

Report to the UUA Board of Trustees
Congregational Services
Tracey Robinson-Harris, Director
March 15, 2005

I returned from my seven week sabbatical on February 1. The gift of time was wonderful – and could not have been spent any better. I spent New Year's in Yellowstone in the company of wolves. I went to Mexico in late January for a few days. Every day I was in town and the studio was open I danced. Among the changes of heart and mind I returned with is one I remember so clearly from my last sabbatical in 1993 - a different sense of time; a sense not of its scarcity but of its abundance and the richness of each moment, the feeling that there is time to do what needs to be done each day. So far I am still holding on to that. That, and knowing without doubt that dance is my other calling.

I will be taking the second half of my sabbatical sometime in the July – mid-September period of this calendar year.

And now for news from Congregational Services:

Lobbying for Comprehensive Sexuality Education –

30 participants gathered in Washington DC in early March to be trained in advocacy, media techniques, and to learn about the REAL act, which would fund comprehensive sexuality education. Co-led by Washington Office and **Young Adult and Campus Ministry staff** and the staff of Advocates for Youth, participants and leaders also talked about how support for comprehensive sexuality education comes from our faith perspective, how this work religious.

The training included a screening of the new documentary The Education of Shelby Knox. (It premiered in January at the Sundance festival). It is about a teen from Lubbock, TX who tried to lobby for comprehensive sexuality education there. Shelby joined the group for the screening and for the lobby day that followed the training--she is an incredible young woman.

On lobby day about 40 Unitarian Universalists visited Capital Hill. A film crew from 60 Minutes followed a group of young UUs for some time, filming their activities including a Senatorial visit. They filmed this group of 17-22 year-olds talking about why comprehensive sexuality education is a religious issue for them, discussing how it saves lives, and how their comprehensive sexuality education (mostly OWL) has helped them make healthy, safe decisions--including the decision to remain abstinent. They also filmed part of the training, including Michael Tino's prayer before the group went to the Hill. We think this 60 Minutes segment will air in a few months (maybe around the time of GA). They promised to let us know when a date had been set. Their larger piece of

which this will be a part is on abstinence-only vs. comprehensive sexuality education.

Large Congregations Conference

Approximately 300 participants attended the sixth triennial UUA Conference for Large Congregations. Thirty of the UUA's forty largest congregations were represented, including CLF. Included in the overall number were 41 participants from 13 "larger midsize" congregations, each of which had been identified as having the potential to join the list of large churches in the not-too-distant future. At least half of these midsize congregations are likely to cross the threshold before the next large church conference. In the keynote presentation, "Congregations in Good Company," Don Cohen introduced the central concepts of social capital, which "consists of the stock of active connections among people: the trust, mutual understanding, and shared values and behaviors that bind the members of human networks and communities and make cooperative action possible." After sharing the fruits of his research in this area, including his experience at Saddleback Church, Cohen introduced storytelling as a tool for developing social capital. There were 32 workshops on a wide range of topics, the largest offering ever at a large church conference. As a pilot, the services of the General Assembly Office were used for processing registrations, which worked well overall. Conference evaluations are still being tabulated but the overall numeric rating was 7.7 out of 10.

Exploring the Large Church

Stefan Jonasson represented the UUA at "Exploring the Large Church," the first of four gatherings being convened by the Alban Institute. In addition to generating increased awareness of the challenges facing large churches and strategies for addressing them, this series of gatherings will lead to the establishment of an Alban-sponsored Large Church Network, a cross-denominational initiative based on the assumption that "we learn better from people who are in our same *setting* rather than in our same *system*." The UUA continues to be the only American denomination known to have an office dedicated exclusively to serving large congregations, a fact that did not go unnoticed at the Alban gathering.

JUUST Change Consultancy Launched and on line at
<http://www.uua.org/programs/justice/antiracism/consultancy.html>

With training and orientation now complete, JUUST Change Consultants are ready to help congregations with a developmental process of congregation based anti-racist, anti-oppressive multicultural transformation and social action. By this ministry to congregations and their professional and lay leadership, JUUST Change consultants can help identify internal leaders; facilitate group processes in developing vision and mission, dialogue, problem-solving, team development,

developing capacities for building partnership in the larger community, and goal-setting/action planning;

Our resources encompass a broad range of voices and experiences, grounded in institutional/power analysis of racism, heterosexism/ homophobia, ableism, gender oppression, and classism; the intersection of oppressions; and wisdom about congregational change/ transformation. Engagement in this work will require that we, to paraphrase “Soul Work: Anti-Racist Theologies in Dialogue, “deepen our discourse, and in light of new information, reconsider how we live out our Unitarian Universalist principles.”

