

**REPORT TO THE UUA BOARD OF TRUSTEES  
FROM THE  
DISTRICT SERVICES STAFF GROUP  
October, 2008**

**National Events Involving District Staff**

- 41 district board members, district staff members, and two UUA Board of Trustees members (Chuck Wooldridge and Linda Laskowski) attended a two-day training in *Policy Governance* last month. Led by the Rev. Margaret Keip and the Rev. Mary Higgins, it served as an exploration of how *Policy Governance* can be effectively used in our districts. Currently 11 of our 19 districts are in some form of policy-type governance.
- *Drive Time Essays Volume 3 - Essays for Smaller Congregations*, is nearing completion. A copy will be sent to all congregational presidents, along with a letter from President Bill Sinkford, thanking them for their leadership and reminding them of the many resources available through the district and national offices of the UUA.
- The Rev. Terasa Cooley, district executive in Mass Bay district, and the Rev. Nancy Bowen, district executive in the Mountain Desert district, along with Harlan Limpert, director for district services, are continuing to serve as program directors for UU University in 2009. For the first time ever, UU University will be incorporated into *General Assembly*, providing six separate ten-hour tracks of intensive programming. The mission is to allow leaders to be immersed in a topic deeply relevant to their congregational life, to join with other lay leaders in community, and to strategize through integrated methodology how they can bring their new understandings on to their congregations.
- Three districts -- Prairie Star, Metro New York, and Pacific Northwest - - are exploring how the "Nurturing Excellence in Transformational Ministry" initiative being launched in the Mountain Desert district can be implemented in their own districts. The UU Congregation in Shelter Rock is providing funding for this effort as part of the Excellence in Ministry initiative.

- District staff members are providing insights and experiences to Harlan Limpert, director for district services, to help inform his work as a member of the Virtual Team Taskforce led by Lyn Conley. The mission of the task force is to explore ways within the Association to reduce our carbon footprint.
- Skinner House Books is considering publishing a book based on the Louisville Growth Consultation that occurred in Kentucky last year. Twelve ministers from some of the fastest-growing UU congregations in America discussed ways in which we can grow our faith. The book may be modeled after workshop led at General Assembly in June entitled, "10 Lessons from 12 Ministers".

### **Southwestern UU Conference (SWUUC)**

- SWUUC rode out the peak of hurricane season with widespread impacts from *Gustav* and *Ike*. The arrival of Hurricane *Gustav* in south Louisiana caused Greater New Orleans UUs (GNOUU) to postpone their Third Annual Hurricane Katrina Commemorative Dinner. One of the highlights of the dinner was to have been a donation from GNOUU to the UU congregation in Gulfport, MS. Luckily, the gift was not delayed. Also postponed for *Gustav* was the razing of the gutted remains of the Community UU Church of New Orleans' building. After three years of believing that the shell of the building could be saved, the city finally called for the foundation to be raised 3 inches. A jazz funeral had been planned for the demolition.
- Baton Rouge was the city most damaged by *Gustav*, and *Ike* added insult to injury by causing additional roof and water damage at Unitarian Church of Baton Rouge. It appears that the congregation that carried us all through Katrina so nobly is the one most damaged by *Gustav* with UU Fellowship of Houston also suffering considerable water damage.
- In the midst of all of this, the hearty souls of the Southwest prepared to embark on their first conference cruises. The first ever Dwight Brown Leadership Experience reunion cruise sailed from the port of Houston to Cozumel, Mexico. Gini Courter was keynote speaker on the theme

"Ecstatic UU Leadership" and cruisers brought aid to a group supporting school children on the island.

