



FOR LEADERS OF UU CONGREGATIONS

CENTER Connections

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Small Project Loans Available from UUA

Loans for small projects, ranging from installing an elevator or exterior sign to paving a parking lot or making emergency roof repairs, are now available to congregations from the Unitarian Universalist Association's Congregational Properties and Loan Commission.

The commission has long made loans for larger projects, including buildings. These smaller loans are designed to promote congregational growth by financing smaller projects that can improve congregational life.

"We look at it as a new tool to tackle issues that may seem beyond a congregation's current financial means," says Wayne Clark, the UUA's director of Congregational Stewardship Services.

Loans are available for a maximum of \$100,000 and a minimum of \$15,000. They are to be paid back over a period of three to seven years. Congregations must have made their Annual Program Fund Fair Share contributions to be eligible for loans.

Contact Clark at wclark@uua.org or nelson@uua.org. Find more information at tinyurl.com/5o6yrc.

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LEADERSHIP

Strategic Planning Helps Dallas Church Thrive

The First Unitarian Church has always been a pillar of liberal religion in Dallas. From its founding in 1899 it has preached a message of respect for, and cooperation with, other religions. It created a sensation in Dallas in 1921 when it hosted the great Indian poet and philosopher Rabindranath Tagore.

In the middle of the last century it was on the front lines of racial integration struggles. The landmark abortion rights case, *Roe v. Wade*, grew out of a Women's Alliance discussion group at First Unitarian.

The church grew to 850 members in the 1960s, and then dipped along with the rest of Unitarian Universalism. In 1987 it called its current senior minister, the Rev. Dr. Laurel Hallman. It was when Hallman took her first sabbatical, in 1995, that the congregation began its latest transformation.

Visiting ministers came to serve the congregation in her absence. And they began to gently point out that the building that served the congregation was a bit, well, it was overdue for some work. "They noticed, for example, that my office was shabby," says Hallman. Others noted the dents in the sanctuary wall from various accidents, the bathrooms that needed sprucing up, and that Channing Hall, where coffee was served, needed a new floor.

By the time Hallman returned, the congregation was motivated to make improvements. Soon after that the congregation adopted a form of policy governance, which gave Hallman direct responsibility for the staff, building, and church programs. The congregation's approaching centennial in 1999 provided a goal, and a capital

campaign was launched. The \$2.1 million project resulted in the renovation of all of First Unitarian's buildings and created a more inviting place to be.

In 1995 the congregation had about 700 members. Today it has 1,100, making it the ninth fastest-growing congregation within the Unitarian Universalist Association. In 2005 it was one of the UUA's Breakthrough Congregations.

First Unitarian has had a number of turning points that have led it to become the thriving congregation it is today. In addition to Hallman's sabbatical and the adoption of policy governance, another was the decision to call the Rev. Dr. Daniel Chesney Kanter in 2001 as the second full-time minister.

Hallman and Kanter have specific areas of responsibility. She is responsible for the congregation's institutional strength. He focuses on membership, program staff, and helps connect the congregation with the larger Dallas community.

The shift to policy governance made a big difference, says Kanter. "We shifted from being driven by what needs to be done to being driven by our values." Adds Hallman: "It freed all of us up. I could focus less on persuading the board and committees to do something. Instead I had the power and the budget to get these things done myself."

The congregation went to two services in 2000. "The first Sunday we had 100 more people in worship," Hallman says.

Another turning point was the Eloise Blatt Memorial Organ. When a mem-

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INTER Connections

MISSION

InterConnections aims to be relentlessly useful to lay leaders of Unitarian Universalist congregations and the professional staff who work with them, providing information and resources that help make congregations vital.

InterConnections is a joint service of the UUA's Congregational Services, District Services, and Communications Staff Groups. It is made possible by congregations' Annual Program Fund contributions and the generosity of individual Unitarian Universalists to the UUA.

