

**FLORIDA DISTRICT
UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST
ASSOCIATION**

**BOARD – CONGREGATION
LINKAGE**

**CONSOLIDATED RESPONSES
NOVEMBER 2003 TO MARCH 2006**

JUNE 2006

Responses of Congregational Leaders to Growth End Questions in the Florida District November 2003

How do you define congregational growth?

- Growth is linked with numbers, with a clear understanding that other kinds of growth, maturational and organic, spiritual, intellectual and emotional are the basis of any kind of numerical growth.
- Thriving (RE) programs at all levels
- facilities with finances to fund them
- increased activism
- affection for and getting along with each other
- deepening trust and expansion of professional ministry
- Broadening who participates with diversity of members and leaders.

In which of the areas you mentioned does your congregation want to grow?

- “All of the above!”
- facilities
- professional ministry
- RE programs at all levels
- increased participation and greater numbers of active members, “new people to do the work”
- being a presence in the community
- Increase retention of visitors/members.

What would enable growth in these areas?

- Regional approach to PR—“Where are the [Uncommon Denomination] billboards?”
- Projects/ Programs with high visibility in the community
- Understanding of the growth process
- A home of our own/good (attractive, useful) facilities
- A professional minister
- Effective volunteer coordination
- If I knew the answer to that we would be growing!
- Less free for all mentality and better teamwork
- Make the congregational experience more rewarding for current members
- Personal contact
- Good preaching
- Follow-up by a paid membership coordinator

Where do you see resistance to growth in these areas?

- Attitude of scarcity--lack of time/energy/resources/facilities
- No desire to change size or lay-leading we are comfortable with, “It’s good enough”
- Implicit and tacit resistance due to pain of change
- People seeking a spiritual home want social contacts that seem limited in smaller congregations
- We like feeling of family; fear dynamics of change

- Inertia, entrenched habits
- Physical space
- Lone ranger mentality rather than cooperative group effort, turf squabbles
- Entrenched cliques
- Resistance to differing religious thinking; changes in services such as including prayer or blessings
- Leaders don't want to offend anyone
- Lack of long-term planning

Are there any areas in which your congregation does not wish to grow?

- None of those for us!
- Some prefer to exclude other religious outlooks, i.e. theists, pagans, wiccans, etc.
- We're tired.
- Fear of intimacy with strangers.
- Not in a hurry to hire professional ministry
- We want not just numbers, but dedicated community-seeking people who are willing to ...search for their truth...and have the courage to act upon it in their daily lives. This is difficult
- Physical space requirements are a concern (expense)
- There is resistance to talk of financial growth

Is there anything else about growth you would like to tell us?

- Envious of Methodist ads on TV
- Planning to send people to growth conference in Atlanta
- We are in process, with new enthusiastic members, plans for a new building
- We need
 - help with transition entailed in growth, i.e. awards to congregations for factors that contribute to growth
 - to see the value of being members of a movement
 - education and insight about growth and its difficulty/ramifications
 - resources from the denomination
 - to be open and accepting of those visitors considering "crossing the bridge" from traditional denominations. I've seen visitors completely turned off by diatribes against Christian churches. Our religion is not an easy path and those who are new to it need to be "gentled in".
 - to attract greater diversity and youth
 - members with good leadership abilities and the skill sets needed by our congregation/organization
 - support for spiritual growth and retreat like experiences
- Consider sponsoring GA in our District
- We seem to be working on it endlessly, as we should
- We are ready to grow and will welcome all the encouragement, nudging, and resources that are provided

What is a Healthy Congregation? Linkage Question, June 2005

Communication

- Good communication -- open, clear, relationships (minister, staff, board, congregation)
- Limit gossip
- Conflict resolution
- Involving congregation in decision-making
- Behavioral covenant
- Safe to express divergent opinion
- Respect for each other's ideas/opinions

General Community/Welcoming

- Overall sense of well-being
- Diverse membership (racial, age, sexual preference)
- Little/no controversy re: minister
- Welcoming to all who basically agree with UU Principles
- Attention to potential new members
- Creating culture of hospitality
- Good attitudes
- Have a long-range plan – intentional plan to produce cultural change -- what's the result?
- Works to bring in younger members