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### **Mountain Desert District (MDD)**

- On Saturday, September 27 the Boulder Denver Cluster will launch **Living Into Covenant**, the Ministerial Formation Project funded by the Panel of Theological Education. Based on the educational philosophies of Maria Harris, Parker Palmer and Peter Groome, this experiential model will involve students, ministerial interns, ministers in preliminary fellowship, experienced ministers, religious educators, and lay leaders in deep dialogue about the leadership of our congregations and larger movement. (Note: Other districts are considering replicating this effort, customized to their district's unique circumstances.)
- The **District Youth Ministry Study Group** is leading an Appreciative Inquiry process to imagine and design the next model of youth ministry in MDD. This study group is prompted by the national work on youth ministry. The goals for the new program coincide with the goals of the national consultation: congregational based, spirit filled, justice based and action oriented. The new program will be developed in cooperation with youth, parents, ministers, religious educators and congregations based on best practices in youth ministry. MDD expects to add more consulting services to congregational youth ministries as well as, providing those opportunities that individual congregation cannot sustain themselves.

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### **Massachusetts Bay District (MBD)**

- In addition to our usual programming for congregational leaders, we offered a workshop for ministers this summer. Based on the Edwin Friedman book, "Leadership in an Age of Anxiety" we spend a week exploring our role in congregational and family systems, and ways in which

our leadership may be enhanced or hampered by how we understand our role. Eighteen MBD ministers spent a week of their precious vacation time and brought great openness and commitment to the process.

### **Florida District (FLD)**

- The Florida congregations are uniting and rallying together in opposition to Amendment #2, the so-called Florida Marriage Protection Act, which would do anything but. Unitarian Universalist Ministers in Tampa Bay, Miami & Ft Lauderdale, Melbourne & Tallahassee are leading the way with community forums designed to expose the dangers in this proposed amendment to the Florida constitution. Most of the State's ministers will preach on the amendment October 19th, to counter a Baptist-led campaign that day in support of the Amendment. Additionally, the newly forming state-wide Legislative Ministry is leading the way with educational advocacy.
- The District has inaugurated a monthly web-based seminar for Congregational Leaders to supplement its offerings of workshops. Up to 15 congregations join in a conference call and web-based presentation program on everything from Board goal setting to effective stewardship campaigns.
- Seven District congregations have joined forces for a competitive grants program devoted to growth projects, utilizing monies made available from an Association Sunday Grant. The District requires congregations to form teams for measurable growth programs during the 08/09 year. Four projects are currently being evaluated.

### **Ohio-Meadville District (OMD)**

- New congregations are forming in Ashtabula OH, Oil City PA, Elkins WV and Fayetteville WV. Another group is re-forming itself in Chillicothe OH. These new groups will be linked with existing congregations for support and nurture. Our Erie, PA congregation has already established a well-working satellite relationship with Oil City, PA. The Charleston WV

congregation is working with Elkins and Fayetteville WV. Other larger congregations are considering relations with Ashtabula and Chillicothe.

- The NRG ( read: "Energy", the multi-district initiative) Co-op has decided that North East Ohio will be the location for a Planning for Growth pilot project this fall. Six small congregations from northeast Ohio will be chosen to participate over the next three years. There are currently ten small congregations working on possible applications to the program. Teams from the participating small congregations will work with former MDD district executive Ellen Germann-Melosh, small church consultant, starting this fall. Ellen will also train three volunteers (two former small church presidents and one former board vice president) from the region to be district small church consultants. They will continue to work with other small churches in the OMD after they work with this project.
- On Oct. 11, the OMD will be revisioning/reimagining/reinventing the way the district does Social Transformation work at a Social Transformation Summit. This reimagining effort is a direct result of feedback from our spring Long Range Planning interview process. The process brought up time and again requests by congregational leaders that the OMD become a "Big Voice" in the region and take initiative on major social transformation issues. And that the OMD help the congregations rethink their own social change work by providing a clearing house function and resources that help the congregations sort through and prioritize the major social change issues facing us. On Oct. 11, a group of lobbyists, congregational leaders, ministers, and social change professionals will meet to help the OMD revision its approach.
- The OMD was unanimously invited to become a non-voting affiliate of the Ohio Council of Churches this past spring. This has opened up a plethora of networking possibilities for social change work with other faith traditions and other activities of mutual interest..
- Chalice Lighters has grown from less than 75 at this time last year to over 575. We hope to reach 1000 with our fall campaign next month.