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ber wanted to buy a small organ for the congregation in 1990, in memory of his wife, another member, Stuart Owen, expanded that dream by raising \$150,000, in addition to the \$40,000 original gift, from the congregation for a large tracker action pipe organ that now dominates the sanctuary balcony.

Before the organ, there had been doubts that there was enough money in the congregation for such projects. "With the organ we realized we had the money to do anything we wanted to do," says Hallman. For the complete story on the organ see the Fall 2008 issue of *InterConnections*, "Stepping Forward to Help When There Is a Need."

Raising money for a memorial garden at the side of the church at about the time the organ was purchased had a similar effect on the congregation. There was more money than anyone anticipated. That opened the door to greater possibilities, including one that is just now unfolding.

The congregation is in the midst of a \$9 million capital campaign to fulfill the goals of a five-year strategic plan called Chart and Compass 2010. It is also experiencing a ministerial transition. Hallman is a candidate for the UUA presidency and will be retiring in January. She will remain with the church until June. The congregation has called Kanter as senior minister, effective in January. A search is underway for a second minister.

The congregation is using Chart and Compass to develop ways to expand its outreach into the larger Dallas community, improve internal communications, create better religious education facilities, better care for its members, and help members develop their spiritual lives.

As part of Chart and Compass the congregation has hired in the past two years a minister of pastoral care, a director of lay ministries, a communications director, a facilities manager, and made the adult RE director and the youth director's jobs into full-time positions.

The congregation has also begun discussions on the creation of the Center for Public Dialogue, a place at church for citywide discussions on issues that divide Dallas residents. "We think our unique gift to the larger

community is civil dialogue," says Hallman. "We could be the open place for that in Dallas."

More Chart and Compass initiatives: The congregation has committed \$150,000 to support the development of the UUA's new Tapestry of Faith religious education curricula, begun plans for a public marketing effort, redesigned its website, and installed new phone and computer systems. It plans to install an improved sound system and has created a volunteer database so it can more easily connect members to appropriate ministries. The initiative includes the construction of about 26,000 square feet of new space for religious education classrooms. Existing classrooms will be renovated for offices for ministers and staff.

Worship at First Unitarian, the centerpiece of congregational life, "connects head and heart," says Kanter. "We try to shape an arc of worship that takes people to a deep place and gives them a reason to hope. Worship connects daily life with ultimate issues, comforts, challenges, raises questions, and uplifts. Everyone needs a pastoral sermon as well as a challenging one."

Social justice continues to be important at First Unitarian. Banners about marriage equality and other topics occasionally go up on the side of the building facing a major street. A large group of members participates annually in the Dallas Gay Pride Parade, and the church is a leader in interfaith activities.

Chris Denney is First Unitarian's chief administrative officer under policy governance parlance. He runs the operations side of the church, meaning "anything administrative in nature."

Chart and Compass has created a "rallying point" for members, he says. "People get excited about its vision. It also helps people to visualize a specific place or ministry within it that they can be involved with."

Staff members were recently asked to write mission statements for their jobs, connecting them to the church mission. Most people on staff are church members.

There is a minimum of conflict at First Unitarian, says Kanter.

Hallman agrees, saying, "We don't get dislodged by dissent. There's a huge amount of trust here in leaders and a sense that what we're doing as a community is important."



Together

Alone we can do so little. Together we can do so much.

**Helen Keller (1880 – 1968),
American author and activist**

A Quick Look at First Unitarian, Dallas

Here is a quick glance at some of the numbers, features, and tools behind the success of First Unitarian Church in Dallas. Find more in-depth articles about this congregation throughout this issue.

Established: 1899

Membership: 1,100 adults, 400 children and youth

Average attendance: 460 adults, 200 children and youth

Facilities: This urban church has a sanctuary (with pews and a pipe organ) that seats 400. The sanctuary opens into a narrow foyer and then into a multipurpose room where coffee hour is held. Multiple doors into and out of the rooms eliminate any sense of crowding.

