying for their college educations end up feeling that they benefit even more from the relationship than the kids they help. (Font & Center Press) \$15.00

UUA Publishing

Our Whole Lives: Sexuality Education for Young Adults, Ages 18-35, Michael Tino, Laura Anne Stuart, Sarah Gibb Millspaugh (January 2008) Lifespan Faith Development

Sexuality and Our Faith: A Companion to Our Whole Lives, Young Adults, Mandy Keithan, T. Michael Rock, Lynn Young (January 2008) Lifespan Faith Development