Connection

- Small groups
- Caring about
- Good connections to Cluster, District and UUA
- each other
- Mutually supportive of each other's search/spiritual growth

Stewardship

- Rallying together in a crisis, surviving
- Willing to pull together for the good of the whole
- Committed to regular attendance/participation
- Good level of volunteering
- Affirming/recognizing volunteers

Attitude towards Change

- Open to change & new ideas
- Music as opportunity for worship & growing
- Flexible worship times and locations

- Content with what they're doing
- Regular self-evaluation
- Open pulpit – to different religious persons and members

UU Values

- Ability to articulate Unitarian Universalism
- Lifespan Religious Education
- Social Action
- Clear sense of mission
- Known as good place in the community for UU values
- Contribution to well-being of the community at large
- Wholeheartedly invests itself in the UU principles

Organization/Growth

- Financial stability
- Growth -- Membership, programming, spiritual, intellectual, financial
- Outreach, including publicity
- Staff – minister, DRE, administrator
- Adequate facilities – parking, meeting rooms, sanctuary seating, etc.)
- Safety in general/risk management.
- Incorporating new technology

Leadership

- Accountability for responsibilities
- Good leadership -- Innovative, action, take advantage of “lucky breaks,” take risks
- Open to second chances
- Mission statement that is 25 words or less
- Leadership responds to needs of members

Florida District Board Linkage Report on Interdependence September 2005

What would it mean if your congregation was interdependent with other UU congregations?

- Greater involvement in Cluster and District events and programs
- Lay leadership would be interested in understanding connections with the larger UU community
- Better understanding of UUism
- A good spirit of cooperation with other congregations in terms of working together on programs/projects
- Expanded problem solving toolset from shared learning experiences
- More information sharing between colleagues – i.e. Ministers, presidents, etc.
- Increased emotional and religious support for our liberal viewpoint and faith system—important for geographically isolated congregations
- Opportunities to do joint fundraising, joint programming, and sharing of other kinds of services, eg. Administration, etc.
- Increased communication and flow of ideas, leading to a fuller, richer expression of the ways in which we worship, teach our children, and nurture ourselves and each other.
- More effective in terms of social justice issues
- Greater potential for collective advertising and promotion of congregations and UUism
- Greater empowerment through awareness of belonging to a large group
- There could be many advantages, together with some confusion and mixed signals.
- We would benefit financially if we shared expenses such as advertising, hosting speakers and events of mutual interest.
- We would surely become a stronger voice in our greater community/ies by being a larger, more vocal (through the above-mentioned advertising/publicity and bigger, more relevant speakers and events) presence.
- Disadvantages would come from the very nature of UUs -- their independence and "natural" leadership.
- We would be able to share our successes and challenges with our peers; and, more importantly to us, we could be testing the waters, so to speak, to make certain we're keeping in step with the rest of the UU world.
- To be interdependent means that we are mutually dependent on each other, with overlapping concerns.
- To be interdependent with other UU congregations, means we are all concerned with the strength and health of UUA as a whole: The growth of UU, attracting new members, providing a safe place for anyone to seek, explore and celebrate their beliefs, regardless of what they are. If we are interdependent with other UU congregations, we would all work together to achieve these goals.

