



THE BEACON

UUA Convenes Conversation on Economic Sustainability



In early June, Unitarian Universalists traveled from all over the country to St. Louis, to take part in a two-day conversation on economic sustainability in ministry. The conversation took place at the Hotel Dubois, in the heart of downtown. "We knew this

was going to be an emotional conversation," said UUA Fiscal Director, Oliver Downder. "So we wanted to make sure to create the right setting." Conference planners purchased sectional sofas and armchairs with non-allergenic stuffing, and

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Welcome to General Assembly in Portland!

Featured Workshops:

"Blood from a Stone": Fundraising in a New Era!

"Your Mother Doesn't Work Here": Church Kitchens Where People Do What the &# They're Supposed To

"It's More Than a Phone Call": Stalking and Capturing New Members of the Grounds Committee

"But We Don't Want to Sing in 7/4 Time": What to Do When Your Music Director Gets Ambitious

"Oblivisci praevidere possumus cum volumus nos procer."

UUA Considers Suing The Presbyterian Church (USA) for Infringement

In March, after years of careful, and sometimes contentious, debate, the Presbyterian Church (USA) finally settled the question of recognizing same-sex marriages in the affirmative. Many in the struggle for equal marriage celebrated. Many, but not all.

"A little late to the party, aren't they?" asked UUA President Peter Morales, when asked for a comment.

Director of Multicultural Ministries, Rev. Bonnie Jonasson, said, "It does make things awkward."

Several weeks of discussion at the UUA resulted in clear resolve. As well-intentioned as the Presbyterians may have been in their historic vote, it was not without unintended consequences. "Look,"

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Congregation Expresses Concern About “Sermonating”

“I worry,” says Doris McCann, chair of the Worship Committee. “Sometimes, it will be Thursday, and I won’t even want to open up Facebook.” McCann is not alone. Ever since calling Rev. Melinda Holmes as the settled minister of the UU Congregation of Rapid Forks (Minnesota), church-members have been privy to the anguish that accompanies the development of each Sunday’s service.

“Yo, Sermonators!” a typically peppy post might say on a Wednesday. But by that evening, the church-members will read Rev. Holmes’s Facebook page, where it will say, “Nothing. Absolutely zero. Why did I ever get into this line of work?”

By Friday evening, Holmes might post, as she did recently, simply the word, “Ugh.” But church-members have learned what it means. Most don’t even look at their minister’s posts on Saturday night.

“It gives you perspective,” says Building and Grounds Chair, David Allard. “Writing a sermon sure sounds pretty hard.” Allard’s wife died earlier this spring, but he says, “Knowing that Melinda’s sermon-writing process was so painful—actually being able to follow her pain in real-time—let me know that I’m not the only one in the world who’s suffering now.”

McCann, the Worship Chair, says, “Sometimes, I wonder



what newcomers might think, if they friend Melinda on Facebook, to know that she’s in such pain every week. I went into bankruptcy last year, and don’t think I mentioned it to more than one or two close friends. But who am I to judge? I’ve never written a sermon. Must be almost more than a person can bear.”

2015 Starr-King Commencement Disappoints Bloggers



On Thursday, May 14, students and faculty of the Starr-King School for the Ministry gathered at the historic First Church of Oakland for commencement festivities. It was a fine occasion, which saw a number of happy graduates honored and awarded the diplomas for which they had strived. By all reports, those in attendance were happy with the occasion. But if those in attendance

were pleased, those at a distance had a different experience.

“What a let-down,” wrote blogger Jason Ramsbottom, of Orlando, Florida. “Heading into commencement season this year, you felt such hope. Such excitement. A sense that something really dramatic could happen. And then the day came and went, and nothing. It was just a graduation.”

Renee Simpson, a UU blogger from Virginia Beach, Virginia agreed. “I specifically took a week off from work this year, right when the Starr-King commencement was scheduled. I wanted to have plenty of blogging time. I wanted to be able to devote myself to the conversation. And then

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Unitarian Universalists Commemorate Civil Rights Struggle with Anniversary

They will gather to remember. They'll gather to tell stories. They'll gather to reflect on a legacy of painful race relations, and a legacy of healing. This October, to mark forty years since those days of trouble, Unitarian Universalists from all over will gather in a city known for its racial divisions: Boston, Massachusetts.

Following a class-action lawsuit brought by the NAACP against the Boston Public Schools, in 1974, Judge W. Arthur Garrity, Jr. of the United States District Court found a recurring pattern of racial discrimination in the Boston Schools. He ruled that the schools were unconstitutionally segregated, and required the implementation of the school's Racial Imbalance Act, requiring any Boston school with a student enrollment that was more than 50% non-white to be balanced according to race. Because it meant busing students across district line, the issue was referred to as "busing." It was then that Boston showed what it was made of. The Boston School Committee, led by Louise Day Hicks, refused to implement the plan. Rather than comply with the order to integrate, parents kept their children home: out of a total student population of 100,000, attendance stood for some time at 40,000. Out of 550 white South Boston students ordered to attend high school in primarily-black Roxbury, only 13 showed up. Parents of Boston Public School students showed up to protest against integration every day. Whites and blacks began entering through different doors. A white citizens group was formed, called "Restore Our Alienated Rights," or "ROAR." Protests turned violent, some resulting in deaths. Through all this racial turmoil, Unitarian Universalists—veterans of the Civil Rights movement—was right in the thick of it.

