

## from the desk of Gini Courter

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December 19, 2006

Friends:

Once again, we will **not** be coming in on Wednesday. It is my belief that we will be coming in early in April – some business that we could have attended in January was placed on April's agenda, so April will be a very, very full meeting -- but enough about April. We're going to have another great January meeting, tightly scheduled just like October was. Please review all the board packet materials in advance of the meeting. We won't have a lot of extra time to read once we get started, especially if we're even close to the speedsters we were in October!

The group formerly known as the Working Group Conveners/Committee chairs is now called the Coordinating Council, (and that name has already been shortened to CoCo, not to be confused with CommComm or NomComm or...) At their meeting following the October board meeting, the Coordinating Council added a fifth working group to focus on Governance. One member of each of the existing working groups has already been drafted to serve on the Governance working group. The Rev. Linda Olson Peebles has graciously agreed to convene the group for the remainder of this year.

Thursday evening begins with dinner followed by worship and conversations on Congregations Come First and Open Space Technology. Friday morning the working groups will be working hard. Friday afternoon we return to our conversation on governance, but first, we're trying something new: after working groups, we're going to take a break from 1:30 to 3:30 so that the working groups can polish up their notes and turn them over to Nancy. We hope this will free up the computers downstairs from 9:30 until midnight on Friday night.

Excellence in ministry has popped up frequently as a topic in working groups and the board as a whole, and groups throughout the Association are talking about ministry, from ministerial formation, to the role of ministers in congregational health and growth, to the ministers' role as teacher, (an outgrowth of the understanding that congregations are the locus for lay theological education). We'll spend Friday evening with the Rev. Jory Agate, chair of our Ministerial Fellowship Committee. The evening will include a mock interview so you can see how the MFC process works, then we'll have an opportunity for conversation.

Saturday evening is jam packed and fun filled. Lyn Conley and the Finance folks will take us through the budget and answer questions.

The Rev. Burton Carley will lead us in worship on Sunday morning. Following the Board meeting, Jackie will lead the Coordinating Council in the post-mortem and planning for April. This is an open meeting.

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Work continues on the Open Space sessions for General Assembly in Portland. Eva Marx is representing the board on the OST team. Our team lead for Open Space, Dr. Helen Bishop, has provided a variety of materials for your use at district meetings this spring. You'll find the materials under the GA tab in this packet, and we'll discuss them on Thursday evening. As you talk with congregations that are figuring out how to get to GA, please remind them about the GA scholarships – last year, there were unused scholarship funds.

In case it slid under your radar, the UUMA Exec voted in October to encourage all ministers to participate in the Open Space process at GA. With every meeting, every conversation, I'm growing more excited about what we will be able to learn and do as a result of the Portland GA.

When I met with district staff at BCM in early December, a few staff members expressed concerns about GA participants playing a critical role in setting ends for our Association of congregations. I was mildly surprised to hear clichés like "GA doesn't represent our congregations". I reminded the folks present that General Assembly has become more representative with more congregational leader participation thanks to significant leadership by UUA President Bill Sinkford and the Board, and invited the district staff who have not already done so to join in the effort to help congregations send leaders from every UU congregation to GA in Portland. (I also suggested that the UUA Bylaws make good evening reading.) To be clear, this was only a handful of folks, but I realized it may be a preview of coming attractions. We're shifting decision making back to our congregations, and push back is inevitable from everyone who has been doing that decision making: staff, committees, and heck, even us. We need to continue to be strategic and focused, but we must also be clear. As we start to live our polity, we may as well live it large.

I continue to be honored to serve as Moderator, and as your Board chair. When I write this letter for each board packet, I am humbled by the trust you place in me and grateful for the opportunity to serve. Thank you, friends. I look forward to seeing each one of you at the January board meeting.

Wishing you all a season of abundant joy.

Gini