- We are hosting a conference on Big Ideas for Smaller Congregations on Oct. 18 for all NRG Co-op churches. We are working with NRG to plan a youth leadership component for youth and one for youth leaders in the upcoming UULTI.

**Northern New England District (NNED) (Formed from the recent consolidation of the New Hampshire/Vermont and the Northeast districts)**

- The Northern New England District is expanding their Chalice Lighter Program to make it possible for our congregations in those old, glorious and inefficient building to use the funds to make their building more energy efficient. They will conduct an every household Chalice Lighter campaign in October to increase membership by more than 15 times followed by district-wide initiatives and a month of Chalice Lighter activities in January.
- In partnership with others the NNED will soon complete a page for Small Congregations for the NNED web site. This page will include specialized resources currently provided by other districts to their small congregations, and will be easily linked to or used on the UUA web site. A UUA Funding Panel grant is being considered for 2009 to provide funding for the Small Church Specialist to support UUA staff teams (for a limited time) that request help to specialize materials for small congregations. The Small Church Specialist is now part of a national interdenominational network of staff specialists for small congregations.
- The staff of the NNED has created a policy that will help us do our work in a way that is more environmentally sustainable. That policy includes commitments to:
  1. measure current staff and office environmental impact including CO2 calculation, waste production, toxic substances used, and our activity in environmental justice and education and leadership to the district at every level. Once measured, we commit to reduce negative impact by measurable amounts. (For instance as Small Church about half of the 8000 miles I drove in one period of time were to events

where I was serving just one congregation or event. I am committed to significantly reduce that number of 'one-shot-trips' as a way to reduce my total number of miles. I am committed to reduce those total miles 20% in the next period of time.)

2. at every staff meeting include spiritual grounding and report our progress on our sustainability goals

3. create and support a district wide Sustainability Task Force (primary responsibility of the Sustainability Coordinator). The Task Force will suggest goals, measurements and provide leadership to assist every level of district function in its efforts to substantially decrease our environmental impact and to offer both hope and focus for conscious and reverent ways to live on this earth.

### **Central Midwest District (CMwD)**

- The Central Midwest District has a variety of workshops lined up for this fall, covering many aspects of congregational life. A seminar for small and emerging congregations was held September 13, and teams from eight congregations participated; two youth advisor retreats/trainings are being held in the northern and southern part of our district; a growth conference is scheduled for October 18 in the greater Milwaukee area; a congregational presidents' gathering will be held November 1 in St. Louis; and a workshop on Creative and Contemporary Worship will be held in Deerfield, IL on November 15.
- In addition, we are continuing our 7-year collaboration with neighboring Prairie Star and Heartland Districts to train and share congregational consultants, increasing the pool of expertise we are able to offer all of our congregations. We are particularly excited with the new series of jointly sponsored online workshops—which, if successful, we plan to continue monthly. This Fall we are also planning an advanced conflict intervention workshop with Susan Nienaber of the Alban Institute. Again, if this succeeds, we are interesting making this a model for a possible future yearly joint event—and one that we will be able to open to other districts.

- The Central Midwest will also be extending its very successful "virtual office" project into a "virtual district" project. After a challenge from our district board we have set ourselves the goal of making this year's district assembly "digitally accessible": with podcasts and resources from as many of the presentations and workshops as possible. We have set ourselves the goal of doing this within a budget of human and financial resources that would be affordable to our average congregation allowing this to be a joint learning endeavor.

