

## **REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE EMERGING CONGREGATIONS WORKING GROUP TO UUA BOARD OF TRUSTEES APRIL 7, 2014**

The desired outcomes of our discussion of emerging congregations at the April 2014 UUA Board meeting are:

1. Determine the Board's support for pursuing the recommendations of the working group outlined below. Recommend determining item by item.
2. If in agreement with any of the recommended Rule and Bylaw changes, consider charging the working group to draft proposed changes. Note that the Rules can be changed by the Board at any time, whereas the Bylaw changes recommended in Item 4 below require a vote of the General Assembly.
3. If in agreement, consider authorizing the President to form the staff panel as discussed in Items 1 and 2 below. This authorization could be granted at this meeting or be put under consideration to grant at the Providence meeting if more definition is desired by the Board.
4. If in agreement with the concept, the Board could consider whether to find a place at GA 2014 to engage Delegates and/or other Sources concerning the "values" as discussed below that might inform a different approach to relationships with emerging congregations and potential affiliates.

Following several telephonic meetings since the October Board meeting, the following report and recommendations were articulated by the UUA staff (Terasa Cooley, Scott Tayler, Stefan Jonasson) to the working group, which summarizes and focuses the conversations in the working group:

The Unitarian Universalist Association's Office of Growth Strategies strives to mobilize strategically a variety of resources, a sense of purpose, and a network of partnerships to grow current and future Unitarian Universalist congregations. In seeking to cultivate Unitarian Universalist growth and health, the OGS — in collaboration with the UUA Congregational Life Department — is developing strategies that include (i) identifying uniform but flexible benchmarks for emerging congregations' pathway to membership in the Association, (ii) updating resources and developing educational tools and experiences to support congregational development, (iii) helping regional staff develop their capacity to work within and among regions as agents for growth, (iv) connecting emerging congregations with one another through social media and innovative learning circles, (v) collaborating with Church of the Larger Fellowship, (vi) encouraging the growth of multisite congregations and satellites as an especially promising tactic for growth, and (vii) developing assessment tools and discernment processes for existing

congregations whose membership has declined below the critical lower threshold of viability and sustainability.

The UUA Administration's growth strategies arise out of a recognition of a dramatically changing religious landscape. One model of growing congregations in a steady increase in membership over a longer period of time is no longer sufficient. New technologies and entrepreneurial enterprises allow new groups to emerge quickly, but they don't always follow the same pattern of traditional congregations. Our current bylaws prescribe a path to membership that has become cumbersome and slow to navigate, and sometimes discouraging groups from affiliation. The staff is looking for ways to support existing congregations with clearer guidelines for associational connection that can more easily change over time, as well as to more adeptly respond to emerging groups.

In recent months, the emerging congregations working group of the UUA Board of Trustees has been meeting with selected Association staff to discern ways in which the pathway to membership for both emerging congregations and extra-congregational organizations (variously referred to as incubators, experimental groups, beyond congregation ministries, satellite organizations, etc.) might be strengthened and enhanced. As the conversation has progressed, board members have expressed the desire to empower Association staff to nurture healthy relationships and practices with congregations and extra-congregational organizations in both affiliating and disaffiliating with the Association. The guiding principles and values that emerged included: flexibility and adaptability in the Association's work with congregations and extra-congregational organizations; managing only the highest-level concerns through the bylaws; empowering Association staff to establish clear and comprehensive processes concerning affiliation; and developing, over time, the necessary ways and means to support this work.

It is clearly the board's prerogative and responsibility to articulate core values and establish criteria for admitting groups to membership in the Association as congregations or to partnership with the Association as independent affiliate organizations. Building upon this foundation, the following recommendations for board action have grown out of the rich conversation between the Board working group and Association staff:

Item 1. Enable the affiliation of experimental groups and ministries (those whose identities and activities are beyond our current understanding of congregations) and also enter into strategic partnerships with allied organizations by reviving the admission of selected organizations to the category of independent affiliate organizations, as provided for in Bylaw C-3.8. We propose that the same staff panel assessing applications for congregational membership be empaneled to assess applications for membership as independent affiliates, based on values established by the Board of Trustees.

Item 2. Empower the President of the Association to establish a staff panel to assess and recommend applications for membership in the Association, based on more flexible criteria than presently exists but guided by values established by the Board of Trustees, and also to assess and recommend applications from partners organizations applying for independent affiliate status.

Item 3. Revise Rules 3.3.5 (Rules and Regulations for New Congregations), 3.3.6 (Order of Administrative Procedure), and 3.5.2 (Inactive Congregations) to correctly reflect current staff group names and the changes that will necessarily result from the regionalization process. In addition to these refinements, any one (or all three) of these rules might be amended to include a provision (or provisions) establishing the staff panel proposed in item 2.

Item 4. Amend the Bylaws to provide more flexibility and intentionality in the disaffiliation process. Specifically, Bylaw C-3.5 (lines 113-115) could be amended to remove phrase "and placed in an 'inactive congregation' category," while Bylaw C-3.6 (lines 124-130) could be amended, after the words "pursuant to the provisions of Section C-3.5," to read "has been deemed inactive but shall do so only after consultation with the congregation in question, whenever possible." Rule 3.5.2 could then be enhanced to include values and establish protocols to empower UUA staff, where a congregation seems to be struggling near the edge of survival, to initiate an assessment process to discern (i) whether it might be a candidate for redevelopment, either through enhanced support or by considering a new form of congregational existence, such as multisite or merger, or (ii) whether the congregation might be encouraged to disband and disaffiliate.

Item 5. Remove the fixed minimum membership requirement from Rule C-3.3. This would require amending Rule 3.3.2(c), which requires that the list of charter members satisfy minimum membership requirements; Rule 3.3.2(d), which requires an initial contribution to the Annual Program Fund no less than the Fair Share amount; and Rule 3.3.3, which sets the minimum number of members at 30. We propose that Rule 3.3.3 be changed to read "... must have a sufficient number of adult members to be viable and sustainable." Rule 3.3.2(c) could then be amended to read simply, "the names and addresses of charter members, and," while Rule 3.3.2(d) might be amended to read "a financial pledge in support of the Association."