The UUA is committed to creative partnerships with our congregations, as we pursue living in Beloved Community. Our mutual task is to transform ourselves as congregations, so that we are vibrant, spirited, anti-oppressive, pluralistic communities. Our faith is best manifested through relationships that allow deep and honest sharing with one another about what matters most to us, including justice and standing strong against oppression. Such relationships involve active listening, the willingness to acknowledge mistakes, fears, or uncertainty, faith in one another’s’ good intentions, and a desire for transformation that is stronger than the desire for safety and comfort.

Congregations accepted into the consultancy are asked to commit to five days of consulting (one-two days on site) and to support the consultancy financially. The cost to the congregation is scaled according to size and Annual Program Fund standing.

[More news about our on-going anti-oppression, anti racism, multiculturalism work includes:](#)

Plans for a post GA training for newly elected and appointed UUA leaders include work in systemic understandings of oppression and role/skill focused training that translate those understandings into the work of leadership; the leadership team for this event will include three of our JUUST Change consultants along with Paula Cole Jones, Taquiena Boston and myself.

All Regional Subcommittees on Candidacy will have completed a basic anti racism, anti oppression, multiculturalism training similar to Beyond Categorical Thinking in this calendar year; follow up plans are being developed as we go – a collaborative effort of Ministry and Professional Leadership, Identity Based Ministries and Congregational Services

Ministers of Color/ and Latino/Latina/Hispanic ministers serving UU congregations have been invited to a mid-April retreat organized by staff from Ministry and Professional Leadership, Identity Based Ministries and Congregational Services

The New Congregation and Growth Resources Office has completed an anti oppression, anti racist, multicultural editing process for the Planning for Growth and Vitality Weekend Workshops, one for Small and one for Smaller Mid-size (151 – 350 members). We successfully piloted the AR/AO/MC Mid-size in St. Lawrence in January, and will pilot the AR/AO/MC Small in Heartland in mid-May.

Ethics in Congregational Life

These last six weeks have seen a dozen concerns about ethics and safety in our congregations requiring attention. The nature of the issues and concerns is quite varied.

The Second Generation of The Uncommon Denomination

A brief overview of the Houston campaign – “Imagine A religion”

- The January 2 launch party was a wonderful success! We had 200 Houston UUs show up. The mood was celebratory. Bill Sinkford’s attendance and his words were inspirational.
- The Chronicle Religion Editor, Richard Varga, would like to run a story about the campaign. We have given him a list of Houston UU contacts and will try to let you know when the article runs.
- We’ve had 1,700 hits on the Houston page of the UUA website.
- Anecdotally, we’ve received lots of great stories about increases in attendance at the churches. Northwest Community informed me that on Sunday, January 30th they had 5 guests as a result of the newspaper ad. Guest attendance really jumped after the Sunday Chronicle tab insert on 2/20 and second post card drop that week. On Sunday 2/28 Bay Area had 10-first time guests; First UU Church had between 50-75. Emerson reports they are averaging 13 guests a week as compared to 4 a week a year ago.
- The ads are still running, billboards will remain up through February, NPR spots are underway, and the third direct mail piece will drop the last week in March. The Chronicle website banner ads will run through March 20- the Chronicle gave us another 100,000 “complimentary” impressions for a total of 200,000 over a 4 week period.
- We can afford another insert in the Sunday Chronicle, covering 400,000-500,000 households by zip code. We plan on using the same insert; we’ll update the calendar, change-out a few pictures, etc. We’d like to do this in the fall because we know that’s a time that families church shop.

Public Relations activities occurring during campaign:

On February 13, Revs. Jose Ballester, Gail Lindsey-Mariner, and Matt Tittle participated in a Houston area same-sex marriage ceremony. A dozen

clergy and 50 couples were in attendance. The event was covered with TV and press interviews.

The Focus on Family event “Love Won Out” was on Feb. 20th. Approximately 150 protestors, primarily from PFLAG, were on hand. Many of the protestors were from our Bay Area, Galveston, and First UU congregations. Matt Tittle was interviewed on radio. In response to the conference we ran a new ad “Imagine a Religion Where All Are Welcome” in both the Galveston paper and the Chronicle in February.

What’s next? Plans for the Fort Worth version of “Imagine A Religion” are well underway as we explore bill board, radio, direct mail, print including the possibility of a tab insert during back to school season and marketing tools we’ve not tried before.