The children's religious education classrooms are in a separate two-story building. Plans have been made to tear down a former parsonage and create a new building for RE facilities. Some current RE rooms will be converted to offices that will be consolidated in the new space rather than scattered throughout the complex as they are now.

Parking is challenging, but generally adequate. The church has a 20-car lot on its property, plus about 180 spaces on adjoining streets and in nearby commercial lots.

Stewardship: The median pledge is \$1,200. The offering plate one Sunday a month is donated to various organizations. In 2007, that amounted to \$58,000. During the annual stewardship drive—generally a Commitment Sunday model preceded by testimonials by members, a sermon, and canvass letters—no dollar amount goal is

advertised. "We want people to be driven by their hearts and what this church means to them," says chief administrative officer Chris Denney. "We want people to give because church is a vital part of their lives." First Unitarian pays its Fair Share contribution annually to the UUA and to the Southwestern Conference.

What's Next: Chart and Compass 2010 is the church's five-year-strategic plan. The congregation has raised \$6 million of a \$9 million goal. Funds will be used to enlarge children's RE facilities, support development of the UUA curricula Tapestry of Faith, establish a Center for Public Dialogue (see page 1), and improve the congregational database. A minister of pastoral care, director of lay ministries, and communications director have been hired, and other positions were made full time.

The Pastoral Care Ministry plans to start a Sunday morning "listening room" where trained counselors will be available to meet with people with personal concerns. It's an idea taken from the Unitarian Church of Baton Rouge, which adopted it following Hurricane Katrina in 2005.

This issue of InterConnections profiles First Unitarian Church of Dallas, whose senior minister, the Rev. Dr. Laurel Hallman, is a candidate for president of the UUA. The Spring 2008 issue profiled the congregation of her opponent, the Rev. Peter Morales. Learn more about the elections at UUA.org/elections.

Blogging, Facebook Resources

The UUA Office of Information and Public Witness has published additional resources to help congregations take advantage of new media. "Best Practices for Unitarian Universalist Blogging" features advice and insights from UU bloggers. "Dos and Don'ts for UU Congregations Using Facebook" offers tips for establishing and maintaining your congregation's Facebook page. These and other resources can be found at tinyurl.com/564uww or email pw_specialist@uua.org.

UUA Pamphlets Available

Order UUA pamphlets on a variety of topics from the UUA Bookstore, at uuabookstore.org or 800-215-9076. New pamphlets include, *Family Prayers, A Sampler*; *Religious Hospitality: A Spiritual Practice for Congregations*; *UU Views of Evil*; and *UU Views of the Sacred*. Many pamphlets are \$7 for a pack of 25. Sampler packs are also available. Pamphlets are a useful way of informing guests about Unitarian Universalism.

Resources Available For Church Security

Resources are available on the UUA website to help congregations think about security issues in the wake of the tragedy at the Tennessee Valley UU Church in Knoxville, Tenn. These resources include a video by the Rev. Aaron Payson, a member of the UU Trauma Response Ministry, titled "Lifecycle of a Disaster." Find it at tinyurl.com/5h23j5.

Other resources, including ways to evaluate your buildings for security and how to take precautions against an armed intruder, are at tinyurl.com/5hrl3a.

Learn to Be an Advocate For Sexuality Education

People who want to learn how to be religious advocates and community leaders on the topic of comprehensive sexuality education are invited to the fifth annual Sexuality Education Advocacy Training March 21-24 in Washington, D.C. For more information contact Grace Garner, Legislative Assistant for Women's Issues, at the UUA's Washington Office for Advocacy and Witness at 202-393-2255 or send an email to seat@uua.org.



Multiracial Multicultural Conference Scheduled For April in Tulsa

The UUA's third annual conference on creating and nurturing multiracial, multicultural congregations, will be April 3 – 5 in Tulsa, Okla. Tulsa was selected for its diversity of congregations. One of the conference partners is the UU Congregation of Tahlequah, capital of the Cherokee Nation.

