



So What Do Districts, Regions, and the UUA Do for Us?

That's Not a Bad Question.... But it's not good enough

Every congregation faces resource challenges. Every dollar invested in something means a dollar not invested in something else. If we are to invest in our organizations beyond congregations – beyond just ourselves – we need to have confidence this is the best use of our precious resources.

Asking what value we receive for our investments in districts, regions, and the UUA is a good and necessary, but insufficient, question in the way it is often asked. Let's talk briefly about why it's insufficient by itself, but then go on to answer it.

It's an insufficient question in that it reinforces the perspective that those levels beyond congregations exist solely to serve the member congregations. While that certainly is a main purpose for having these organizations, it's not the only purpose.

Who are we?

*"We" are more than those we can see sitting next to us on
Sunday, and "we" are more than are here today*

We Unitarian Universalists treasure our individuality and independence. We also need to acknowledge that this is also a community endeavor, that we are part of a larger, worldwide movement with shared values and priorities. We are, in short, more than the sum of our parts, and if that is true, there are some things we cannot do effectively as an assortment of individual congregations.

If we are to have any impact beyond our small size as a denomination, it will be as organizations of multiple congregations and individuals. Our voice in government and with international organizations is heard as an association.

We need levels of organization and gathering beyond congregations to help us speak effectively on the issues we care about, to help us share our ideas and passions, and to engage with other organizations and society. Who would ever have even heard of *Standing on the Side of Love* were it not a national movement? These we cannot do simply as individual congregations. For all of this, we need a larger presence.

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The metaphor might be that we can choose to be a thousand or so little individual lights in the forest scattered around the continent

or

We can be a thousand such beacons, joined by bridges of connectivity and communication that are our districts, regions, and the UUA. With this connectivity, we share and reinforce each other and make it orders of magnitude easier for others to find and hear us.

OK, but districts, regions, and the UUA are supposed to support congregations. What does that look like?

Yes, we rightfully expect a number of services from these levels to support our congregations. What might such support, beyond speaking for us in regional and national forums, consist of that congregations value? Here are some of them:

Personnel and Professional Support

- ✓ Credentialing of ordained ministers.
- ✓ Credentialing of Lifespan Spiritual Growth professionals.
- ✓ Credentialing of Music Directors.
- ✓ Provision of settled and Interim minister candidates and other professionals for congregations in search of new leaders.
- ✓ Professional associations fostering continued personal growth and professional standards for ministers, LSG Directors, Music Directors, and Administrators.
- ✓ Counseling and intervention services for congregations in conflict that need a quite and independent voice to help them through difficult times. Assistance is also available in times of leadership and staff transitions.
- ✓ Support to seminaries that grow our ordained leaders, such as Meadville Lombard and Starr King.

Worship and the Arts

- ✓ Creation and distribution of our hymnals, one of them in two languages.
- ✓ Support through resources and gatherings for the worship arts.

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Education and Training

- ✓ Leadership and volunteer training at a level and with resources we could not muster as individual congregations – both resident and online courses.
- ✓ Creation and sharing of dozens of curricula for adults and children across every aspect of our interests and beliefs.
- ✓ Districts and regions offer hundreds of seminars, webinars, and on demand online courses, all created to meet congregational requests and priorities.

Support for Growth and Development

- ✓ Support for growth through the Chalice Lighters Program.
- ✓ Programs to encourage and recognize excellence in living our values, such as Breakthrough Congregations, Social Justice awards, and Green Sanctuaries.

Stewardship and Finances

- ✓ Financial advice, loans and grants, and support through the VEACH and other loan programs and the Congregational Stewardship Services program.
- ✓ Our districts, regions, and the UUA combine and channel our disaster assistance contributions for best effect where needed.

References, Information Sharing, and Best Practices

- ✓ Organizing capabilities for various ministries (Youth, inclusiveness, antiracism, equal access, etc.).
- ✓ Congregational resources we all use, such as the Safe Congregations Program, guidelines for growth, training and education, congregational financial management, congregational and governance handbooks, identity based/small group, and addictions ministry support, church management guidelines, and many other supplemental publications.
- ✓ The *Interconnections* newsletter, *UU World* magazine, Skinner House, Beacon Press, and the UUA Bookstore, Unitarian Universalism TV – our global Commons for sharing knowledge and ideas through media.
- ✓ Over 200 email based lists of communities of interest, ranging from leadership and worship to Sunday morning coffee groups and UU Humor. Almost a dozen UU labs and affiliation groups on Facebook not directed by the UUA, but supported and enriched by regional and UUA participation.

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- ✓ Guidance on how to develop and deploy media (newsletters, websites, social media, video, web conferencing, etc. – congregational lifeblood in this era.
- ✓ Shared examples of what other congregations are doing well – central repositories of what works for others, gathered together to make it easy for the rest of us to find them.

Programs

- ✓ Our Whole Lives (OWL) training for children and adults – a uniquely UU and singularly effective program for sexuality education.

Gathering Together

- ✓ The Church of the Larger Fellowship (CLF), which serves a large and thriving UU population otherwise unable to join in a traditional congregation, including those overseas or in remote areas, deployed military, those physically unable to travel to a service, prison populations and others. Many of these participants work their way back to our congregations over time, kept connected to us over the years by CLF.
- ✓ Annual and other gatherings of UUs, from a few dozen to thousands of us, sharing our ideas, problems, and priorities.

It Comes Back to the Same Question:
Who are We?

And the list goes on. Could at least some of these benefits and others be accrued otherwise, if we did not have districts, regions, and an association? Perhaps some could, but most would not, and those that did exist would likely be harder to find, access, and renew.

Each individual UU is important. Every congregation and fellowship is unique and valued. But so too is our global community. These wider associations allow us to “join hands and minds” in powerful and irreplaceable ways.

We should aspire to be more than scattered villages across the landscape – wonderful though our villages may be. Let’s be more than the sum of our parts; let’s use our organizations beyond congregations to find that synergy and do that work.