



Unitarian Universalist Association

Monitoring Report — Global Ends

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Introduction

The interconnected nature of the Board's Global Ends

The global ends adopted by the Board speak of Unitarian Universalists living lives of “humility and purpose, connection and service, thereby transforming themselves and the world.” The ends go on to describe qualities of congregations that lead, inspire and engage their members and who are in partnership with sister congregations.

The work of the UUA staff is to lead and support this effort. However, it became clear that to report on each of the ends independently would inevitably result in a great deal of repetition. This is because so much of the work of the Association staff, and of the strategic initiatives of this administration, addresses several of the ends simultaneously. For example, all of our work to support professional ministry affects each of the ends simultaneously. A monitoring report that is structured around the ends as currently written would entail either a confusing breakdown of our work or tedious repetition.

Format of this report

For the purpose of clarity, this monitoring report will address all the global ends, but will do so in a manner that focuses on this administration's strategy and programs for achieving the ends.

This report will be structured as follows:

- **Assumptions**—a discussion of the key ideas that underlie and unify our programmatic initiatives, including how these relate to our global ends.
- **Logical Model**—a discussion of the model of how congregations thrive and grow and how one must lead change in our movement.
- **The current situation**—a presentation of key indicators of the health and vitality of Unitarian Universalism today.
- **The UUA's strategic vision**—building upon the assumptions, logical model, and assessment of our situation, the administration's strategy for achieving our ends.
- **Implementation status**—Where we are in the process of implementing this vision.
- **Conclusion**



Assumptions

The need to “get religion”

The foundational belief of this administration is that the capacity to create the Unitarian Universalism we long to see lies in our people right now. We need to unleash the commitment, compassion, passion, creativity and energy of our people. I call this “getting religion.” When our congregations focus on their mission, when they inspire and channel the religious idealism of our people, lives are transformed and congregations thrive and grow.

What is needed in Unitarian Universalism today is ultimately religious and cultural. It is not “technical.” If we look at our most successful and thriving congregations, we see that what distinguishes them is not some technique or “best practice,” but rather a spirit of deep compassion and the qualities mentioned in the Board’s ends: joy, finding their ministry, meaningful worship, etc.

Human need for religious community

The human need for religious community is fundamental. We are relational creatures who enter into our full humanity only when we are connected in love with people who join in the service of our highest ideals. We need love and community the way we need food and shelter.

A nation of isolated seekers

Americans are perhaps the most relationally isolated people who have ever lived. Recent academic studies have shown a precipitous decline in the network of close relationships among Americans. People are starved for authentic community. We see that reflected in our congregations every Sunday. Our congregations have thousands of potential members come to visit each Sunday. The future of our movement depends on our learning to engage more fully those already in our congregations and to welcome fully the hundreds of thousands who are looking for a progressive religious home.

The future is multicultural

Actually, the *present* is multicultural. “White” Americans of European descent will be a minority in a generation. In some states they already are. The majority of elementary school children are from “minority” ethnicities and cultures.

One of the great challenges for our congregations is to learn to express our core values of compassion, spiritual depth, freedom, justice and peace in new ways. This is much more than an organizational need. This is about living fully in relationship with our neighbors.



The “logical model”

Programs are based on a model of change

Every programmatic initiative we undertake at the UUA and in our congregations is based on a model of how the world operates. Often the underlying model is not obvious or stated. Often when people disagree about what to do, they are really disagreeing about how they believe the world works.

The Association’s recent emphasis on marketing as a means of growth provides a good example. The “logical model” behind this effort was the belief that the reason more people do not join our congregations is that they do not know about them. If they knew, the reasoning goes, they would join. Therefore what we need to do is design and fund a marketing program that reaches the right people. There is, of course, some truth in this model.

This administration’s lower emphasis upon marketing is based on a different logical model. I believe that our data show that we have 200,000 to 300,000 visitors every year. We don’t keep enough of them. Also, my belief is that the reason some congregations thrive while others do not has to do with the quality of the relationships and culture (especially the emotional culture) of these congregations and their leadership. The key to a thriving Unitarian Universalism, then, is to create congregations that meet the needs of both their members and of religious seekers.

How congregations change

We have scores of examples of UU congregations that have been revitalized. These congregations are vibrant and growing. What are the keys to their success? I believe that our leading examples of growing congregations (such as those involved in the Louisville consultation in 2008 that gave rise to a dvd and the book *The Growing Church*) and research into organizations that transform themselves show that several elements are critical. They key to thriving and growing congregations include:

- **A sense of urgency**—organizations change only when the people in them are emotionally engaged and committed.
- **Shared vision**—A sense of mission and vision are critical.
- **Ministerial leadership**—Congregations that grow have shared leadership. However, in congregations with ministers, the quality of ministerial leadership is critical. In every case of revitalization, the role of the minister has been central.
- **A rich fabric of relationships**—Simply put, a congregation needs a sense of warmth and compassion. People hunger for authentic community. Relationships keep people engaged. Hospitality and openness attract and keep seekers.
- **Congregations as moral beacons**—People come to our congregations not only to meet their needs for spirituality and community, they also come in order to join hands with others to bring compassion and justice to our world. Indeed, the need to contribute and participate in a transcendent purpose is a deep spiritual need.



