

New Orleans Strategic Planning Group Advisory Board

Our charge: The strategic planning group shall envision and design a plan for a vibrant, robust Unitarian Universalist congregational presence in a rebuilt New Orleans. The plan should encompass the vision and needs of particular congregations but be focused holistically and systemically, rather than atomistically, on how Unitarian Universalism might be strongest and most vital in the greater New Orleans area.

Summary of Meetings May 12-13, 2006

In attendance: Burton Carley, Jyaphia Christos-Rodgers, Wayne Clark, Becky Cureau, Dick Harris, Marilyn Malone, Jim VanderWeele and Mark Westergard

Becky was in attendance on the 12th but unable to attend on the 13th

Marilyn was in attendance on the 12th but not the 13th

Mary An was unable to attend on either day. Suzy Mague represented her on the 13th

1. Mid Term Check-in and Review of Covenant (Friday May 12th)

[Information deleted to provide a “clean” copy for distribution beyond the group.]

2. North Shore Check-in

Search committee has been formed to find an interim minister. Job description and organizational charge have been developed. Filling the pulpit is going well. Tom Capo will be helping the congregation through the difficulty of losing a minister. Have been unable to find a membership chair. Currently 50-75 at each worship services (as opposed to 65-70 before the storm). Some congregants are leaving for jobs in other places. More people leaving than coming in. No new members since December, although there are visitors who have been returning regularly and a few previous members have been coming to services.. An office is being set-up. A five-year financial plan is being created and will be put on a computer. Small groups, circle suppers, chalice circles, and religious education are all working well. The lay leadership has been energized. Many responsibilities have become group tasks.

3. Community Church Check-in

Currently have 50-60 members with 25-30 attending worship. Concerned about membership loss, with more loss to come. Families with young children are leaving so the congregation is aging. Hard to wake up each morning knowing that you have to be a “pioneer.” Have discussed that best option may be to stay independent and remain in the Lakeview area. Was hard to run a full program before Katrina and it is even harder now.

Architect will be assessing current building to determine the future of the building as opposed to constructing another building on the same site. Some are thinking about constructing a new building in the shape of an ark to draw attention to “rebirth.” Hoping that more people will return after the upcoming hurricane season. West Hartford, CT congregants will be conducting telephone interviews with CC members to determine their hopes and dreams for the congregation. Jim is spending more time visiting member patients in hospitals. There are more doctors leaving the area. In June, new board members will be chosen, with all off them living locally. Craig Hirshberg (former minister of Summerset Hills, NJ) will soon visit to discuss “church in a box” procedures.

4. First Church Check-in

Congregation is in a rebuilding mode. Becoming harder to manage all of the side conversations. Sometimes conversations get inaccurately defined as decisions rather than just sharing of ideas. Trying to develop a clear accountability matrix. Electricity has still not been restored to the building. Interested in building “green” and may join Ministry For Earth. Marta is trying to extricate herself from the daily management of the building. New board is ready to be installed. All positions are filled. Members of the Arlington, MA congregation and members from the Arlington Street Church in Boston are coming to work during Memorial Day weekend. May 24th workshop on managing trauma will be made available to all three congregations. Marta and the First DRE visited the Presbyterian Church across the street from First Church. Partnership between the two congregations may mean a return to the neighborhood, ample space for First religious education program, a weekly service at 9:00 am in the fellowship hall, and use of four outdoor showers, Partnership may be a good arrangement until the First building is ready for occupancy. Data has been gathered about the effectiveness of the recent public radio marketing campaign and it indicates that there is no evidence that any visitors or callers contacted the church because they heard the message.

5. General Assembly

On Thursday June 22nd from 9:30 am to 11:00 am in the Benton Room at the Renaissance Hotel, there will be a meeting for the three New Orleans’ area congregations and their partner churches.

6. Reports From Cash-flow Spreadsheet Meetings with Wayne

North Shore. Without financial support from the Gulf Coast Relief Fund, the congregation may need to sell their building, or cut staffing and perhaps return to a lay-led fellowship. Wondering if they should even be considering the expense of an interim minister. See no possibility of sharing resources with the other two congregations. Even with aggressive annual pledge growth of 10 percent to 18 percent for each of the next five years, they will still have a deficit of approximately \$64,000. Realize that if they set and achieve some measurable goals, they are more likely to receive external financial aid.

First Church. Survival is going to be a real challenge. Without external financial assistance, they will need annual pledge growth and annual membership growth of 20

percent to balance each upcoming annual operating budget. Facing significant financial issues around building maintenance, debt service, and capital expenses.

Community Church. Focus and timeline are quite different from First Church; CC is strategizing while First is rebuilding. Still planning on joint worship services with First through the summer. Cash-flow projections indicate a likely annual deficit of \$45,000 for each of the next several years. Will ask each member of each partner church to make a three-year financial commitment to CC; \$100 the first year, \$75 the second year, and another \$75 in the third year. CC members and friends will need to contribute to this “afflicted” congregation in the same way that partner churches are contributing. Have lost 40 percent of their pre-Katrina members. No current religious education program. Coming to the realization that it might be prudent to rent for a longer period of time so that they can focus on rebuilding the internal dynamics of the church. Partner churches are wanting to see a strategic plan before contributing more money.

Conversation About Financial Projections

[Information deleted for distribution beyond the group.]

7. Personal Check-in (Saturday the 13th)

[Information deleted for distribution beyond the group.]

8. Group Decisions:

- 1. Mark will send the partially completed strategic plan outline to the group by May 19th**
- 2. Previously scheduled conference calls will occur (May 31st, August 2nd, and September 6th)**
- 3. The group will meet with Mark on June 9th-10th to finish the strategic plan outline**
- 4. The group will present the strategic plan outline to each governing body and congregation between June 11th and September 29th**
- 5. The group will meet on September 29th-30th to review congregational feedback**

9. Volunteer Coordinator Discussion

Job description revisions were made to better meet the needs of the congregations.

Action Item #1: Jyaphia will share the job description revisions with Steve Crump and Meg Riley.

For now, North Shore will not be housing any volunteers.

Action Item #2: First and North Shore will each recruit volunteer coordinator candidates and submit names to the Funding Panel before our May 31st conference call.

10. Bill Sinkford Visit (June th-8th)

Action Item #3: Each governing body will determine how Bill can be most helpful during his visit. That information will be sent to Bill by May 31st.

11. Staff Salaries

Group Decisions:

- 1. That each employee (from First and CC) be given an 8% increase for one year**
- 2. That 100% of salaries for existing employees (other than the ministers) be provided by the Funding Panel**
- 3. That the Funding Panel provide 85% of the ministers' compensation, with the remaining 15% funded by each congregation**
- 4. That North Shore interim minister be given same salary as the previous settled minister [Note: Later amended, by phone, to indicate that the interim minister receive a salary more competitive with other area ministers]**

Action Item #4: Jim, Marta, and Dick will present their specific (dollar amounts) requests to Burton, who will write the proposal to the Funding Panel.

12. Evacuation Plan

Goal is to reduce anxiety among New Orleans' UUs by providing a place to stay for anyone who doesn't have a place to stay if evacuated. Best guess is as many as 60 people. District plan has not yet been completed.

Each N.O. congregation is preparing their own three-day evacuation plan.

Baton Rouge, Shreveport, and Memphis are all willing to be hosts if needed.

Action Item #5: Burton will ask each of the three host congregations to appoint an evacuation coordinator who will be ready to accept evacuees.

Action Item #6: Dick, Marta, and Jim will gather the names of people who might need a place to stay during another storm.

Respectfully submitted,

Wayne B. Clark
5.22.06