

May 5, 2005

## MODERATOR'S REPORT

Like last year, the initial portion of this report is structured around the first question asked by Board member Jackie Shanti when I interviewed to serve as Moderator in October 2003: "What are your priorities concerning the various roles the Moderator plays?" and my experience answering that question during the past eighteen months.

There are three relationships that are critical to the Moderator's ability to contribute meaningfully to success of the Association: the relationships with our congregations; with the UUA President; and with the Board. Only when the three relationships are vibrant can leaders be equipped to help congregations provide spiritual engagement for current and new members, work for justice in their communities, and promote Unitarian Universalist values in the larger society.

### **Relationships with Congregations**

General Assembly is the Association's best venue for building and strengthening the relationships between congregations as well as relationships between individual congregations and elected leadership and the staff. General Assembly should be an institutional showcase where good governance and shared leadership are demonstrated. This Fort Worth GA is an important opportunity to build relationships – to continue to intentionally reweave the fabric of our Association. Part of that relational work happens in plenary. The General Assembly Planning Committee provided significant energy to the effort to craft focused, engaging plenary sessions for this GA. Based on evaluations from last year's GA attendees, a group including GA parliamentarian Gordon Martin, Executive Vice-President Kay Montgomery, GA Office staff, chairs of the GA Planning Committee and Commission on Social Witness, and representatives of the Youth Office and the Young Adult Network met to redesign the GA schedule ("the grid"); this collaborative grid was reviewed and blessed by the Planning Committee for use this year. Though the results will only be clear as we experience this year's GA and review the evaluations, I'm grateful for the willing help of so many dedicated volunteers and staff members.

Last year over three hundred congregational presidents served their congregations as General Assembly delegates. I can't express what a thrill it was to have so many congregational leaders in our business sessions and GA workshops. Following General Assembly, many of our districts built on this energy to start or expand district gatherings of congregational presidents. I've attended two of these congregational presidents' "roundtables" this past year, and the presidents tell me that these gatherings are an important tool in support of their leadership. In the coming year I will attend presidents' roundtables or leadership sessions in several other districts.

I've also had the opportunity to preach in a number of our congregations this past year. I'm grateful to the Reverends John Luopa and John Burciaga for inviting me to share their pulpits on short notice when other travel left me with a free Sunday in their neighborhoods.

### **Relationship with the UUA President**

A healthy Association requires a strong and trusting relationship between the Moderator and President. This relationship isn't documented in the Bylaws. But this relationship, which President John Buehrens and Moderator Denny Davidoff often called "the dance," can enhance

or inhibit the smooth functioning of the Association. It's a dance that requires strong partners who can improvise quickly when the music changes, who know when each is responsible to lead or to follow. I'm very pleased to report that that respect and admiration and that President Sinkford and I have for each other continues to inform our partnership as elected leaders. It is a genuine pleasure to work with Bill Sinkford.

### **Relationship with the UUA Board of Trustees**

The hard working women and men who serve on the UUA Board spend six weeks a year or more in volunteer service to the Association. The current Board includes ministers, teachers, social workers, retirees, business people, college students, consultants. Their deep love for this faith is reflected in the resources of time and even money that they contribute to our association and their local congregations and districts.

When I was elected to serve as Moderator I committed that I would work with the Board to create a relationship that appropriately reflects their accountability and leadership. In the past year we've modified some of the Board's structures to better support their work. The Working Group Conveners/Committee Chairs meeting, chaired by the Board's First Vice-Moderator, The Rev. Ned Wight, plans the agenda items for the Board and working groups. As a group, they endeavor to be pro-active and ensure that items that require the Board's attention are on the agenda. While I'm responsible for assembling the agenda for each meeting, the creation process is done in full collaboration with the Working Group Conveners, the Committee Chairs, and the UUA President and Executive Vice-President. During the past year the Board has voluntarily added one day to each Board meeting to work on Vision, Mission, and Ministry. The Rev. Will Saunders has served as coordinator for this ongoing ad hoc work, and is joined by a different group of Board volunteers to plan the activities for each Board meeting. I'm grateful to all members of the UUA Board for their dedication, smart work, and their willingness to fly the plane while we're still strapping on the wings.

### **Relationships with Other Leaders**

In the past eighteen months I've met several times with the General Assembly Planning Committee and Commission on Social Witness, and was pleased to accept an invitation to meet with the Commission on Appraisal in April. The Board and District Presidents' Association is forging a strong partnership. I was blessed to be able to attend a portion of the white allies gathering at the DRUUMM (Diverse Revolutionary Unitarian Universalist Multicultural Ministries) fall conference last year. At every meeting, association leaders are primed and ready to suggest, support, and embrace positive change. Leaders are increasingly willing to collaborate with other committees, commissions, and the board.

