

President's Report

April 2011

As I complete my third year as President of the Thomas Jefferson District of the UUA, I stand in awe at the bold and courageous leadership in this district with whom I am privileged to serve. This boldness and courage is helping shape a renewed, energized, and focused Unitarian Universalist Association.

It is a joy to serve with our professional staff. They are innovative and have expanded their influence to the broader Southland region and beyond, and have expanded their reach through a growing professional cadre of volunteer consultants.

It is a privilege to serve with the engaged congregational leaders throughout this district. They have participated in district meetings, convocations, town hall meetings, webinars, cluster gatherings, and training events in increasing numbers to inform themselves on the myriad of issues and activities that can extend Unitarian Universalism in this part of the world.

It is energizing to serve with our trustees, the Rev. Jake Morrill, the TJD trustee, and the Rev. Jeanne Pupke, trustee at large. They make collaboration feel like shared ministry, and they have become a force of nature within our Association by their growing influence.

It is inspiring to serve with our board of directors. They demonstrate their love of this faith with their untiring commitment, passion, and energy every single day. They are living their faith.

The state of the district is good and improving. The four leadership legs—the staff, those congregational leaders in relationship with other congregations, our trustees, and the board of directors—are in covenant with one another and walking in love together. They (we) are confronting the issues of appropriate governance, becoming a multi-racial, multi-cultural movement, extending Unitarian Universalism, and assessing the role of regions.

However, I believe the state of the district could be stronger, and I have confidence that we are taking steps to make us so.

Governance

Recognizing that governance in our Association had become an inhibitor to our vitality, the board took action last October on four broad fronts that have had significant influence throughout the Association.

1. Voted to suspend Sections 2 and 3 of the TJD Board Policy Manual, Vision and Global Ends, for a trial period of approximately two years and embrace the UUA Board of Trustees' Global Ends.
2. Voted to suspend Section 8 of the TJD Board Policy Manual, Board/Executive Linkage, for a trial period of approximately two years and defer to the UUA as the singular employer of the DE and other co-employed staff.

3. Voted to enter into discussions with boards of those districts contiguous with our border, e.g. Mid-South and Florida to consider the risks and benefits of consolidation of two or more of the districts.
4. Voted to support the UUA Board of Trustees as it works to enable and monitor the Linkage policies of the Association. The TJD Board committed to be the UUA Board's partner in linkage initiatives. The District Trustee will be the champion for the UUA Board and the Vice President will be the champion for the District Board. It is anticipated that these two positions will collaborate and bring proposals for both boards to consider that will connect our congregations to each other, the District, and the Association as envisioned by the framers of the Cambridge Platform. It is further envisioned that this work will strengthen and support existing cluster groups and encourage the formation of other cluster groups.

Since we took these bold actions, the four districts of the Southland Region (TJ, Mid-South, Florida, and Southwest) met in Orlando in December and released the Orlando Platform that summarized our work and agreements. Subsequent to that meeting, all of the districts within Southland have acknowledged that the districts' Global Ends and the Association's Global Ends are the same. Moreover, these four districts and others have moved to a model of single employment of staff by the UUA. At last count, six of the nineteen districts have followed our lead and relinquished their role as co-employer of the district staff. Additionally, the Central Mid-West District has entered into a relationship with this district to share our experiences with them as they consider their response to governance changes.

A focus on governance also continues at the Association level. I served on the Task Force on UUA Board Restructuring and Representation that recommended the reduction in board size from 25 to 13. The full report can be found at http://www.uua.org/documents/boardtrustees/1104_uua_bot_restructure.pdf. The task force's vision:

- The Board of Trustees will be a board of visionary leaders whose task it is to embody a vision of the growth and development of Unitarian Universalism in a changing world.
- It will be a board that is culturally competent and accountable to historically marginalized groups, faithfully synthesizing the highest aspirations and practical concerns of Unitarian Universalism.
- It will be a board for moral, spiritual, and numerical Growth: a majority of the Board of Trustees should have enduring linkages to the growing edges of Unitarian Universalism – communities and people with whom we believe Unitarian Universalism can and should expand and flourish.
- Its role will be to forge and refine our strategic vision inspiring congregations, organizations and individuals to new ministries, new organizations, and new spiritual growth.
- It will work in covenant with the President to ensure that our resources and energies are responsibly and effectively used to meet our vision.
- The Nominating Committee will be unchanged in composition, consisting of nine members responsible for identifying, recruiting, and developing new leaders for the Association.

It is anticipated that the proposal will be on the GA Charlotte agenda for the delegates to consider.

Multi-racial, multi-cultural initiatives

The board received and approved the report of the Anti-Racism task force last August and established an AR Implementation committee, managed by the DE, and an AR Monitoring committee, managed by the Board under the chair of Peter Kandis. Additionally, the board approved funding for a People of Color gathering at Penn Center, St. Helena Island, SC that took place in February. Moreover, the board is assessing its own cultural competencies and seeking training to broaden these competencies.

Extending Unitarian Universalism

The board met in Greenville, NC for its February meeting and participated in a gathering of congregations east of I-95 in North Carolina for a visioning work shop on how Unitarian Universalism could be extended in that area.

Regionalism

As I have reported before, the UUA congregational services staff has been organized into five regions for several years. They continue to seek ways to extend specialized services across district boundaries for the benefit of all congregations. The four district boards of the Southland Region met in Orlando in December and released the Orlando Platform, specifically addressing governance issues. Out of that meeting came the consensus of the four district boards, staff, and trustees to continue to be in dialogue. Some of the dialogue has been around governance in the middle judicatory (districts) and how to reduce that effort. Additionally, we agreed to examine ways the district boards might evolve into a council of elders to encourage congregations to be in covenant with other congregations. This is often referred to as a shared ministry model. The four district boards will meet again at GA in Charlotte to continue these discussions.

In summary, the Thomas Jefferson District board has been leading the Association in taking bold and innovative steps to minimize our governance role in deference to one policy board, the UUA. We see our work together as a ministry, focusing our energies and passions on becoming a multi-racial, multi-cultural movement that will attract the hundreds of thousands of people in the Southeast who share our values. I continue to believe there are many, many people that are attracted to our values and the way we live out our faith, but who have not found us yet. There certainly are those who have the impression that we are a predominately white and affluent denomination that may not be comfortable with people like them and their stories and thus stay away. We have much more work to do to bend the arc of the universe towards justice, and we have gathered leaders who have the passion to advance that work. Our evolving task is to find ways to attract others to share that work with us and stand on the side of love.