The conference is titled "Leading Congregations into a Multiracial, Multicultural Future: Now is the Time." The keynote speaker will be Dr. L. Lee Knefelkamp, professor of psychology and education at Columbia University. Knefelkamp has written widely on intellectual and identity development and ethical development in the context of race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation.

For more information about this and previous conferences go to tinyurl.com/65xrrjq or email congservices@uua.org.

Midsize Conference February 6 – 8 in Houston

A conference for leaders of midsize congregations (250 to 500 members) will be held February 6 – 8 in Houston, Texas. Titled, "Envisioning Inclusive Excellence in the Midsize Congregation," the conference will feature Dr. L. Lee Knefelkamp, professor of psychology and education at Columbia University. Knefelkamp has written on intellectual and identity development, intercultural and diversity issues, and moral and ethical development.

Workshop topics include Using the Web to Attract and Welcome Newcomers and Inspired Faith, An Inclusive Stewardship Program for your Congregation. For other topics and to register, go to tinyurl.com/6xefflr.

About InterConnections

InterConnections is published four times a year and is sent free of charge to members of governing boards and professional staff of congregations. Others can read it on the Internet at uua.org/interconnections.

People can sign up for email announcements when each new issue is available online, at lists.uua.org/mailman/listinfo/interconnections-l.

MEMBERSHIP

Welcoming and Caring Foster Growth in Dallas

How did First Unitarian get to 1,100 members? With dynamic preaching and worship, a high-quality religious education program, a comprehensive social justice program, and by helping members and guests connect to the church in meaningful ways.

The church grew from 750 to 1,000 members following a \$2.1 million renovation in the late 1990s. Now with 1,100 members, strong membership practices keep it vital.

Sunday morning starts on the sidewalk for the minister and a member of the greeting team as they welcome each new arrival. Inside the front door guests receive another welcome and a nametag and are asked to fill out a brief information sheet.

After the service, as folks mingle for coffee, guests are engaged in conversation by roving greeters. "We count on not only the membership committee doing this, but others as well," says Mark Watson. He and his wife Jenny are co-chairs of the membership committee. On the following Monday guests get a phone call from someone at church.

Guests find the church in one of two ways, he says. "About half of them learn about us from a current member. The rest, especially younger people, find us on the Internet. Very few people come here without already knowing something about us."

Prospective members are encouraged to devote three evenings to a Roots course where they will have the opportunity to learn about Unitarian Universalism and First Unitarian.

There are four expectations for membership, Watson says. "Presence, commitment, spirit, and justice. We ask them to show up and participate on a visible level, work toward giving half a tithe (5 percent) and the other half to charitable organizations, work on deepening their own spiritual lives, and participate at some level in the justice-making work of the church."

First Unitarian is putting an added focus on its membership with two new

staff positions. The Rev. Dr. Xolani Kacela is minister of pastoral care. Nathan Ryan is director of lay ministry. Both began earlier this year.

Pastoral care has become more structured under Kacela. It still depends on many volunteers, but Kacela's full-time monitoring of membership needs means that there are fewer times when care emergencies arise. "We communicate better and can respond more quickly now that we have a more structured program," he says.

The program has also lifted some of the responsibility for pastoral care from the Rev. Dr. Laurel Hallman and the Rev. Dr. Daniel Chesney Kanter, the two lead ministers, so they can be more effective in other areas, says Kacela.

There are five care teams and several more in development, encompassing more than 100 volunteers. "People are more willing to volunteer for pastoral care if there is guidance," he notes.

The caring program has developed its own logo so that people can readily identify information about it in the church newsletter and pamphlets. "We want people to feel comfortable in bringing concerns to us," says Kacela. "We want to make a difference in their lives." He also ministers to the staff.

Ryan begins tracking members as soon as they join. His role is to help them discover their ministry. Visiting with them at home or church he learns about their interests and how they might like to be involved. He adds this information to a church database, which is available to committee chairs and others who are seeking members or help with a project.

