

**REPORT TO THE UUA BOARD OF TRUSTEES
FROM THE
DISTRICT SERVICES STAFF GROUP
April, 2007**

District staff members are promoting heavily UU University, a leadership development program that occurs in the days preceding General Assembly in Portland, Oregon. Last year's attendance was over 400 lay leaders. In the early weeks of sign-up this year, paid registrations are up 50%, boding well for the number of lay leaders who will benefit from this training. The keynote speaker at UU University will be the Reverend Dr. Gil Rendle of the Alban Institute and an expert in all aspects of congregational leadership. Workshop leaders include David Rynick, an experienced UU coach and trainer speaking on "Growing Our Faith"; the Reverend Tom Shade on the development of depth in lay leadership as part of the "Sharing Our Leadership" track; and the Reverend Dr. Laurel Hallman leading a workshop for the "Fostering Our Generosity" track.

District staff are assisting the four 2007 Breakthrough Congregations prepare for the video presentations they will show during the plenary sessions at GA. Additionally, each of the four congregations will lead a workshop where they'll expand upon programs and activities that have helped them achieve numerical growth that exceeds 38% over the last six years - six times the growth rate of the UUA during that same time frame. The four Breakthrough Congregations include:

1. First Unitarian Portland, Portland, Oregon - Growth from 819 to 1102 (35%) in six years.
2. All Souls Unitarian Universalist Church - Kansas City, Missouri - Growth from 326 to 458 (40%) in six years.
3. Carbondale Unitarian Fellowship, Carbondale, Illinois - Growth from 112 to 177 (58%) in six years.
4. Davies Memorial UU church, Camp Springs, Maryland -- growth from 101 to 130 (29%) in six years.

Parish ministers and other religious professionals from 16 congregations will participate in a growth consultation in November, 2007. The goal of the

consultation will be to increase understanding of the factors that contribute to numerical growth of congregations, and identify ways that the Association can support these growth efforts. District staff members will assist those invited to the consultation in soliciting input from even more fast growing congregations to ensure the wisdom shared and the insights gained are representative of even more of the fast growing congregations in the nation.

Major portions of the first UUA conference on contemporary worship entitled "virtually vital and alive unquote were videotaped and are being edited in preparation for video streaming on the UUAs website. District staff members will be given these "Breakthrough Worship" DVDs to use at district conferences and cluster workshops to help promote greater understanding of the role exciting, dynamic worship can play in the growth of vital congregations.

Other notable events and activities occurring in districts:

Metro New York / Joseph Priestley / Ohio Meadville / St. Lawrence

- A new four district partnership with involving the Metro New York, Joseph Priestley, Ohio Meadville, and St. Lawrence districts begins with the districts working together in a three-year experiment to improve services to congregations by sharing expertise and resources.

The UU Leadership Team Institute (UULTI) is will be the first big venture. During this week-long experience, participants will explore Unitarian Universalism on spiritual, intellectual, personal and practical levels. They will, among other things, acquire skills to build and strengthen their congregation and community. Areas covered will include Congregation Development and Growth, Family Ministries, Governance, Justice-Making, Small Group Ministry, Congregations as Emotional Systems, Lifespan Faith Development, Multi-Culturalism, Shared Leadership, and UU Values and History.

New Hampshire/Vermont and Northeast Districts

- These two northeastern districts are combining their efforts and sponsoring a year of work with Partners for Sacred Places and at least eight of the congregations who own historic buildings. In this project there is an evaluation done of the physical structure of the building; an assessment done of the community outreach being done and calculating the dollar value of that outreach; Identifying the ways the congregation's building is a larger community resource and linking them to funding sources outside the church membership to help them outside dollars to help maintain their buildings. The cost of maintaining our historic structures sometimes dwarfs the congregation's ability to fulfill its ministry. The program goals we have established are to reverse this drain; energize the people in UU churches about the new partnerships that can develop with their localities maintaining their buildings: The health and vitality of the town counts on this partnership to serve its citizens.

The districts will share the results of this pilot project at the 2008 GA in Ft Lauderdale. The congregations are already providing the services to their towns. What a difference it could make to develop new partners to share the costs of maintaining UU buildings in the process!

Southwestern Conference

- The three New Orleans area UU congregations have formed Greater New Orleans UU (GNO-UU pronounced *Guh-New*) to carry out the strategic plan for renewing a vital UU presence in the city and its environs. The Southwestern Conference will administer the remaining funds from the Gulf Coast Relief efforts and those to be raised in an upcoming recovery campaign. Northshore UU in LaCombe continues in its search for a settled minister as First New Orleans begins theirs, while both Community UU and First still need extensive renovations to have full use of their buildings. All the while, UU volunteers from throughout the association, particularly their partner churches, continue to stream into New Orleans to help these congregations.

Pacific Southwest District

- PSWD recently provided a joint weekend of a new training for lay and professional leaders of UU congregations. One, based on the Renaissance Module format, was entitled "Pastoral Care for Religious Educators". Concurrently, the weekend Leadership School program entitled "Articulating Our Faith" was held. Both were written and led by a group of religious professionals from the district.

Joseph Priestly District

- The JPD has recently put into effect a Religious Educator Scholarship Program to encourage our RE professionals to seek continuing education and to network with their peers through professional events.
- The JPD Annual Spring Conference will be a totally integrated / intergenerational event. Their youth have decided to have their spring con the same weekend in the same place as the Spring Conference. There will be programming for all ages from the "littlest attendee to the wise elders". The Eugene Picket Award Congregation will be conducting the Sunday morning Worship Service at the Hotel with several choirs participating and Reverend Howard Dana preaching.