Culture change

Simply put, if our movement is to thrive, if it is to meet the spiritual and emotional needs of our people, of the religious seekers who long for liberal religious community, and the needs of a new multicultural America, we have to change the culture of Unitarian Universalism. We know that what is best in our congregations is deeply engaging. Our challenge is to spread the spirit and practices of our best congregations. Clearly, our people hunger for such change.

Our situation

Promising and perilous

This is a critical time for Unitarian Universalism. On the one hand, the potential of our movement is breathtaking. Millions of people are actively seeking liberal religious community. Our theology is inherently open to the gifts of other cultures and traditions.

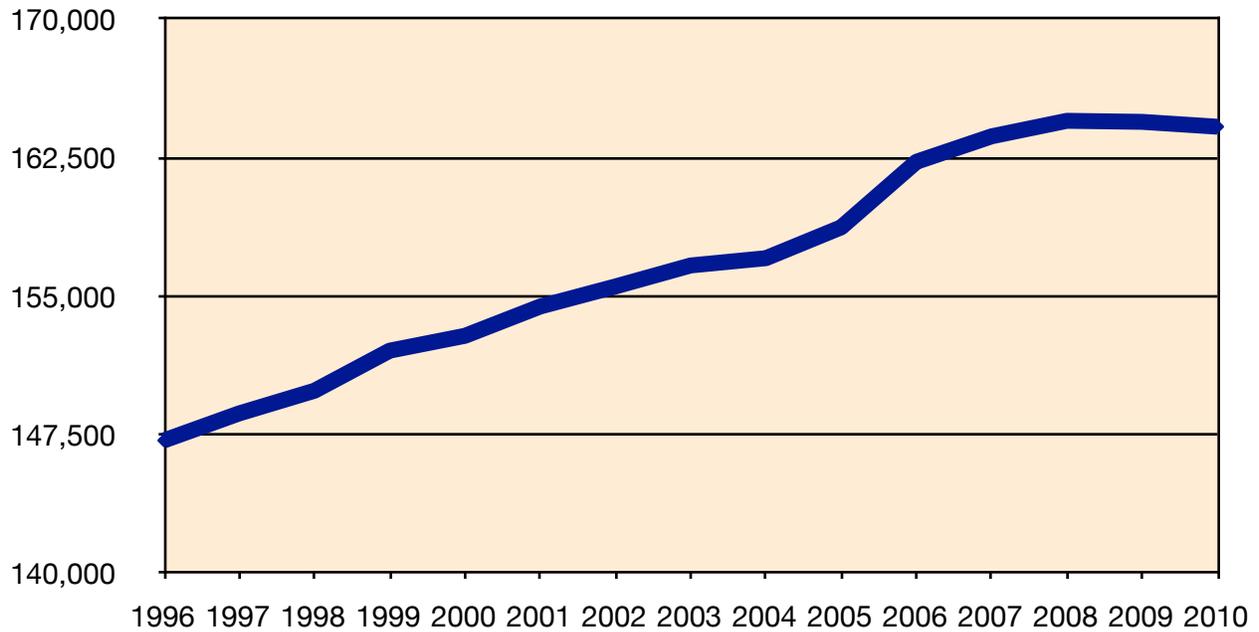
On the other hand, certain trends are profoundly disturbing. Progressive people are becoming more secular. One only need to look to Europe, where liberal religion in general and Unitarian Universalism are tiny. Here at home, our very modest rate of growth, always well below the growth of the population, has ceased. *We are no longer growing.*

Key measures

Our membership numbers for the past decade show a slowing of growth and, in the past two years, small decline of membership.