Ryan will be calling all guests after three, six, and twelve months to keep in touch with them. Members will be called annually, on the date of their joining. "On these calls I will not ask for money or for anything else," he says. "I simply want to find out if they are feeling connected. If not, I will try to help them find a place. I work to help people discern what their ministerial calling is."



NOURISHING THE SPIRIT

Religious Education, Music Ministries Draw People to First Unitarian Church

Karen Lewis, religious education director for children and youth at Dallas' First Unitarian, takes the long view about what she does.

"I know that no one is going to walk out the door on Sunday saying 'Thanks for the lesson on Moses,'" she says, "but we get letters from young people years after they've left here. I recently heard from a young woman who just graduated from Brandeis and is volunteering at a UU church in Boston, thanking us for what she learned here. Her twin sister is considering becoming a UU minister. So we are, through the years, igniting in our children and teens the fire of our free faith and a recognition of the ways that Unitarian Universalism sustains us in our lived lives. Ultimately, we are making progress in keeping our young people in the faith through young adulthood and beyond. I look out into the pews on a Sunday morning and there they are."

Almost four hundred children and youth are registered in the First Unitarian RE program and about 200 attend on any given Sunday. The program is a major reason why the church has grown to 1,100 members.

Lewis says that the program's success is due in large part to its volunteers and a philosophy that the whole church is responsible for RE. The program relies on approximately 73 volunteer teachers each year and about a third of those who volunteer have no children in the program. "The meaning of membership here is that we expect all members to be fully engaged," says Lewis. "We let members know that teaching is a major commitment of time, intellect, and heart and that volunteering in RE is nothing short of relational ministry."

Lewis has been working to create and strengthen the Family Ministries Network to help parents connect with each other. "The staff has more responsibility in a large church to help people connect," she said. In this network parent leaders are encouraged to invite other parents to a get-acquainted din-

ner. Lewis hopes those dinners will be only a first step and that the parents will make other connections among themselves.

RE hallways are decorated with large art pieces, including quilts, made by RE groups from various years. "Kids love to come back years later and see these hanging here," she said.

Several end-of-year trips are highly anticipated by older RE groups. Service trips for high schoolers have included travel to the Mountain Retreat and Learning Center in North Carolina, where they have built accessibility ramps; work at city missions in Atlanta and the UbarU Retreat and Conference Center, where in the summer of '09 they will return to begin work on constructing a challenge course. Sixth and seventh graders make annual trips to Heifer International's working ranch in Arkansas. The ninth graders' Coming of Age year includes a heritage trip to Boston.

The program has recently turned to the UUA for much of its curricula and is pleased by what they have found in the beta test versions of newly released lessons. "We use as much of the UUA's new Tapestry of Faith curricula as we can," says Lewis.

Teachers are required to attend eight hours of training in addition to providing their consent for a background check. Each teacher receives a 50-page manual covering RE philosophy and issues such as attendance, safety, and how to requisition supplies. Lewis says caring and supportive volunteers are the foundation of the RE program.

Another of First Unitarian's strengths is its music program. "Music is an integral part of the life of this church," says Music Director Donald Krehbiel. "Throughout our history this church has employed professional musicians to lead an active program and provide quality music in our worship services." Though he says they are firmly rooted in the classical tradition, they also embrace other musical genres. This fall they've heard a

Lebanese drummer, a gospel singer from Tennessee, a classical flutist, and jazz musicians among others. "Members, new and old, tell me that it is the quality of the music that attracts them, at least in part, to this church," he says.

"My philosophy of church music is that it gives voice to the myriad emotions brought to this space by the congregants through congregational singing and the special musical offerings of various guest artists and our own ensembles," says Krehbiel. "It is my hope that the music will lift the spirit, provide an opportunity for meditation, and bring beauty and joy into the lives of those who are present. I am more interested in providing well-crafted music that has the power to engage and transform, than I am in music that teaches a specific theology."

He adds, "In our worship team meetings we talk about the arc of the service; that is the movement and variety of spirit within the service, which begins with praise, joy, and gratitude, moves through remembrance and grief, meditation and prayer, commitment, and ends with joy."