- There was consensus rejection on the board of the term "interdependent." Instead, it was felt that "interactive" was a word more accurately describing a desirable relationship with other groups. It is believed that our church has a productive interactive relationship with other UU congregations. Our minister has close personal and past professional ties with the UU congregations in some locations. There is intercongregational visiting and exchange between our church and other closeby churches. There was relief work done following Hurricane Charley.
- Our Cluster foments ties with the five closest UU congregations several times a year. In addition, there are other, less frequent ties with other UU congregations through District programs. Our minister is currently vice president of the District UU ministers' association. We have received support from UU Chalice Lighters in the past and currently have approximately 30 percent of our members signed up as Chalice Lighters. We collected, so far, \$3,820 for the UUA Gulf Coast Disaster Relief Fund, which we understand will largely go to support UU congregations in the Hurricane Katrina devastated area.
- Our church has been represented by a delegation including congregational officers at recent UUA General Assemblies and has profited from the experience.
- Interdependence means recognition that we're all heading in a similar direction and aware that other congregations might need help (such as through Chalice Lighters). It includes supporting others outside your community, providing home hospitality for different functions, sharing newsletters, so we know what's going on and benefit from thoughts on an number of issues.
- There are some important strengths and resources that all of us could draw from such a movement:
 - Sharing of wisdom and lessons learned;
 - Strengthening of our presence in the wider community by working together on a broad variety of issues and projects;
 - The sharing of resources - leadership, specialized skills, programming;
 - Stronger support in times of stress, such as hurricanes or tornadoes, loss of minister or community leaders;
 - Renewal of spirit and hope when we see others have dealt with similar struggles.
- To be interdependent with other UU congregations: mutually helpful and supportive in systematic ways. For instance, our church helped bring other nearby churches into being, and we are presently cooperating with them on community outreach projects. In recent years, members of our congregation have been very involved in the Florida District, and our congregation has hosted conferences on both membership and integrating world religions into our congregations. Our minister just completed service on the national UUA Nominating Committee.
- Interdependence asks of each congregation a level of trust, cooperation, and mutual participation across congregational and denominational boundaries which few of our congregations manage. In my experience, individual UUs seem to get interested in denominational and ecumenical activities, but it only rarely seems to translate to congregations as a whole. In fact, it seems as though many denominational activists then lose much of their activism in their local congregation, and that some of the

people who get most interested in other denominations either move over into them, or, again, are somewhat possessive of their special connections and don't seem to try very hard to involve their congregation as a whole in these ecumenical activities. Genuine interdependence demands both a spiritual depth and an institutional commitment at both the congregational and larger levels that many UUs seem to have insufficient trust to manage. If we really want interdependence, we need to become soulful team players, rather than secular egotists. As a denomination, I think we are moving in the right directions, but I suspect you would agree that there is some vibrant resistance.

- Being interdependent with other UU congregations and groups from other faiths would in my view mean being able to contact them to find out what they are doing in specific situations and to share experiences for our mutual benefit. I could also imagine working with them to promote causes we both believe in.

What would it mean for your congregation to be interdependent with groups from other faiths?

- Greater opportunity to respond to social justice issues in the community
- Deeper understanding and broader perspective on various faith communities
- Less provincialism/separatism
- More involvement and a stronger voice in interfaith councils
- More cross-fertilization in terms of understanding each other's religious perspective
- Greater visibility for UUism in larger community
- More collective energy for social justice projects
- Being interdependent with other faiths would present many problems and be nearly impossible on theological matters, I would think. However, in matters of community issues (i.e. fighting the phosphate mining, saving energy, our critical water supply, helping to find affordable housing, feeding the poor, banding together to bring universal health care), I see great advantages and much hope for all concerned.
- UUs would be better respected as well as better known in our communities.
- Interdependence with groups of other faiths might be a good fit for some of our "committees" who might be exploring issues outside the UU family.
- Interdependency also seems to imply a certain responsibility also. While I believe that UU congregations are capable of joining together to promote the common good, I am not sure that same purpose can be accomplished in an interdependent relationship with other faiths. While we have such a relationship with our affinity groups, such as the Pagans and the Buddhists, I do not believe that many of the mainstream faiths have an agenda which would be compatible. With the affinity groups, we work together to create a place of acceptance where all beliefs are respected. I may be speaking from fear and the pain of past experience, but I believe most of the mainstream faiths have an overriding agenda which extols theirs as the "true" path - a position which dynamically opposes the relationships we seek to form.
- With regard to interaction with other faiths, again our church has demonstrated by its actions our support for the concept. Our minister took the initiative in forming the an Interfaith Community Association (ICA) in our area, an organization that is today recognizing its first anniversary with a meeting at the Jewish Community

Center. Over the past year the ICA has brought together representative Protestants, Catholics, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Baha'is, and Unitarian Universalists for a winter observance of holidays and a springtime Baccalaureate Service at the High School.