### **Pacific Southwest District (PSWD)**

- Two successful young adult events occurred in August, 2008. First, in California, a Water Justice Road Trip, jointly sponsored by PSWD and UU Legislative Ministries, CA; in 10 days and 1,964 miles we submerged ourselves with the myriad issues regarding water in California. We learned that in California water flows toward money. We met with several lower income communities that do not have easy access to safe drinking water; they spent 10% of monthly income for bottled water because they cannot drink their tap water. We lobbied our Senators in Sacramento on behalf of the Winnemem Wintu, a native tribe whose ancestral lands were flooded when the Shasta Dam was built. We ended our journey by leading the Sunday morning worship service at the Fresno church (new LEED certified building!) To see more about our trip go to [uuroadtrip.blogspot.com](http://uuroadtrip.blogspot.com). Many participants are leading worship services on the topic back in their home congregations, and three of them have already led a water justice workshop for other young adults.
- Second, a Labor Day Young Adult Camp: 58 young adults worshipped, hiked,=2 Osang, and had fun at our beautiful Camp de Benneville Pines. Our focus was building community, equipping leaders, and creating justice. We had four social justice streams that flowed throughout the weekend: homophobia/heterosexism, environmental justice, reproductive justice, and peacemaking. Our very own peacemaking expert, Alex Winnett from UUA, came out to lead that workshop. We look forward to looping many of those young adults into district leadership and we are encouraging them into congregational leadership. During the weekend, many young

adults who are active in their home congregations spoke of how much it meant to them to talk about religion, spirituality, and justice issues with other young adults.

### **Pacific Northwest District (PNWD)**

- PNWD conducted its first comprehensive survey of member congregations requesting responses on various measures of Ends policy compliance. Although response was small (25%), the survey was instructive in several areas, and will be useful in designing future annual reviews of progress towards Ends achievement.
- In conducting its annual survey of congregations, PNWD took advantage of Harlan Limpert's "Survey Monkey" account. We had such a positive experience, PNWD has now established its own unlimited account which is available free to member congregations. Several are already trying out the resource for their own congregational surveys (particularly those preparing for ministerial search).
- PNWD is engaging the LREDA chapter to encourage and empower its ability to become the locus of professional education and ongoing training for religious educators in the district, including Renaissance Modules.
- PNWD is challenging district youth leaders and adult advisors to more clearly define language and expectations related to sexualized behavior at youth conferences. The leadership group is also reviewing and revising adult supervision and age restriction guidelines to increase safety and inclusion for youth participating in district-sponsored events. We hope these conversations will encourage similar reflection and updates to practices in congregational youth groups.
- PNWD is reviewing age range guidelines for young adult conferences to better meet the life-stage faith development needs of younger adults (18-29) and those who are beyond traditional college age, but still considerably younger than others in their congregations. The district is also exploring life-stage faith development peer groups and targeted gatherings/events for middle age and elder adults.

- Seattle University recently established an endowed scholarship to honor the ministry of the Rev. Leon Hopper. The scholarship will be available to UU seminarians enrolled at the University's Institute for Ecumenical Theological Studies, which serves fourteen denominations including Unitarian Universalism.
- The UUA Information Technology department helped PNWD establish a customer account with Dell Computers that allowed the district to receive corporate discounts comparable to UUA group rates, which provided a significant savings when we purchased two new desktop systems for the district office to replace outdated equipment.
- Rev. Dr. Terasa Cooley, Mass Bay District Executive, will visit the PNWD to present the district's Fall Leadership Council (for congregational board members, lay and professional leaders) on November 8, and a related workshop for UUMA members the day before. The learning topic to be presented by Rev. Cooley is "Finding Balance at the Center of our Faith: I, We and Thou."
- Program Specialist Tandi Koerger will present a workshop at the New England Fall Conference in October.
- Rev. Dr. Bill Shulz will be the keynote speaker at the PNWD Annual General Meeting in February, 2009, which will be planned and hosted by three congregations. Both UUA Presidential candidates will attend, as will several UUA staffers, notably Laurel Amabile to lead a workshop and assist the PNWD Board in engaging attendees around the district Ends of denominational identity. Congregational leaders and others will provide some 30 workshops on various topics related to thriving congregations and creating peace.
- PNWD recently began accepting on-line payments and donations for district events, Chalice Lighters and other activities. We are grateful to districts who shared their experiences and recommendations with on-line payments, and to Dr. Wayne Clark for his office's investigation of Vanco Services, which the PNWD ultimately chose as our vendor. We were