First Unitarian has a graded choir system. There are three adult choirs (two auditioned) and three for children and youth. The children's choir director, Cynthia Nott, is artistic director of the Children's Chorus of Greater Dallas. Choirs are often the strongest small groups in a church, Krehbiel says. "Several of ours bring food and hold a social hour after each rehearsal."

The children's choirs require a six-week commitment and attendance at four of six rehearsals. That solves the problem of parents and children being reluctant to commit to a whole year. "It's a psychological thing for parents," says Krehbiel. "They generally end up recommitting after the first six weeks."

"We talk to the kids about excellence and dedication," he says. "They understand that they are not giving a performance, but that their music is a gift to the congregation."



Planned Upcoming UUA Actions of the Month Include Peace, Equality

The UUA's Washington Office for Advocacy and Witness is continuing its "Action of the Month" initiative to help congregations engage in social justice work. Each month the UUA is making resources available that will enable congregations and individuals to take action on a particular issue at the same time.

The monthly campaigns planned for this winter and spring are:

- December: Peace
- January: Living Wage
- February: BGLT Equality
- March: Gender Justice
- April: Environmental Justice

Suggested actions for each month will range from "anyone can do it" to "very committed." For example, you could sign a petition and/or you could come to Washington, D.C., for a rally.

Additional information is available at tinyurl.com/57gzuv, where you can sign up to receive information.

If you have questions about Actions of the Month or other issues, email socialjustice@uua.org.

Association Sunday Campaign Continues

If you were unable to hold a special Association Sunday service on the official date selected, October 14, it's not too late. Congregations may schedule Association Sunday services throughout the winter and into the spring.

To register go to uua.org/giving/associationsunday or send an email to associationsunday@uua.org, or call 617-948-6544.

Association Sunday funds will be used to support lay theological education and excellence in ministry.

Health Plan Questions

Questions about the UUA Health Plan? For address changes, to terminate the coverage of a member or dependent, and for all general questions, send an email to Tracy Withy, UUA Health Plan Coordinator at healthplan@uua.org. Provide as much detail as possible.

For questions regarding a premium payment call eBDS at 866-865-2133. For questions on covered services, discount programs and similar issues, go to highmarkbcbs.com or call 800-796-6502.

TOOLBOX

Help Youth Get the Most From Boston Heritage Trips

Every year from March to May youth groups and Coming of Age classes come to Boston to visit the Unitarian Universalist Association and see historic UU sites. With proper planning the trip can be the capstone of many years of religious education.

"The trip gives the youth a visual impression of what we've talked about all year, a frame of reference and a context for their religion to add to the oral explanation and stories they hear the rest of the year," says the Rev. Barry Andrews, minister of religious education at the UU Congregation at Shelter Rock in Manhasset, N.Y.

He adds, "The tour of UUA headquarters helps fill in historic blanks. When we go to Arlington Street Church someone tells us about the historic role of the church and William Ellery Channing. The youth get to ring the bells in the belfry, which is always a highlight. They also hear about the extraordinary windows at the church, which gives them a sense of what type of Christians the Unitarians were in the late nineteenth century."

Customary stops for youth groups are the UUA and UU Service Committee offices and the Harvard University Divinity School. Many groups attend worship services at King's Chapel, First Church in Boston, or Arlington Street Church. Quincy Market and its Durgin Park restaurant offer fun, food, and shopping. Many groups visit Concord, Walden Pond, and Lexington. Others walk the Freedom Trail from Boston Common, take a Duck Boat Tour to the Boston Harbor, or take in a Blue Man Group show.

Sabe Graham, the UUA's public information assistant, encourages groups to do some advance planning to get the most from their Boston trips. For instance, groups that visit the UUA on Mondays or Fridays can also sit in on a Youth Office information session.

Graham recommends that groups take time to see UU-related movies such as the Civil War movie *Glory* or *Little Women*, before coming to Boston.