- Interdependence is taking part in joint activities that have meaning to each group, such as our dialogue with a Turkish student group, Unity in the Community, and other activities. It is also inviting individuals from other churches to address us – this promotes interdependence.
- Interdependence includes the ability to work easily in situations with other groups, initiating contact, especially through the RE curriculum in which children experience other churches/services. Making ourselves sensitive and aware of other groups. Living our principles, especially inherent worth and dignity of every individual.
- This question is of particular interest, as we try to strengthen our presence in the Florida community.
 - Increased focus on shared issues or projects, rather than theological differences;
 - The power of leveraging greater numbers of people addressing these matters;
 - Growth in understanding of one another and our shared values, coupled with a lessening of the feelings of separation between faiths;
 - An increase in the number of partnerships available to address issues and ideas;
 - An increase in shared bonds within a local area.
- To be interdependent with groups of other faiths would be: mutually helpful and supportive in systematic ways. Our congregation has worked with the liberal ecumenical organization here for many years, and with community outreach projects with many congregations. In recent years, we have hosted several ecumenical services beginning with 9/11, and out of these efforts grew the Wage Peace organization, which has many of their meetings at our church and much of their leadership from our church, but has become quite broad, both with other denominations and with secular activists. Because of the minister's personal history with IARF, UU-UNO, and the Peace Network, they have been very involved in non-violent activist activities in the area, including the Alternatives to Violence program, the umbrella committee for non-violence efforts, Wage Peace, and in teaching non-violence, truth and reconciliation, and the religions of India at the local University.
- Being interdependent with other UU congregations and groups from other faiths would in my view mean being able to contact them to find out what they are doing in specific situations and to share experiences for our mutual benefit. I could also imagine working with them to promote causes we both believe in. In fact, I have often contacted people at the local UCC (United Church of Christ) and have said to others that "they are as nearly as liberal as Unitarians but much better organized." I have followed their lead on several major occasions. However, I would not call us INTERdependent because they have never asked me for advice or assistance in return.

Is it important for your congregation to be interdependent with other UU congregations?

- Yes, very important, especially on a local level to enable a positive effect in the community
- Yes, it is important, but can be difficult to accomplish because:
- Small congregations struggling to survive tend to be internally focused
- Smaller congregations are limited in terms of time/energy to commit to involvement with other congregations
- Newer UUs often don't realize that there is a larger UU faith community with which to become involved. It can take a long time for them to understand the connections and how the opportunities they present
- New UUs are strongly focused on their own congregations
- Older UUs have a better understanding and appreciation of the connection with the larger faith, but are often too burnt out from their work in their own congregations to pursue more involvement
- Interdependence could be very important, but not sure how it would work, not sure how we're defining "interdependence"
- In brief, the answer to the District's queries is we are in favor of interactive relationships with both other UU congregations and other faiths.

Congregations included in comments: Boca Raton, Ft. Lauderdale, Key West, Miami First, St. Croix, Port Charlotte, Sun City Center, Cocoa, Venice, Tallahassee, Brooksville, Jacksonville, Gainesville

**Florida District Board Linkage Report on Self-Governance
March 2006**

How does your style of self governance help your congregation live the UU Principles and increase the UU presence in the world?

In answer to your question about how our church's style of self-governance help us live the UUA principles and increase our presence in the world:

1. Our democratic organization means that we are able to present ourselves as a 21st century institution in a religious world which is still often in the 19th century of civic activism.
2. Our Board, officers and staff have made communicating with the congregation a major priority this year. We have a systematic congregational survey every three years, and last year's results indicated this was a primary concern within the congregation. The Board has done this through a summary of a Board minutes in the monthly newsletter, the President reporting to the congregation for a few minutes at a Sunday service more or less monthly, and e-mails to everyone with e-mail whenever there is something that the leadership feels the congregation needs to know. There have also been two follow-up services on the survey and other congregational initiatives. All this really seemed to help.
3. A period of responses to the sermon are a regular part of our Sunday liturgy, as are Joys and Sorrows which may be done verbally, by simply lighting a candle, or by putting information for the Minister into a loose leaf notebook.
4. The Committee on the Ministry has also initiated response cards that are in the pamphlet rack by the door [and which may also be mailed in], and envelopes for cash contributions [so that individuals may be credited for cash contributions.
5. Our stipend Membership Coordinator produces an annual photographic directory, periodic updates for the Directory, and photos of the new members. This really helps people get connected. Along with monthly orientations for prospective members and mini-mixers with new and longer-time members, these help with the integration of new people.
6. Our Nominating Committee makes a deliberate attempt to represent our congregation's diversity in our elected officers [This has included 3 African-American Presidents in the last decade, 2 Hispanic Treasurers, two Lesbian Presidents, and a good range of women and men leaders of different ages, backgrounds, and incomes. If a congregation is going to actually welcome diversity, it needs to elect the variety it wishes to support to elective to office
7. I find that people have a harder and harder time with meetings generally, and we usually need to schedule meetings on Sundays in order to get a crowd unless it is a very committed group.