delighted to find that a great many Chalice Lighters who flocked to the on-line payment site (which appears seamlessly within the PNWD website) also chose to give to the district's Addictions Ministry Project.

- The Juneau UU Fellowship (AK) recently voted to acquire their first church home after 50+ years as the only UU congregation in the state's capitol. They are purchasing a former Christian Science church in downtown Juneau, directly across from the state legislature. The congregation credits the six-month, full-time Consulting Ministry of the Rev. Ken MacLean last year, as well as the ongoing support of district staff, with helping grow and energize their membership. A congratulatory gift from a member of the Fairbanks UU Fellowship was in the amount of \$583.01, toward the capital campaign of the fellowship residing at 58 degrees 30.1 minutes N latitude. Fairbanks is the northern-most fellowship of the UUA.
- PNWD Board members are engaging deep conversations on the effectiveness of district governance. The board will take a bylaws amendment to the district meeting in February 2009, recommending a reduction of the board from 9 to 5 members. The PNWD Board has also modified its meeting calendar to include attendance at UUA General Assembly, to increase its own denominational awareness and leadership education. PNWD directors urge other District Board members to make a similar commitment, and hope to meet with many of their peers in district leadership at GA. The PNWD Board will also meet at the district annual meeting and a summer retreat, conducting any other business by teleconference. The board will support its teleconferences with Persony software; they wish to thank district executives Annette Marquis (Thomas Jefferson District) and the Rev. Dr. Richard Speck (Joseph Priestley District) for their assistance in educating the Board about using this tool, and also wish to thank UUA Director of Information Technology, Mark Steinwinter, for arranging a group purchase that helped make the software available to districts.
- PNWD staffers Tandi Koerger (UUA Program Specialist) and Diane Brinson (District Administrator) recently attended the Policy Governance

training for board and staff members of UUA Districts. Diane provided some on-site administrative support for the event.

- PNWD is currently defining a support path for new and/or tiny UU groups, which outlines preparatory steps required before the district will recognize "Emerging Congregation" status. The process includes mentoring congregation alliances for groups that will become Emerging Congregations, as well as those who will remain informal UU groups that legitimately serve very small communities. The PNWD Emerging Congregation path establishes a specific timeline, religious development expectations and district oversight for the process leading towards UUA affiliation, and also embraces discernment and support for those who will not affiliate. The first such group is expected to be welcomed as an Emerging Congregation at the district's 2009 annual meeting, with UUA affiliation expected at GA 2010.

#### **St. Lawrence District (SLD)**

- We achieved 95 % compliance with district dues in '08, and our latest Chalice Lighter request produced \$14,000 - \$3,000 more than any earlier call. Our APF contributions also increased, and we hope that trend will continue after APF Director Laura Amabile meets with our Financial Resources Committee and speaks at our Congregation Presidents conference later this month.
- For the first time in 40 years, there will be a UU house at the Chautauqua Institution. The UU Fellowship of Chautauqua, which meets during the summer, has purchased a house on the grounds which will be open for the '09 season.
- District religious educators will consider their work as change agents in building the Beloved Community at their fall ingathering, where Rev. Richard Gilbert will speak on "Growing People of Prophetic Fire: Spiritual Osmosis and Social Justice."
- A new In-House Leadership Curriculum, developed at the request of our Southern Tier Cluster and funded by a grant from the New York

State Convention of Universalists, will be offered in congregations for the first time this fall.