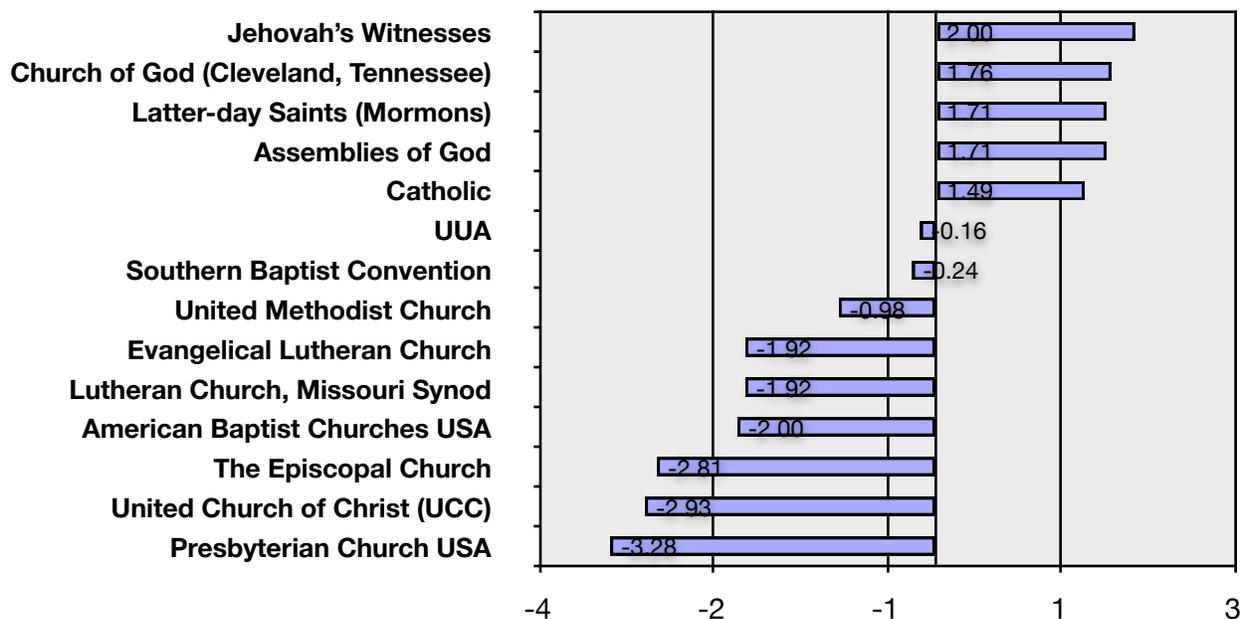


Adult membership



(Note that the chart above shows only a range from 140,000 to 170,000. This was done to highlight small changes.)

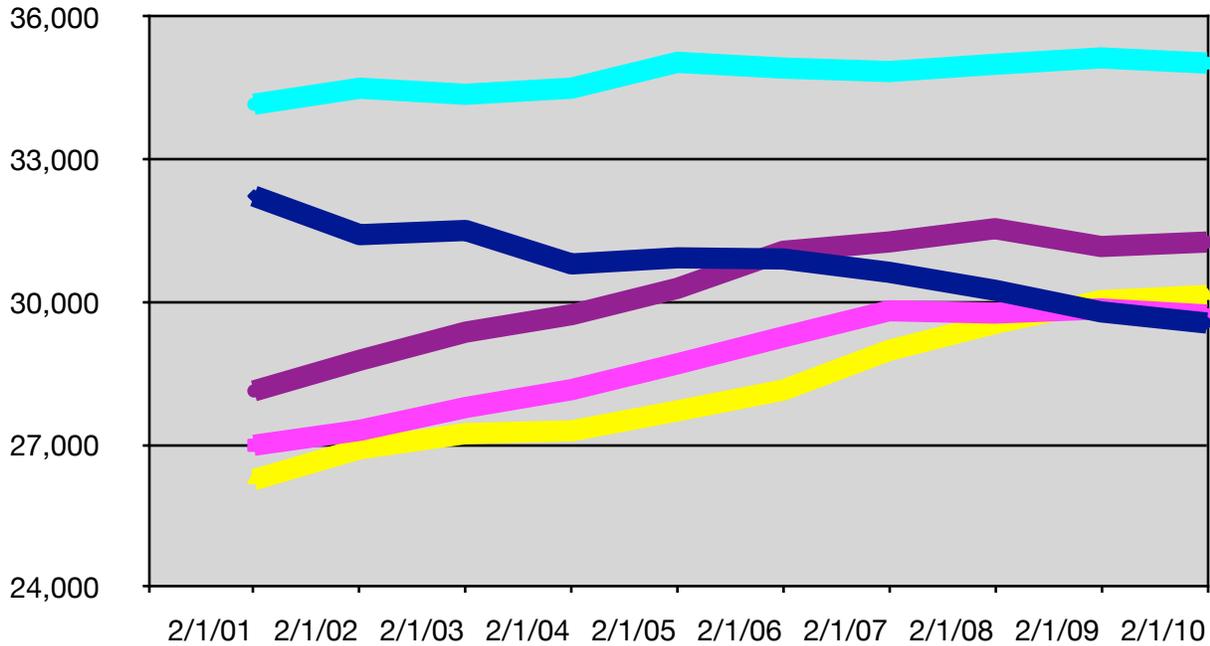
Denominational Growth in Percent - 2009 to 2010





