

**REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT
FOR THE
2006 GENERAL ASSEMBLY
Kay Montgomery**

At the opening ceremony Wednesday night, Gini said, “We are working in every way we can imagine to become the community we say we are—a welcome table where all are valued.”

Four years ago we established a new staff group to help make the table of Unitarian Universalism more welcoming. The work of the Identity-Based Ministries Staff Group goes right to the center of what is important to our faith, some of the hardest work we do. They are charged with nothing less than transforming our movement, of making Unitarian Universalism more just and closer to the Principles that we hold dear. Taquiena Boston is the Director of that group and I’ve asked her to speak directly to you. Taquiena . . .

(Taquiena Boston’s remarks):

Good afternoon. I welcome this opportunity to introduce you to Identity-Based Ministries.

You can learn about our programs and services for congregations at the UUA website (see slide). Or come to the Identity-Based Ministries exhibit booth #103 and talk to one of the staff members pictured above. In my few minutes with you, I am going to focus on Identity-Based Ministries’ role and mission.

Unitarian Universalism is the spiritual home for many kinds of diversity, including ability, age, class backgrounds, gender, gender identity and expression, race and ethnicity, and sexual orientation. In Wednesday’s opening ceremony several Unitarian Universalists told us that membership sometimes extracts a high cost or even sacrifice of identity and culture.

Because accessibility is more than installing a ramp . . .

Because it takes more than a rainbow chalice to communicate welcome to bisexual, gay, lesbian, and transgender UUs . . .

Because multicultural diversity means much more than singing a hymn in Spanish at worship, or celebrating the holidays of many cultures . . .

And also because people of diverse identities need nurturing spaces where they can share their challenges in this faith, affirm the richness of their cultures, and lift up their dreams for beloved community . . .

Identity-Based Ministries mission is to make Unitarian Universalism a faith that welcomes, affirms, and includes people who yearn for liberal religious community among those who identify as bisexual, gay, lesbian, transgender, economically oppressed, Latina/o and Hispanic, multiracial families, people of color, and people with disabilities.

While Identity-Based Ministries also consults with congregations and provides resources such as *Beyond Categorical Thinking* for ministerial search committees, and information about increasing accessibility to persons with a variety of disabilities, our primary role is to support leadership development and community among Unitarian Universalists who hold the identities named earlier.

Much of the staff's work is behind the scenes. We perform the roles of pastoral counselor, mentor, coach, advocate, and sometimes even cheerleader for ministers and other religious professionals, seminarians, and lay leaders of all ages.

Our work includes facilitating workshops and identity caucuses at conferences, cosponsoring identity-based retreats and gatherings, advising on constituent projects, writing letters of support, shepherding difficult conversations, and running interference when necessary.

Staff members serve formally and informally as chaplains at conferences and retreats. We support the work of identity-based groups and continental committees that advance the cause of specific Unitarian Universalist communities.

Identity-Based Ministries seeks to connect our priority constituents with opportunities, resources, networks, decision-making tables and each other -- sometimes face-to-face, more often electronically.

Building the World We Dream About is a congregational curriculum in development that focuses on race and ethnicity. This new curriculum was inspired by the "Welcoming Congregation" program which helps congregations welcome and include more fully bisexual, gay, lesbian, and transgender UUs. By the way, we are pleased to note there are 500 plus "welcoming congregations" and counting, which represents almost half of our Unitarian Universalist congregations.

Building the World We Dream About is being guided by Unitarian Universalist religious and lay leaders who represent the many kinds of identity diversity in our Association of Congregations as well as several identity-based affiliate groups. Though the title may sound like the expression of a desired future for our faith, this curriculum will help congregations recognize the rich possibility represented by the multiracial/multicultural diversity already present among us. Identity-Based Ministries looks forward to field testing this curriculum, which is being developed by Mark Hicks, in 2007.

As I close, I want to acknowledge the commitment and diligence of the Identity-Based Ministries staff, and to thank other Association staff, the affiliate organizations, and committees who partner with us in our role and mission.

Four years ago, when Identity-Based Ministries was conceived, one vision for our staff group was to work ourselves out of a job. We look forward to the transformation of Unitarian Universalism into that loving and just spiritual home that welcomes, affirms, and includes all. In the meantime, "until we work ourselves out of a job" we will continue to do our part in building the world that Unitarian Universalists dream about.

(Kay Montgomery resumes her report):

Thank you, Taquiena. And will join in helping me thanking all of the Identity-Based Ministries staff: Simona Munson, Sofia Craethnenn, Keith Kron, Jean McKenney, Devorah Greenstein.

And now I want to introduce you, through the web, to some of the other work of the staff, and to remind you that there is a written report on the work of the UUA staff that you can get outside Room G here in the convention center, that each program staff group has a booth in the display area, and that there are many workshops that will fill you in on the details of what I say plus much more.

