

**EMERGING CONGREGATIONS WORKING GROUP
UUA BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEETING
MARCH 7, 2015**

Following the October 2013 meeting of the UUA Board of Trustees, the Board and Staff created a collaborative working group to see if there were ways we could honor and be in relationship with covenanted UU groups ("UU communities") around the country who were either "emerging congregations," aiming to seek membership status with the UUA, or were pursuing an alternative ministry beyond traditional church walls.

The UUA Staff has surveyed the UU communities and engaged in dialogue with them to better understand their needs and aspirations. What the Staff has conveyed to the Board, and the Board has embraced, is that the Association should be in a more intentional relationship with the UU communities and provide more guidance and resources to foster the communities' mission, growth and sustainability.

At our October 2014 meeting, the Board further charged the Working Group:

[To} bring to the Board before the January 2015 meeting a pilot program to formally recognize congregations and communities (collectively "Recognized Communities") previously identified by the UUA as "Emerging Congregations."

The goals of the pilot program were:

1. To provide formal recognition from the UUA.
2. To further the End of growing our Faith.
3. To foster relationship between the larger Unitarian Universalism movement and the Recognized Communities; and
4. To foster healthy stewardship in the Recognized Communities, not only for their own organization, but to the UUA.

At the January 2015 meeting, the pilot program developed by the UUA staff was presented and met with approval by the Board.

Since January, the UUA staff, coordinated by Rev. Tandi Rogers, has reached out to 53 groups in "emerging congregation" status and five additional alternative-structure groups about the possibility of becoming a recognized community to be formally recognized at General Assembly 2015. So far, 13 groups are planning to apply for recognized community status. A chart tracking the staff's progress with the pilot program is included in the Board packet. The Working Group recommends that the Board

authorize the UUA staff to continue their process with the goal of honoring these Recognized Communities at GA in Portland.

The Working Group also invites discussion of and a decision as to the scope and form of recognition we will deliver at GA.

Based upon feedback from the communities they have been talking with, the UUA staff is recommending that the Board reconsider the "Recognized Community" designation. Previously, there was some discomfort with the designation of "Covenanted Communities." Nevertheless, the groups the staff has visited with have responded more positively to this designation. The staff is suggesting a compromise - that we might call the communities who respond to the pilot program "Covenanting Communities." The staff believes this active designation avoids the confusion about the meaning of "covenant," emphasizes the ongoing nature of covenantal commitments, and preserves the emphasis on the covenanting process that is meaningful to the groups themselves. The Working Group would like to engage the Board in discussion to respond to the staff's suggestion.

The Working Group is pleased to report that an unexpected consequence of staff engagement with groups currently in emerging congregation status, initially to inquire about their interest in the recognized communities status, is that some groups have decided to renew their efforts for pursuing full congregational membership in the UUA (these are indicated on the attached spreadsheet). This positive development underlines the importance of creating a comprehensive system of support for new or emerging groups which includes both continuous engagement and a flexible structure that makes it easy for groups to adjust their goals from year to year.

Finally, the staff reports that they have frequently connected the Board's exploration of formal status for these groups with a parallel process for UUA staff developing a continuous system of support for the same groups and other similar initiatives, using the metaphor of a "highway" with different "lanes" for different types of supports and resources. The staff's communication with groups who could potentially become recognized communities, especially around the nature of the relationship between these groups and the UUA, demonstrates the need for formal status to become more closely linked with systems of support. Though it is outside the scope of the Board's request for the recognized communities exploration, staff will provide the Board with an update in the next week or two on the development of a comprehensive system of support for emerging groups so that this understanding can inform the Board's decisions.