The overall numbers, however, obscure important regional differences

Membership by Region

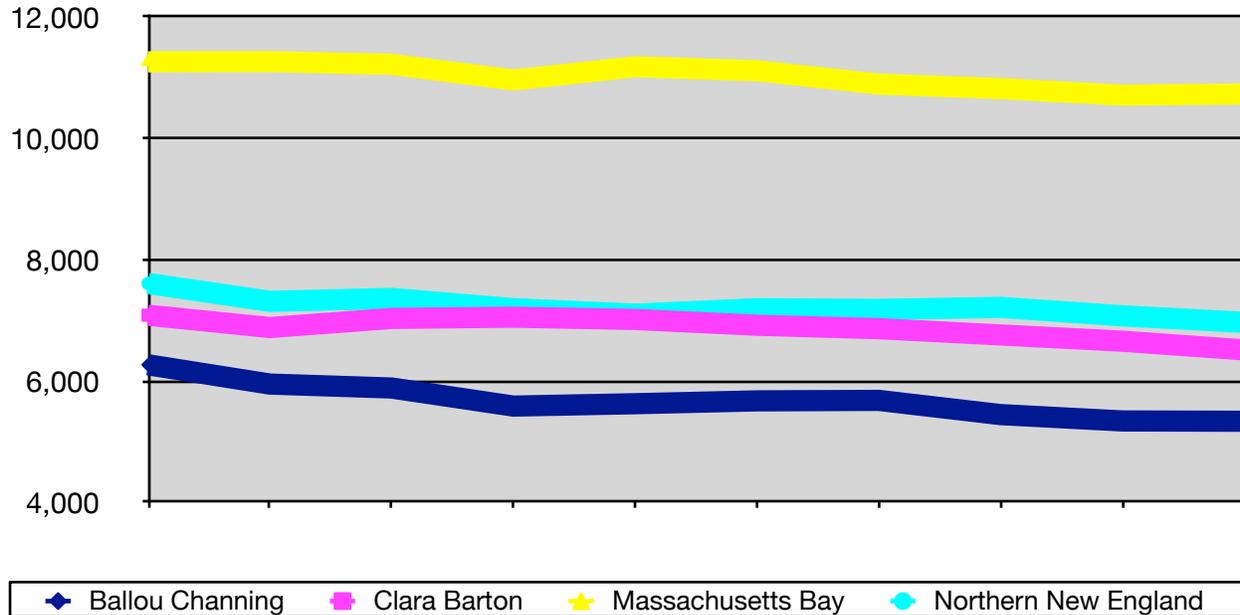


The chart above shows that three of our regions (Southland, Western and Mid Atlantic) have grown significantly. The Central East Region has grown very slightly. Unfortunately, the North Atlantic is in serious decline. In a decade it has gone from our second largest region to our smallest.

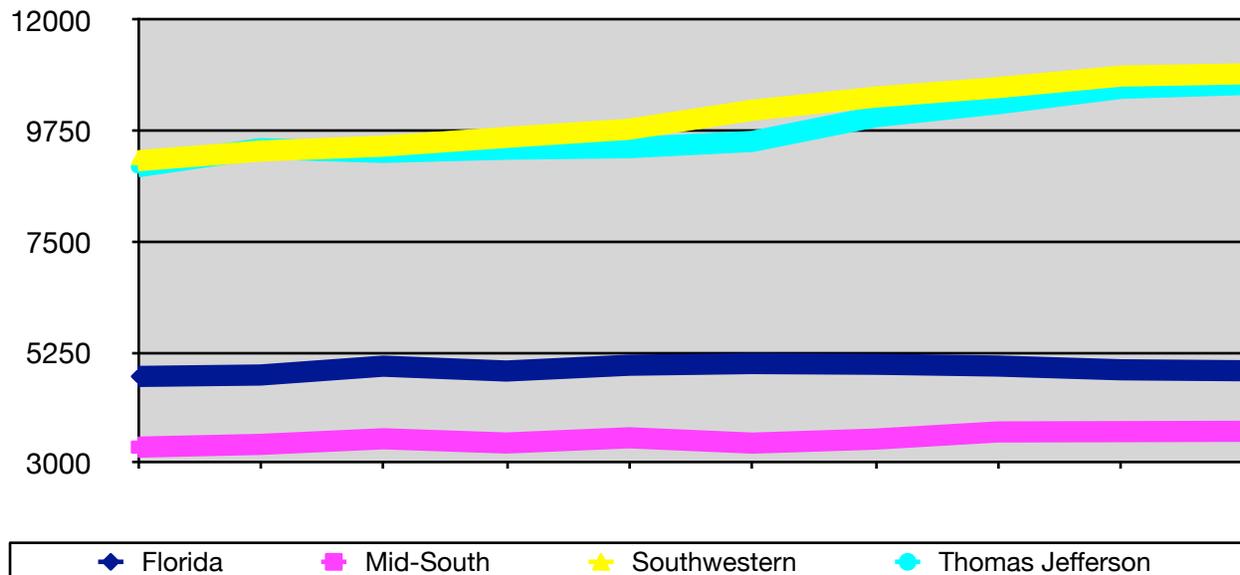


In the charts below we can see each district compared with others in its region:

North Atlantic

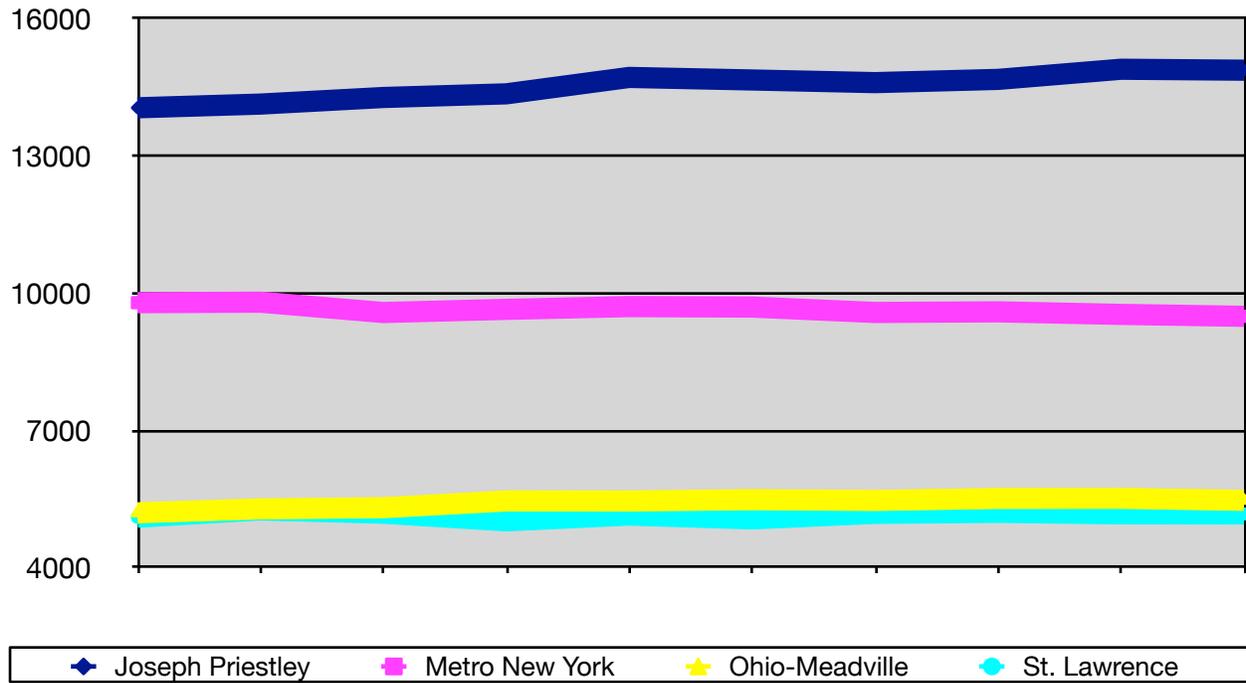


Southland

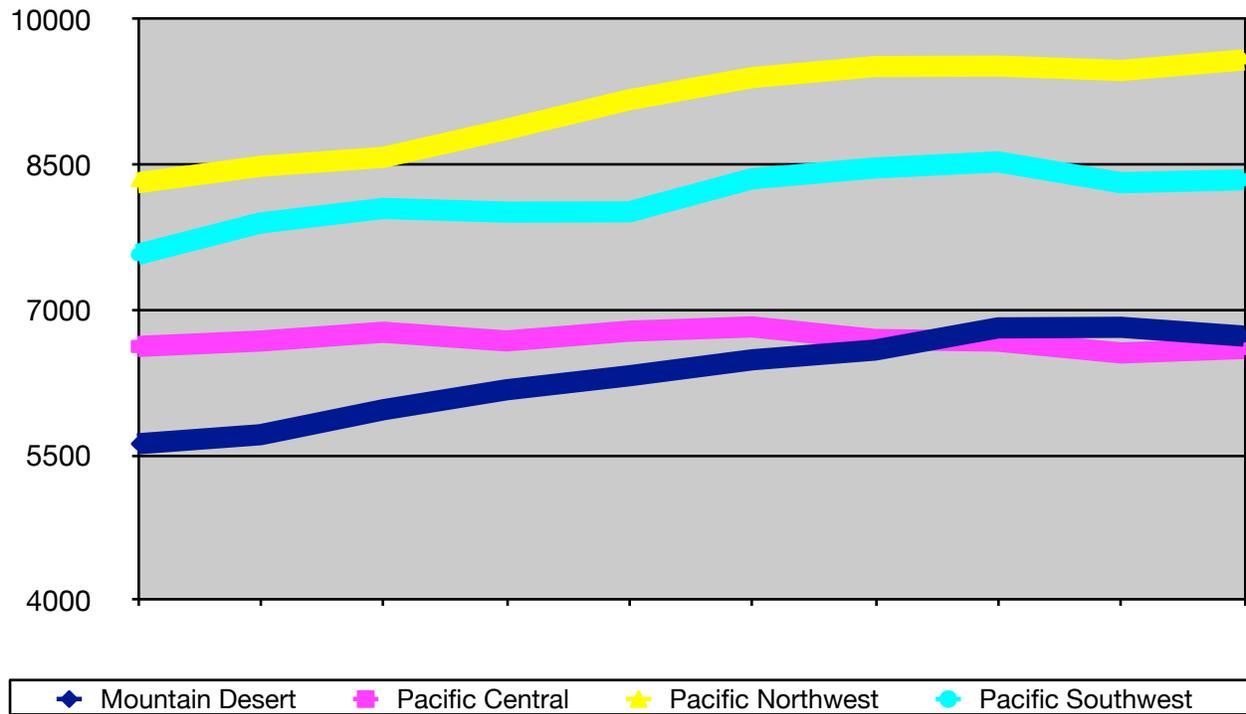




Cent East

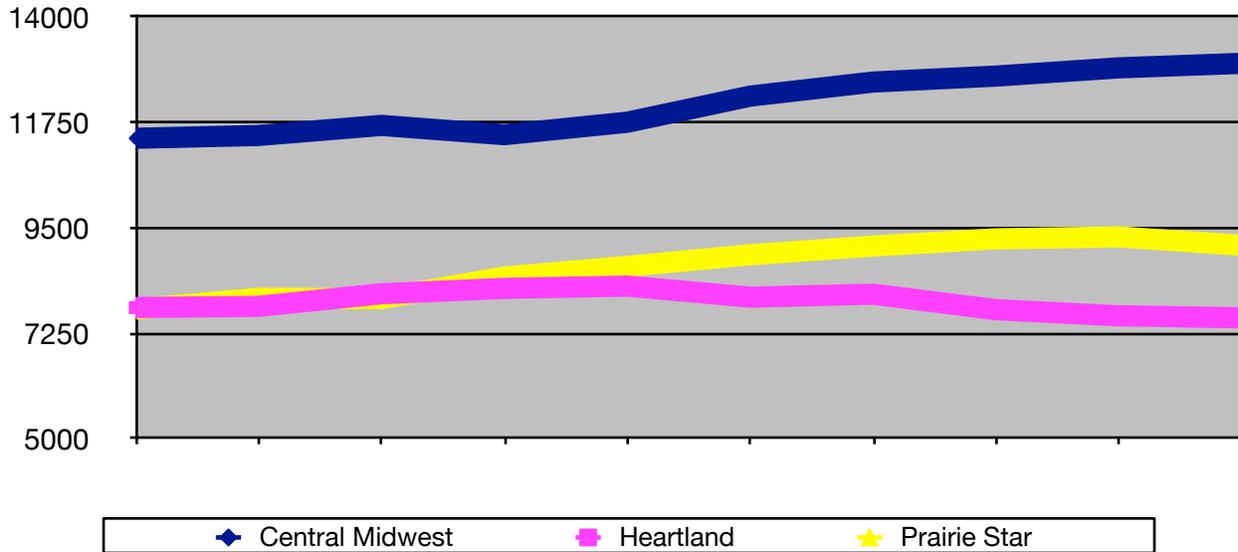