There's a new spirit of collaboration moving in volunteer leadership. To nurture that spirit that it might remain among us, Bill Sinkford and I will invite members of the elected commissions, committees, and Board of Trustees to attend what we believe is the first-ever Association-wide volunteer leadership summit. We hope that all committees will be able to send representatives to meet, explore mission, and search for synergies. We had hoped to hold this meeting last year, but three of the four General Assembly-elected committees will have new leadership immediately following this GA, so we decided to hold the summit this year rather than last.

### **Other Noteworthy Items**

**Anti-Racism/Anti-Oppression Training for Leaders:** As reported last year, there will be a day of anti-racism and anti-oppression training for candidates for the board, committees, and commissions following this GA. District presidents were also invited to attend this training. Thanks to Rev. Tracey Robinson-Harris and the JUUST Change consultants for providing this training.

**Professional Development for Congregational Leaders:** Based on the feedback from congregational presidents last year, the UUA Board and staff are already at work designing professional development for congregational leaders prior to General Assembly 2006 in St. Louis. In 2006 your congregation can send its president, treasurer, and growth/membership chair to General Assembly to learn and to teach others how to be stunningly great at the work your congregation has entrusted them with. We will provide a world-class training experience every two years for congregational leaders in 2006, 2008, and 2010.

**Reimbursement for Congregational Presidents at GA:** Last year the Board and General Assembly Planning Committee agreed to pool funds to reimburse registration fees for congregational presidents who attended the Long Beach GA as delegates. Congregational presidents' registration will be reimbursed again this year. In 2006 – 2008, we will reimburse part of the registration for presidents (75%, then 50%). In 2009, we hope that most congregations will fund their president's registration fee so that their elected leader can represent them at General Assembly.

**Congregational Presentations in Plenary Sessions:** If we wish to grow, we need to be willing to say that healthy, growing congregations are critically important to Unitarian Universalism now and in the future. As leaders, we must then align our resources to support growth. We know what it takes to grow because we have plenty of examples in every size range. At this General Assembly you'll hear reports in plenary from four congregations: Quimper, White Bear, All Souls (Washington D.C.), and First Unitarian (Dallas). These are just four of many places that Unitarian Universalist congregations have learned to grow in spirit and numbers. Growth is not a question of resources, or a question of knowledge. It's a question of leadership.

**Congregational Workshops at GA 2006 in St. Louis:** Elected leaders are sharply focused on congregations. General Assembly is the annual meeting of Unitarian Universalist congregations, but in the past fifteen years the GA program has expanded with the sudden increase in affiliate organizations. In 2003 over half of the GA workshops were delivered by affiliate organizations. Affiliates bring diverse programming to GA but their substantial participation limits our choices of convention centers, increases the cost of GA, and uses the workshop space that could be used for congregational workshops or other programming such as covenant groups. Next year, we hope that at least 25% of all GA workshops will be conducted by congregations. (The current percentage is much lower.) The Board and GA Planning Committee are making the necessary adjustments to provide space in the GA program for congregations. If your congregation is interested in providing a workshop at General Assembly 2006, watch for information on the General Assembly page of [uua.org](http://uua.org) this summer.

**Plenary Presentations by Theological Schools:** This is the second year that our Unitarian Universalist seminaries have agreed to host substantial conversations in plenary that GA delegates can take back to their congregations for further reflection. Last year the Rev. Dr. Lee Barker, President of Meadville Lombard Theological School, moderated a session on "The

Language of Reverence" in Friday's plenary. Starr King Theological School's President, the Rev. Dr. Rebecca Parker, will moderate this year's session on Sunday. I'm grateful to the presidents of both theological schools for focusing their expertise to challenge and empower General Assembly delegates. We must learn to communicate our values if we are to reclaim our voice in the public debate.

**Board Packets Published on uua.org:** General Assembly lasts less than a week. Our Bylaws empower the Board to act for the Association the other fifty-one weeks of the year. I'm working with the Board and staff to improve communication between the Association (that would be congregations) and the Board during those fifty-one weeks. For the past three years, agendas for the UUA Board and working group meetings have been posted on the UUA web site prior to the meeting. (Here's the web address: <http://www.uua.org/TRUS/>). Beginning in January 2003, the web site posting was expanded to include the entire Board packet. Every item that is distributed to the Board is posted on uua.org at least 10 days prior to the Board meeting. (Thanks to Nancy Lawrence, Deborah Weiner and members of the IT staff for making this happen.) When you visit the web site, you'll also find a list of all the board members and the moderator along with our email addresses. This is not accidental. Feel free to contact the trustee from your district with questions or comments.

### **And Finally**

I am still delighted and honored to serve as Moderator of the Unitarian Universalist Association. I continue to be humbled by the trust you and your congregation have placed in me.

Thank you for your work in the service of the vision, mission, and ministry of Unitarian Universalism.

In faith,

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