(note: this section was accompanied by images on uuworld.org and uua.org's new design):

Our new weekly magazine on the World Wide Web, uuworld.org, debuted last August just one week before Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coast, allowing the magazine staff to provide much more timely news than ever before. *UU World*'s news team went to work immediately, and in the first three weeks alone they filed ten news stories to uuworld.org about the impact of the hurricane on our congregations in the area.

But timely news about Unitarian Universalists and their communities is only part of uuworld.org's mission.

With original essays, online-only extras, and a format designed to appeal to people who may not yet know anything about Unitarian Universalism, uuworld.org reaches out to religious liberals and seekers providing UU perspectives on everything from the immigration debate to *The Da Vinci Code*.

Hundreds of people visit uuworld.org every day. I subscribe to uuworld.org's weekly email newsletter, which brings each week's headlines right to my mailbox.

But uuworld.org is just the beginning of the Association's new approach to the web. Soon, UUA.org will be reborn . . .

Some of you recall that at last year's GA we showed you the design for a new spirit-driven uua.org website. I'm delighted to announce that the new website framework is now complete and running on a test server. Here is the new home page.

The site is audience-focused. Large buttons invite Visitors, Members, and Leaders to come inside and find material appropriate to their needs. A drop down list presents topical choices like Congregational Life and Spiritual Life.

As you move through the site, we will help you find your way by reproducing the same navigation throughout. A trail of breadcrumbs shows you where you are and how you got there. There are tools to search, a printer-friendly version, and the capacity to email a page to a friend.

Under construction is “Find A Congregation,” that now uses Google maps to display search results. Say you’re staying at the Holiday Inn near the convention center in St. Louis; let’s see which congregations are nearby, and then let’s get driving directions to the nearest one.

Also under construction is a redesigned Worship Web that cross links worship resource categories, authors, and content. This is being built by the Lifespan Faith Development staff group using the new content management system. It’s the first time a non-technical staff group has been able to directly publish their own web content.

Our staff is busy categorizing and moving thousands of pages of existing content into the new site. While much of the process can be automated, every page must be checked and tweaked by hand. We plan to have the new website on the air before the calendar year is out and hope that you will be as pleased about these changes as we are.

(staff members mentioned were on stage with Kay Montgomery for this section of the report).

This has been a year of much change, with, more than usual, significant staff changes. We’ve had long-time employees retire who will be sorely missed, and, most specifically, I want to ask you to acknowledge David Hubner, retiring Director of the Ministry and Professional Leadership Staff Group. David has worked for the Association for eighteen years and has been devoted, brave, pastoral, and often very funny. For the last five years he has, arguably, held the toughest job we have to offer. David

And there are a few new faces I want to introduce to you: or at least faces in new roles. Here are three people I want you to meet: Beth Miller, who served our congregation in Carmel, California for nine years, and now succeeds David as Director in Ministry and Professional Leadership. John Hurley, a long-time employee for the Association (and **everyone’s** communications consultant), has become our Director of Communications. And Chris Walton in the UUWorld staff becomes Executive Editor of the UUWorld as Tom Stites prepares for retirement next year.

And then, finally, I want to introduce you to someone who is neither retiring (in any sense of the word!) nor new but can’t be thanked enough for her work. The person who keeps the engine running for me and the Moderator and the entire Board of Trustees, the person who, with endless good humor, remarkable efficiency, and deep commitments, is absolutely central to the life of the UUA staff and board (and God knows, to mine), Nancy Lawrence, my elegant assistant.

A couple of months ago, one of our new-this-year district executives, preached at the weekly staff chapel in Boston. The Rev. Terasa Cooley has been a parish minister in a number of remarkable churches and now nurtures the congregations in the Mass Bay District. This is part of what she said, and she speaks, I think, not only for our district staff but for all of the UUA staff.

“Despite all the tumult . . . , I find myself feeling an amazing sense of privilege in serving [our] congregations. For now that I am one step removed, I can see what I could not see close up: that congregational life is an extraordinary thing: that meaning is found, lives are changed, love is forged in a way that could not happen anywhere else, even if it is imperfect, even if it comes with hardship and pain. That in the midst of everyday congregational life, every once in a while the hard husks of our outward coverings break open and the tiny green shoots of sacred love break through and find their way to the sun. It is up to us merely to nourish the soil, to water the tender shoots with our tears of recognition, and to remove the obstacles that block out the sun. And to wait, patiently, for what may come.”

Will you join me in thanking all of the women and men who work for you, the UUA staff, who help you water the green shoots of love in your congregations . . .

Thank you, thank all of you, for your companionship in this hard and sacred work, the work you do in making the table of Unitarian Universalism more welcoming.