West

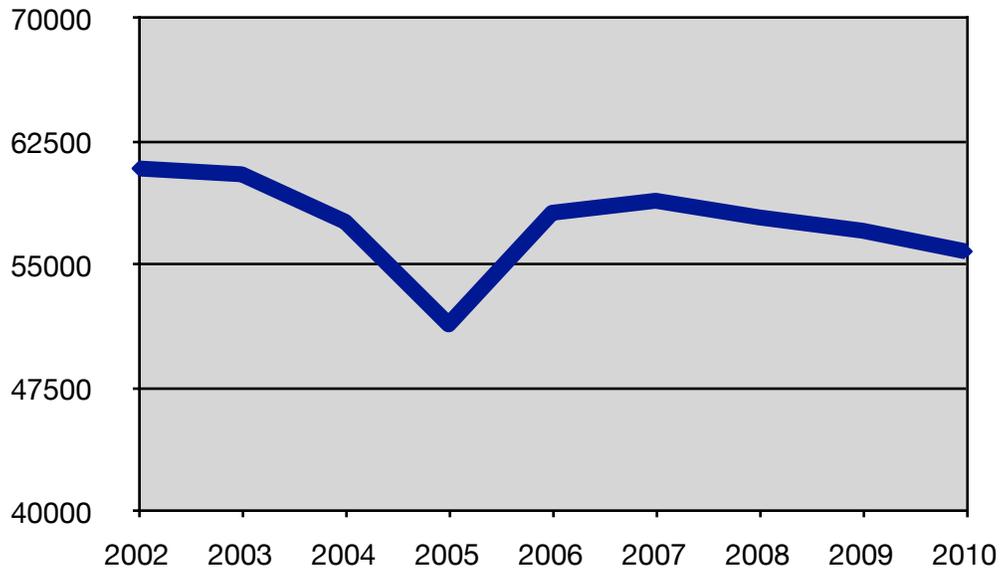




Mid America



RE enrollment



RE enrollment has vacillated, but is trending down.