I would like to discuss this in other forms beside e-mail. I find great discrepancies in the statement and practice of local autonomy of our

congregations and the relationship to the UUA and UUMA. It has been my experience the congregations are not the first consideration of the surrounding institutions.

Our congregation identifies itself as an independent congregation within the Association of Congregations. Our polity is based upon the purposes & principles as set forth in the UUA guidelines, our bylaws and the will of the Fellowship membership. We think the Florida District and us have the same relationship.

From board members at one congregation:

- To be democratic means respect for every individual, which reflects our principles.
- One recent example of democracy is that we hammered out (with some difficulty) a policy that freed our Social Concerns Committee to speak out in the community.
- The reference to ministerial initiative is positive because it doesn't require a vote. It allows people with common interests and values to work in small groups and involve others.
- We don't know who the hell we are. I can't say how we are governed. Strong direction is provided by ministers, who must be good at what they do. That leadership has been missing here over the past four years.
- I am not sure that our self-governance will increase our UU presence in the world. That is to misread the sentence you inquire about. Rather, living our UU principles will increase our UU presence in the world. These are two different things. We are congregational churches with self-governance due to our history, but I am not sure that is an asset for increasing our presence in the world. On the other hand, Michael Durall at his recent seminar said that independent congregations are the ones most able to be flexible and grow (he was referring to the mega-churches, however).

A white paper written by a board member from one congregation:

Our Style of Self Governance

In response to the request to consider the above topic, I have prepared this review of a leading textbook in the field, Henry Mintzberg, *The Structuring of Organizations*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1979.

The business school context from which this field emerged has not agreed on a term for how organizations govern themselves: management policy, policy theory, strategic decision making, management of the total organization are some of the terms used. The key to governance he claims is "structure," and that 'form follows function,' that is, organizations structure and govern themselves according to what they do, their function, not the other way round.

Three of the five structures he examines are the "Simple Structure" characterized by a visionary entrepreneur who engages and inspires a work force to carry out his plan. Examples include start-up businesses with a new way to serve a public need, such as Southwest Airlines under its founder Herbert D. Kelleher. The Carver Model seems to fit this structure.

A more familiar structure is the "Professional Bureaucracy" characteristic of universities, hospitals, and school systems with standardization of skills for employees and giving them considerable control over their own work.

The final structure in his list of five is the "Adhocracy" characterized by a "large number of task forces and standing committees used to encourage mutual adjustment among the different units." The classic example of such an organization is UNICEF that because environment and tasks change frequently requires fluid communications "to emphasize dialogue, problem solving, and learning rather than reporting, controlling, and explaining." Other characteristics of adhocracies include: people "who believe in more democracy and less bureaucracy," and willing to live with "ambiguities, and inefficiencies." The tendency of this, as with all structures, is toward more bureaucracy whether suitable to the tasks undertaken or not.

Of all the structures he studied I believe we are closest to an adhocracy. We are profoundly drawn to democracy in both our history and practice, but we are confronted by a challenge to growth that seems to involve more ultimate control by the minister. I have long believed that the ideal form of government would be one in which a loving god made all the decisions. Unfortunately, I no longer believe in that type of god and any human being, even ministers, are prone to fall far short of that ideal. As Churchill observed, "democracy is the worst form of government, except for all the rest." A good leader does not have to be undemocratic, just sensitive to the needs and wants of a congregation so as not to lead where no one wants to go. Hence, I believe that ministerial initiative is preferable to ministerial authority.

This Adhocracy structure seems most compatible with each of the seven UU principles, and to have the most appeal to those most likely to be attracted to UU congregations.