Arrange housing well in advance, says Graham. She recommends the UUA's B&B, Eliot and Pickett Houses, located behind UUA headquarters on Beacon Hill. Rooms are \$120 for Coming of Age groups. Four or more to a room is OK. Rooms book quickly in the spring. An added benefit is that Eliot and Pickett is close to the Boston subway system, which can take groups to Fenway Park, the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, and other locations. Boston also has youth hostels, or groups can choose to stay in UU churches although it's likely no showers will be available.

Before coming to Boston, Andrews conducts a "UU College Bowl" experience with his groups, after requiring them to read the book *100 Questions About Unitarian Universalism*. Each youth is required to research a historic individual or site and then tell the group something about that subject at the appropriate site in Boston.

Andrews says, "I always tell the youth that this isn't just a vacation, it's a pilgrimage. Nothing brings home history and heritage as much as a visit to the sites and shrines connected to them."

The coming of age class from All Souls Unitarian Church in Tulsa, Okla., comes to Boston annually, notes Kate Starr, the church's youth program director. "It's part of their spiritual development. Seeing UU historical sites and visiting the UUA provides a strong foundation for learning and staying in touch with their UU heritage. At Walden Pond we have them spend an hour alone in reflection and every year at least a few of the youth write their personal credos there. Also, visiting the UUSC gives the youth a personal connection with the social justice causes they hear about in church."

Resources

Contact info@uua.org or 617-948-4652 for information about scheduling and planning heritage trips. Ask for a heritage tour trip-planning guide. Also visit the heritage tours page at [UUA.org: tinyurl.com/6xb7ot](http://UUA.org/tinyurl.com/6xb7ot).



MONEY

In Uncertain Economic Times Enthusiasm, Planning, Count for a Lot

Is the glass half full or half empty? Does economic uncertainty bring only problems, or could it also bring opportunities?

Those are questions facing all of us in congregations this fall as markets fluctuate and members see their savings, and maybe even their jobs, in jeopardy. As leaders, how do we respond to this economic climate?

As markets tumbled, leaders of the UU Congregation of the Palisades in Englewood, N.J. (60 members), called a congregational meeting in October to allow folks to talk about the economy. "We had a frank discussion where people could talk about what's bothering them," says President Jonathan King. "We wanted to lessen some of their fears and help them understand they have a community here. We saw this as an opportunity to tend to our own community in a crisis."

"We had a conversation about how we could be there for each other and how we could help the larger community," King says. Several people volunteered to help counsel those with financial concerns, he says, such as budgeting and credit card debt. "People liked the idea of having others to talk with on a regular basis. People can feel very alone in their anxiety."

The group also encouraged the governing board to create a minister's discretionary fund for those in need, says King. "Several people talked about the need to focus on others and not on our own scarcity. I think that's where congregations need to be going right now."

The Rev. Ian Evison, congregational services director for the UUA's Central Midwest District, and former director of research for the Alban Institute, notes that helping people with their finances "is not a typically UU thing to do, but we're catching a glimpse in this district that the emerging generation of UUs would be receptive to this."

Things to watch out for in this economic climate, says Evison:

- Don't take drastic measures, such

as cutting the budget, or staff, before working it out with the congregation. "Some of the greatest damage I have seen to institutions in downturns comes from quick and clumsy self-protective action. That can magnify the harm, first by what is done and then how it is done."

- Economic stress can cause problems along pre-existing fault lines in a congregation. "If there is poor communication or a staff that does not work well together, watch for problems."

- Work out issues before a money crisis hits. "Often the immediate thing that sends a congregation into crisis is an issue around delayed maintenance of the building, a computer that dies, or needing to find money to replace a minister on sabbatical. "Plan for the things you can plan for. It's not fair to blame an economic crisis on the sudden need for money for these issues."

- Spend time looking for the opportunities in a down market. "Congregations planning major projects and who already have a chunk of cash in hand are finding great opportunities."

Evison notes that economic conditions have generated more interest in congregations about staff working at home, and in holding some meetings virtually. This might also be the time to think about publishing the newsletter electronically, he adds.

