



UUA Strategic Plan for Professional Ministries

Final report from the Strategic Review of Professional
Ministries Task Force to UUA President Peter Morales

April | 2011

Executive Summary

Our Unitarian and Universalist ancestors were notable for always getting into trouble. They raised a ruckus in their time by loudly questioning outworn religious thought and working to bend the arc of the universe toward justice. What kind of a ruckus are we Unitarian Universalists making in our time? We certainly cannot afford to rest on the great legacy of our Unitarian Universalist past, as if the intellect and the passionate engagement of our religious pioneers and prophets ennobled us today. If you were to walk up the grand marble staircase at UUA headquarters at 25 Beacon Street in Boston, you would see powerful photographs of UUs in yellow “Standing on the Side of Love” t-shirts witnessing for immigration justice in Arizona. Yet despite these inspiring contemporary images, you also might feel that you were stepping back in time, with busts and portraits of our 19th century forebears holding you in their gaze from their hallowed perches above.

How do we take the best from our past and at the same time live with radical creativity in the multicultural reality of the present day? Unitarian Universalism lifts up a powerful theological message, poured through the vessel of covenant: you are at once precious and distinct, and at the same time intrinsically a part of the oneness of all being. This message provides us with a quandary and a call. The quandary is this: we must live out our faith as individual members and congregations while holding in tension the needs of the whole. And the call is this: we are to walk together in the ways of love, inviting all who would join us in our big tent of faith.

Our UUA President, the Rev. Peter Morales, was elected in 2009 on a platform of change. He believes most urgently that Unitarian Universalism can and should be the religion for our time. If we are to live up to this challenge, we must equip our religious professionals to become deeply grounded in theology, cross-culturally competent, strategic about the use of technology, entrepreneurial as leaders, and resilient in the face of new challenges.

To this end, President Morales commissioned a Task Force composed largely of UUA staff to study key areas in the formation of our professional ministries, and to make recommendations for how the UUA might best direct its energies and resources in the service of a dynamic multicultural future for our faith. This Strategic Review of Professional Ministries, the culminating report of that Task Force, offers eight recommendations (presented in more detail on pages 4-5):

1. Aggressively Recruit Leaders;
2. Support Multicultural Immersion Learning;
3. Re-imagine and Evaluate our Credentialing Efforts;
4. Expand Transition Systems;
5. Support Advanced Learning for All Religious Professionals;
6. Be More Strategic in the Use of Scholarships and Grants;
7. Measure What is Truly Important;
8. Go Deeper: Partner with Related UU Organizations.

The Process

In 2010, UUA President Peter Morales created a Task Force to conduct a strategic review of our professional ministries. The Task Force released a draft document entitled “A New Ministry for a New America” in February, 2011, exploring how we – UUA staff primarily – can best direct our resources and efforts for the ministries we need to provide ten and twenty years into the future. Six areas were explored.

- Ministry in a Multicultural World
- Recruiting and Inviting
- Education and Training
- Credentialing
- Placement and Transitions
- Continuing Education and Professional Development

The Task Force then solicited feedback from leaders of UU professional associations, identity groups, field staff, and lay leadership bodies, and received more than 200 pages of thoughtful responses. The most frequent positive responses included the following:

- The articulation of the challenges was thoughtful, thorough, and objective.
- The approach was comprehensive, acknowledging the various ministries of our congregations.
- Readers appreciated being invited to consider these critical issues for our faith.
- Readers valued the lenses of multicultural ministry and anti-oppression that were applied throughout the document.

Significant observations and recommendations for improving the report included:

- Be bold in the responses to the articulated challenges.
- Provide theological grounding for the work.
- Provide increased focus on the ministries of religious education and music.
- Consider the crucial role that our Community Ministries can play as part of our multicultural future.
- Define better the terms used in the report.

The original [Strategic Review of Professional Ministries document](#) is available at uua.org. Rather than spend substantial energy in re-writing the Strategic Review, the Task Force opted to move forward with this Strategic Plan for Ministries. The Plan reduces the sixty original recommendations to eight, and includes a section that lists “Open Questions” raised in this process. We hope that our partners will continue to join us in conversation and collaborative efforts as we tackle the challenges and imagine the possibilities for our future ministries.

The Recommendations

Aggressively Recruit Leaders

In partnership with the leadership of the Unitarian Universalist Ministers' Association (UUMA), Liberal Religious Educators' Association (LREDA), Unitarian Universalist Musicians' Network (UUMN), Association of Unitarian Universalist Administrators (AUUA), the Interim Ministry Guild (IMG) and the Unitarian Universalist Society for Community Ministers (UUSCM), develop formal systems for recruiting strong, diverse leaders for our professional ministries who are committed to transforming our faith through creative and just interchange at the intersections of race, class and culture. Support promising young adult seminary graduates serving in our ministries with targeted debt reduction grants. Significantly improve UUA credentialing websites with a focus on outreach.

Support Multicultural Immersion Learning

Raise funds to support UU seminarians and religious professionals to participate in multicultural learning experiences both domestically and abroad. We will prioritize programs that integrate action and theological reflection sponsored by seminaries, congregations, districts and regions, the UUA's Multicultural Growth & Witness and emergent Multicultural Leadership Institute, and partner organizations such as the Living Legacy Pilgrimage, the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee, the Partner Church Council, and the International Council of UUs.