The overall picture

The trends are clearly troubling. The modest growth we have enjoyed for a generation as stopped. The number of children in our religious education programs is declining. Where our faith was once strongest it is now in steady decline.



Strategy and implementation

What the UUA can do

Given our assumptions, our view of how congregations change, our historic and social situation, the role of the Association in leading change that will bring about our shared ends becomes clear. Certain elements of the Association's work become critical. These include:

Create and sustain a sense of urgency

We have a critical role in creating a sense of urgency that is based on a shared vision of what is possible for our movement. Urgency is not panic. Urgency is a sense that we can and must change if we are to create the congregation and movement we seek. In vocabulary of policy governance, we must help to create a compelling vision of what must be done to achieve our ends.

Stimulate growth

I have always believed that opening our doors to seekers is the moral equivalent of feeding the hungry or housing the homeless. People need religious community. Growth is not so much a goal or an end as it is a measure of whether we are engaging our people and seekers. The Association has a key role in spreading what is best in our movement.

Develop professional ministerial leadership for a new America

The leadership of our religious professionals is crucial. The best of leaders engage members in a sense of shared endeavor. The potential for vitality and excellence in ministry is present in virtually all of our congregations. In those congregations that are professionally led, the ability to lead and the capacity to engage people emotionally are vital. In addition, as we move forward, the ability of our professional leaders to minister to a multicultural America is crucial.

Be a force for compassion and justice

Public witness is an essential part of our religious identity. We have always been a faith that speaks to the great moral issues of the day. The Association must do two things. First, it must be our national and international voice on pressing moral issues like the right to marry, environmental justice, immigration policy, and human rights. In addition, we must help our congregations, clusters and statewide organizations be more effective.

Create the infrastructure for a culture of collaboration

Amazing and wonderful things are done in our congregations. However, our culture of individualism and a practice of congregational isolation have prevented us from spreading what is best in our movement. New technology makes possible a new level of sharing. We can now show one another what is most exciting. The Association has a responsibility to make sharing and mutual inspiration easy and common.



The UUA's initiatives in each critical area

Below I will describe briefly what we plan to do in each area and the status of implementation. This “monitoring” must be more about activity than about results. The initiatives we are undertaking will take months and years to bear fruit. That is simply the reality. We can, however, be accountable for deliverables and measure what preliminary results we can. This is a critical point. The work we are undertaking to stimulate growth will not produce immediate results. I fully expect our numbers to go down in the next couple of years. It takes time to change a culture.

Create and sustain a sense of urgency

We must convey a message about what is possible for our faith and how to achieve that. That message must be conveyed through a variety of media and in a variety of ways. Here are the major initiatives and their status:

Initiative	Status
President as spokesperson—a major part of the work of conveying the vision of a welcoming, engaged, multi-cultural movement falls to the president. I do not seek a cult of personality or over emphasis on my person. However, people look to the president to frame a vision.	I have sought a variety of ways to convey this message. These include: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• web presence on UUA.org. This includes a welcoming video• preaching and speaking at (almost) countless gatherings. The message is always about our moral imperative and the importance of seizing this historic moment.• President’s column in <i>UU World</i>.
Organizational changes	Some of the changes we have made were cutbacks forced on us by the decline in the Association’s revenue. Others, however, are aimed at focusing our energies on leading change. These include: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Creation of a “program” division of ministries and congregational life. This was done to focus more leadership on our staff that deals directly with congregations, on professional ministry, and on issues of race, culture, class and oppression.• Reconfiguration of our communications staff to bring in more expertise in new media.



Initiative	Status
Strategic review of communications	This is still pending. Soon we will begin a strategic review of our communications. This will include work on framing our message and a critical review of how we use media. In particular, we need a plan for making better use of new electronic media. The review will be completed by the end of 2010, in time to inform budget and staff decisions for the following fiscal year.

Stimulate growth

A major theme of this administration's work is our conviction that our movement has amazing untapped potential. We are blessed with some wonderful religious professionals and lay leaders. We have not done enough to engage them, partner with them, and empower them. In particular, I believe that our potential for growth, which is truly breathtaking, will only be realized in partnership with our best congregations. While we will focus resources on growth, it is important to remember that everything we do to promote congregational health also promotes growth.