As of late October it was too early to tell if fall stewardship drives in congregations were seeing any effect from the declining economy.

The publication *Christianity Today* advised in October that church giving should remain steady for the next year, but if the recession goes into a second year giving could decline. The magazine quoted Sylvia Ronswalle who has been studying Christian giving since 1988. "The data suggest that decreasing giving (to churches) is not the first thing church members do in tough economic times," said Ronswalle. "People have traditionally viewed (the church) as just beyond the family in terms of accountability."

It's important to keep congregations

strong not only for ourselves, but for people who may seek out religious community in these times, says Laurel Amabile, the UUA's director of the Annual Program Fund. "Individuals and families are experiencing anxiety about the economy and its effects on their finances. Many look to religious community as a source of encouragement and spiritual support in facing these challenges."

Wayne Clark, the UUA's director of Congregational Stewardship Services, says it's especially important this year for leaders to "make a compelling and passionate case" when asking for money. "Focus on recent successes and build upon them. Ask for financial commitments in person. And be sure to acknowledge each contribution."

And expect the best from your congregants. Last spring the UU Church of Silver Spring, Md., found itself with a budget gap of more than \$72,000. The governing board cut the budget \$20,000 then went back to the congregation on Sunday morning with a compelling vision for the rest (and \$7,000 they raised among themselves). Congregants contributed \$25,000 that Sunday and within three weeks the total rose to \$54,000. The congregation also fulfilled its goal of contributing its full Fair Share amount of \$20,250 to the UUA after many years of not paying Fair Share.

Says the Rev. Liz Lerner, who ditched her scheduled sermon to speak spontaneously about the deficit, "I talked about how accommodating growth, and the infrastructure that goes with it, is hard, and stays hard, and that there are no churches for whom growth is easy. But that hard work pays off. We had some very inspiring moments that Sunday as people responded to the call."

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QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

In this feature we seek out answers to questions of broad interest, drawing on experts in congregations, the UUA, and elsewhere. To submit a question, write to *InterConnections*, 8800 Norwood, Leawood, KS 66206, or email interconnections@uua.org.

Q I'm a new vice president of finance, and I need all the help I can get. I've found the UU-Money email list for congregational treasurers and other finance people (uua.org/lists), but I'm overwhelmed by the information. I started printing emails on different topics figuring that at some point I might need information on that issue. But I'm getting swamped with paper. Is there an easier way?

A Yes, says Michael Meyers-Jouan of the UU Congregation of the Palisades in Englewood, N.J. "Did you know that you can sign on to the message list and search the archives? Every message that has passed through the UU Money list is stored in the archives. You should try searching for topics of interest to you there. If you can find the messages of interest to you in the archives, where they are collected automatically, it may not be nec-

essary for you to collect them in your own mail program. Plus, you'll have access to all the messages that were exchanged before you joined the list!

Q I know that the UUA is working on restructuring its youth ministry program. What is the status of that?

A A Youth Ministry Working Group of 10 youth and 10 adults has been formed and will be developing recommendations for the UUA Board of Trustees on a new framework for UU youth ministry. YRUU (Young Religious UUs) no longer exists as a continental organization, but congregations are free to continue to use that name for their local and regional youth groups. The UUA is continuing to support local and regional YRUU gatherings. A key goal of this youth ministry restructuring is to strengthen youth ministry in con-

gregations. The UUA will also continue to support the Youth Caucus at General Assembly, the Chrysalis training program, web resources, curriculum development, and youth ministry consultation programs. More information is at uua.org/members/youth.

Q With the economy in turmoil, members of my congregation are facing foreclosures, job losses, and reduced savings from the drop in the market. Are there worship resources that would be helpful in such a time?

A The UUA does have a collection of worship resources specifically for "tough economic times." You can find the collection at uua.org/spirituallife/troubledconomy. These resources include sermons, op-ed pieces, opening words, and prayers. Congregations are encouraged to contribute more items to this collection.