Ballou Channing District

- The Ballou Channing District has established a Transition Consultant position. The Transition Consultant provides information and education to congregations to help them prepare for and engage in interim ministry. The consultant is to help with the smooth transition into the interim period by answering questions about the interim program, guiding the congregation leadership to draw up of a plan for the transition period, advising them about how to form the Interim Search Committee and budget for, select and hire an interim minister.

Massachusetts Bay District

- The Mass Bay District is working together with the Ballou Channing to develop a program called "Leadership Arts and Crafts" that will be one evening sessions on such topics as "Brushing off the Welcome Mat",

"Listening to Your Congregation", "New Models of Religious Education", "Effective Social Justice Organizing", "Best Business Practices" and more. The programs will be offered in four regions of the two districts on a rotating basis.

- Mass Bay has more congregations participating in Gulf Coast Relief than any other district and is in need of assistance in organizing these efforts as well as in connecting our congregations with organizations such as the UU Urban Ministry, UUSC and Mass Action Network. Therefore it is applying for a UU Funding Panel grant to create a new position for Social Justice Organizer.

Pacific Central District

- The Pacific Central District partnered with our UUMA Chapter to present a joint growth conference led by the Rev. Larry Peers. We had about 250 people attend representing 33 of our 38 congregations, plus several folks from the Starr King School for the Ministry.

An important part of the PCD growth strategy is to raise our marketing effectiveness. PCDs generous congregations have raised \$182,000 to support the major marketing campaign for the San Francisco Bay Area. They are also getting pretty good at guerilla marketing: On a recent Tuesday morning, NPR broadcast a news story about OWL. The PCD staff and a volunteer marketing group had a background piece posted on the district website and a spokesperson identified that same day, and had press releases going out that evening and the following morning to take advantage of the free publicity the NPR broadcast created.

Prairie Star District

- The Prairie Star District is experimenting with new ways of communicating with congregations. For some time, the Lifespan Program Director, Rev. Phillip Lund, has been writing a blog on topics related to faith development, family ministry, youth programming, and more. Find Phil's Little Blog on the Prairie at <http://home.earthlink.net/~psdlund/>

Phil has also started a online newsletter for religious educators and others interested in faith development. Email him at plund@psduua.org to be put on the mailing list. Phil is also posting a series of religious educators' newsletter columns at <http://faithdevelopments.blogspot.com>

Nancy Heege, District Executive, has also joined the blogging world with Nancy's Views of the Landscape, which can be found at www.nheege.wordpress.com. Prairie Star's part time Youth and Young Adult Specialist, Sherry Warren, has started Sherry's Home on the Range at <http://sherryshomeontherange.blogspot.com/>

Florida District

- The District's Annual Assembly in April will feature over 30 workshops on congregational excellence, under the theme "**Cornerstones & Cupolas.**" Throughout the District, one finds new energy to ensure we do the basics well and stay focused on our vision of a world possible. New District Executive, the Reverend Kenneth Gordon Hurto, will give the keynote, "Nothing But the Best!"
- Elsewhere, the District's congregations and area clusters are working on regional programming and increased utilization of electronic technologies to strengthen congregation-to-congregation linkages while being mindful of our 'carbon footprint' as we do so.
- Bearing witness: Two of our Florida Ministers, the Reverends Manish Mishra (St Petersburg) and Abhi Janamanchi (Clearwater) have led the public outcry for the unjust dismissal of the Largo City Manager who had announced he would be undergoing a sex-change operation this summer.

Pacific Northwest District:

- Rev. Bill Sinkford was the keynote speaker at the PNWD Annual General Meeting in Boise, ID, in February. More than 300 congregational delegates and others attended the meeting, with most congregations granted travel equalization funds provided by the PNWD.

Congregational leaders and others presented 20 workshops for attendees, including a Q&A with leaders facilitated by President Sinkford and including our UUA Trustee and District Board. Rev. Elizabeth Greene and Judi McGavin also offered a workshop on "Preparing for a Powerful General Assembly." The PNWD Board provided routine reports in writing only, freeing up most of the business meeting for small group discussion on one of the district "Ends" policies, related to Vitality and Extension of the Faith (i.e., what is the responsibility of member congregations in growing Unitarian Universalism?). District Board and staff hosted evening receptions for the UUMA, LREDA, Congregational Presidents, and workshop presenters & district consultants. Boise UU Fellowship, our host congregation, provided a "Passport to Discovery" to encourage attendees to meet their fellow UUs, scour the weekend schedule and explore Boise - their joy in welcoming everyone infused the entire weekend!

- PNWD Chalice Lighters contributed more than \$15,000 to provide grants to all PNWD congregations so that UU youth can attend 2007 General Assembly in Portland, OR.
- PNWD congregations are organizing a network of B&B accommodations, congregational visits, and local tours for guests coming to General Assembly. For information, see <http://holycow.portland.or.us/pvac/>. The Portland-Vancouver Area Council is coordinating these offerings and recruiting local information volunteers for GA.
- PNWD spring Leadership Council (for congregational Board members and professional staff) will feature UUA "JUUST Change" lead consultant Paula Cole Jones presenting the learning topic, "Leading Multi-Cultural Community." The event will be hosted in May by First Unitarian Church of Portland (OR) and the PNWD Board of Directors.