Re-imagine and Evaluate our Credentialing Efforts

The ministerial credentialing system is currently experienced as overwhelming, bureaucratic and complex. Immediate proposals include: encourage the Ministerial Fellowship Committee (MFC) to remove the gate-keeping function of the Regional Sub Committees (RSCCs) and transform their role into one of in-care support and feedback; reduce the number of RSCCs from four that meet once a year to two that meet twice a year; strongly encourage seminarians to see the RSCCs in their first year-and-a-half of study; review the 17 competencies currently required by the MFC. Are they the right ones? Do they point to the past or the future? Additionally, the UUA will work with field staff to build on successful district in-care systems. Using models created by consultants from Brandeis University, we will work with the MFC, RSCCs, Religious Education Credentialing Committee (RECC) and Music Leadership Credentialing Committee (MLCC) to determine which portions of our current processes are effective and which ones could benefit from changes.

Expand Transitions Systems

Change to a twice-a-year settlement system. Extend the standard interim ministry period to 18-24 months because experience indicates that this is the optimum amount of time to seize the opportunities and address the challenges that a ministerial transition presents. Offer the option of having interim ministers selected by the Transitions Director. Provide flexible options for large congregations. Explore the potential costs and benefits of including religious educators and musicians in the settlement system. Upgrade the functionality of the transitions system website.

Support Advanced Learning for All Religious Professionals

Use Association Sunday 2011 contributions (goal: \$600,000) to support continuing education for all those involved in professional ministries. Important initiatives include the "10 Year Plan" in development with the Unitarian Universalist Ministers' Association (UUMA) that has at its core a series of long-term programs focused on themes and skills crucial to ministerial development and success; the expansion of the Dreaming Big program for ministers interested in growing or serving large churches to include professional ministry teams; supporting advanced training in religious education and music leadership; and the creation of a rubric for excellence in 21st century ministry (with consultants from the Educational Development Corp). Some of the advanced learning topics suggested include: intercultural competency, effective ministry teams, worship arts for a multimedia age, stewardship, adaptive change, and faith development.

Be More Strategic in the Use of Scholarships & Grants

Starting in FY12, scholarships will be pooled into larger individual amounts and targeted to promising and diverse candidates for our ministries. Internship grants will favor congregations focused on multiracial/multicultural ministry. Scholarship funds will be raised for specialized ministries such as military chaplaincy, UU composers, academics, and master-level religious educators.

Measure What is Truly Important

Because smart decisions are informed by credible measurements, UUA staff will capture and analyze the data required to inform progress on strategic decisions related to our ministries, something that has not been our practice to the degree it needs to be.

Go Deeper: Partner with Related UU Organizations

We welcome further reflection on issues affecting the future of our ministries. For example, the Task Force determined early on that community ministry was too large a topic to address in an already overwhelmingly complicated strategic review. Yet the UUSCM is ready to address the role of community ministry in the future of Unitarian Universalism. The same is true for music ministries and religious education. In fact, LREDA recently released their research on the future of religious education in the UUA. Ministers' study groups are interested in tackling issues such as mentoring, developing a more entrepreneurial ministry, etc. The Panel on Theological Education is interested in exploring fundraising strategies for theological education with seminaries and the UUA.

The following section lists some of the "Open Questions" raised in the process of developing this Strategic Plan.

Open Questions

In the March 21, 2011, edition of the Alban Weekly, the Rev. Jeffrey Jones (author of [Traveling Together](#) on discipling leaders) tells the story of a time he shocked himself and his lay leaders by interrupting a church board meeting. Having dedicated himself to leading a congregation with excellent worship, solid religious education, warm hospitality and caring, and broad social justice outreach, he was increasingly discouraged that his church wasn't growing despite his every effort. Suddenly he blurted out, "Virtually all the old answers about what it means to be and do church don't work anymore!" This of course doesn't mean that we throw up our hands and quit. But it does mean that we must be willing to put every assumption we have on the table and open it up for discussion. Admittedly, the Strategic Review Task Force did not publish every question or idea we had. Perhaps we were too timid. So here are some bold, open questions we offer for a wider circle of conversation, in service of a strong future for Unitarian Universalism:

- Given that many congregations now and in the future will struggle to afford full time ministry, should we open up our ministerial credentialing system to some variation of a deaconate – a lay leadership program to serve in entrepreneurial and part-time ministry settings?
- Is the Masters of Divinity still the best pathway to the ordained ministry? What alternatives might we explore?
- Do the various credentialing programs mold the leaders we need for the future, or are they based on outdated models of ministerial excellence?
- What are the implications of social networking for the future of our bricks and mortar ministries? As Philip Clayton put it in his article *Theology and the Church after Google*, "Do we really inhabit two different worlds: those who text, Twitter and blog, and get 80% of our information from the Internet, and those who are "not comfortable" with the new social media and technologies?"
- What can we learn from our community ministers about living into the promise of our multicultural world?
- Even if it is a moral and religious imperative for UUs, does becoming more multiculturally welcoming and competent necessarily mean that our congregations will grow?
- Given that we operate within a system of congregational polity, how might we help the lay leadership of our congregations understand and embrace the imperative of becoming radically hospitable to a diverse world? How might our ministers find willing partners in this work rather than resistance to change?
- Why aren't we able to convert more religiously defined "none of the aboves" to Unitarian Universalism?
- Why don't the neighbors who live near our churches attend them?
- Are we entering a "post-denominational" world? What does that mean for our faith as it relates to our Association?
- How can we ever satisfactorily respond to a call for more theological grounding with all of our diversity?
- Who are we? Who are we becoming? To whom do we belong?