Initiative	Status
We are setting out to partner with a group of our growing congregations. The plan is to convene a group of ministers, select some promising initiatives that are low cost, can have immediate impact, and are transferrable to other congregations. We will begin with pilot projects that are carefully evaluated.	A group of ministers, religious educators and key staff will meet in early May for a three day retreat. We have made all the arrangements and provided for professional facilitation. A select group of pilot programs will be selected their and we will announce them at General Assembly.

Develop professional ministerial leadership for a new America

We will be going through a period of generational shift in parish ministry. In addition, there is widespread recognition that our ordained ministry should participate in continuing education and professional development throughout their careers. We are also seeing, in some of our best congregations, a new culture of collaboration among parish ministry, religious education and music ministry. One of the great challenges of this decade is to shift resources to support the development of quality and to find more efficient ways of doing such things as credentialing. If all this were not enough, we must continue and expand our efforts to bring more diversity into our ministry and to develop the cross cultural competence of our religious professionals.



Initiative	Status
Creation of a new staff group that combines the former staff groups Lifespan Faith Development and Ministry and Professional Leadership.	The new staff group (still to be named) will combine all our work to support religious professionals into one staff group. The goal is to break down barriers and foster a new level of collaboration. We are in the process of hiring the director. This new staff group will officially begin July 1, 2010.
Diversity of Ministry	We have begun a new approach with our efforts to work with congregations to settle ministers of color. We have learned that to begin work with a congregation once they have announced a vacancy is too late. We have identified a number of congregations that are likely to have ministerial vacancies in the next five years. We are contacting them and offering to develop an individualized set of experiences and training to help prepare them to settle a minister of color.
Review of professional ministry —from recruitment through training to certification to settlement to continuing education.	Much work is being done under the overall umbrella of exploring “excellence in ministry.” The staff’s current effort focuses on a review of our religious professionals and the processes they go through. Last fall I convened a team to look into this. They will be reviewing the large volume of work already done and issuing draft reports in modules. These will be shared widely and comments invited. Our goal is to bring a fresh look to all our work to develop and support religious professionals. Draft reports will be delivered in the coming months, with a final report in January of 2011.

Be a force for compassion and justice

The UUA has long been seen as having a special role in public witness for our faith. Issues that are national and international need the voice of our headquarters and senior leadership. Beyond this, however, we are finding that we are often most effective when we engage people across the country.

Initiative	Status
We are shifting the focus of our work from the UUA’s public witness role to working with UU’s throughout the country to empower their efforts. Part of this involves fewer resources for our lobbying efforts in Washington, D. C. and more work with grassroots local and regional efforts. We will continue to speak out at the national level. However, we are often most effective when we help UU’s speak out where they live.	One of the great success stories of the past year has been the Standing on the Side of Love campaign. What has been especially gratifying is to see people in congregations across our movement taking part in public witness. We are in the process of finalizing a new structure for our work. That will be complete by the time the Board meets in April, 2010.



Initiative	Status
We have been working more closely with the UU United Nations Office and the UU Service Committee. Boards and staff at both organizations want to explore more formal arrangements.	We have had preliminary contacts with both organizations and will be having follow up meetings. On an ongoing basis, we work more closely than ever to coordinate our public witness work.

Create the infrastructure for a culture of collaboration

The rapid expansion of the internet and its ability to convey increasingly rich information is a historic opportunity for us. We must use this technology to help us break down the barriers between our congregations. We have a new opportunity to inspire one another and show one another the best practices in worship, religious education, social action, and more. We also have a chance to reach out to the seeker as never before.

Initiative	Status
Web redesign	We have completed the first step in a redesign of our website. The home page is oriented to visitors, since about 85 percent of “hits” are from non UUs. We have also made it much easier for UUs to find the information they most seek. However, this is only a first step. A work plan is in place for the second phase and we plan to hire IT staff during the next budget year to modernize the underlying structure.
Sharing of best practices	We have just launched a new series entitled “A Religion for Our Time.” This is a series of short web videos that highlight outstanding work by our congregations. Our plan is to have an entry twice a month for the next year.



Conclusion

These are challenging times filled with possibility and peril. In order to move toward the realization of our shared ends, the very culture of Unitarian Universalism must change. Or, better put, what is essential in our culture—our willingness to see and seize possibilities, our willingness to leave behind the traditions that have become rigid and lifeless, our openness to learning and wisdom from many sources, our acceptance of all people, our commitment to love, peace and justice—must remain. What must change is way of being religious that is tied to origins in another time.

If we are to thrive, we must reframe our past as a story of a people who saw new possibilities in every age and who embraced those possibilities.

If we are to thrive we need a new culture of collaboration within our congregations and across our movement. We need religious leaders who can lead the change we need. We need to find new ways of being moral beacons in our communities—standing on the side of love when others would marginalize and dehumanize.

This administration is committed to playing an essential role in leading the change. We have begun a series of initiatives to fulfill our responsibility to lead change. Even in these difficult times, the possibilities remain breathtaking.