"I remember," recalls UUA staffer Todd Dobbins, "that Bob West, who was President of the Association at the time, was trying to get to 25



Beacon Street, to get to work one day. He had two very important meetings with donors. But the Park Street station was just packed with protesters. There were white people shouting racist epithets. There were black people arguing for the right to a decent public education. It was a mess," says Dobbins. "If I remember correctly, West had to reschedule one of those donor meetings."

Others tell more sobering stories. "I had my eye on a nice place in the South End," says UUA staffer Beth Yardley-Swann. "That was right around when the neighborhood was starting to get safe, you

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Economic Sustainability (Cont.)

had them shipped to St. Louis for the event. "You can say things on a sectional sofa that you wouldn't say if you were seated otherwise," Downder explained. The menu was Catalan, featuring seafood shipped overnight from Barcelona. "There's a creativity in Barcelona," said Downder. "I mean, the architecture alone: Gaudi! Gehry! That's what you call 'outside the box.' We wanted to import that kind of thinking right to where we were, at the Hotel Dubois."

In fact, conference planners did even better. At the last minute, they invited world-renowned architect Frank Gehry himself to join them in St. Louis for this important conversation. "It was a little last minute," Downder chuckles. "We were sitting in the stairwell at Farnsworth, the butcher paper literally covered with marker, when somebody—I don't know who—said, 'What if we just brought Gehry to this thing!' It was like a light-bulb went off. We knew it was right. Being last minute, yes, the cost was more than we would have liked. But a conversation like this is very important. So, we wanted to make sure it was done right."

After Gehry's brief remarks, he spent the remainder of the time at a corner table with rapper and St. Louis entertainment artist, Nelly, who had also been retained as a creative resource, to aid the conversation partners as they explored the topic.

"Economic sustainability is so important," Downder

says. "We're talking about people's investments. Their debts. Their lives. We're talking about the future of the faith. We've just got to get this right. So, we're going to keep talking." The next conversation on economic sustainability will be held in San Antonio, Texas, this fall, with the theme, "Diamonds and Debt: A Night on the Danube."

Infringement (Cont.)

said UUA lawyer Debra Sanford. "We appreciate the sentiment. But they've got to understand. What they're trying to do hurts our brand."

According to several sources close to the UUA, representatives of the Association approached officials for the PCUSA at their headquarters in Louisville, Kentucky, with requests for them to end this new policy. All requests were ignored.

"For years," said Sanford, "Unitarian Universalists have stood for marriage equality. Not as secular people. But as people of faith. It was what we were known for. Now, if other faith traditions are going to start supporting marriage equality, where does that leave us? From a market perspective, I mean."

Summer Poem

Fading
Is the flower
That is yellow.
Well, not
Quite yellow,
But kind of
Lime green.
Like life,
Sometimes,
You can't
Put your finger
On. Or what I
Mean is name
Your feelings.
Like when
Sandra left.
My therapist
Said why not
write
a poem? To
Put it into
Words?
Hoot
says the owl.
Hoot hoot.

--Beth Tyler
(Hiddenwood, Florida)

Commencement Disappoints (continued) nothing happened."

Around the blogosphere, similar sighs of dismay could be heard that the Starr-King School for the Ministry appears determined to chart a course of "normalcy," despite the hopes and expectations of many.

"For a while," confessed the Rev. Katrina Salter, of Northwest UU Church, in Norgin, Iowa, "Starr-King was all I thought about. Every day, I'd search the internet. It was all I talked with my friends about. It was so exciting. And now?" For a moment, she appears lost. "Now, it just seems like another seminary out there in California somewhere. People get an education there or something. I don't know what I was thinking. I didn't even go there."

Asked about this deflating turn of events, Starr King representatives said, "We are pleased to say that we have no comment."

Civil Rights (continued)

know? A lot more, you know, 'professionals' were moving in. Real estate was still a decade away from the boom. Could have made a fortune. But," she sighs. "Not after the protests. It just felt too volatile to live in the city. So, I bought in Concord."

UUA Communications Coordinator, Stan Parkley, says that it's important for Unitarian Universalists to gather at places like this, to remember. "This is not only part of American history," he observes. "It says something about us."

These days, Boston, Massachusetts is known as a sleepy seaside city, its days of glory behind it. But, as Unitarian Universalists flood its streets, singing songs of the 1970s, and marching through neighborhoods which once knew the stain of racism, they will help bring the city alive once again. They'll take selfies. They'll tweet. They will pray. And then, inspired by the past to fight the battles of today, they will depart from this city and its history of racial divide, and go back home to fulfill the promises of a new day.

MFC Awards Fellowship to Halliburton Executive



"Technically," says Kevin Simon, "it's not ministry. But it feels like ministry. Like forging a new relationship with the planet earth." Simon, a 2012 graduate of Meadville-Lombard Theological School, works for Halliburton Company in their division of new

process development. "We're trying to see if nuclear waste can be harnessed to the process of fracking, by setting off small nuclear explosions under the earth in populated areas. We're also developing an enormous drill, the size of Australia, that will drill down to the earth's core, extract all that material, and dump it into the ocean." Simon says that, after graduating from Meadville, he expected to go into parish ministry. "But," he shrugs, "the Spirit of Life must have had other plans." Simon admits that his new career has gained him a certain amount of wealth, which allows him to generously support the UUA.

"The word for his ministry," says UUMA Exec Harley Painter, "is 'entrepreneurial.' Ministry isn't always going to use hymnals. Sometimes, it's going to use fracking equipment. Kevin is a pioneer in ministry. And such a generous heart."

"Kevin's a nice guy," says MFC Chair Sonya Buncombe. "We just weren't sure whether detonating nuclear explosions to improve the fracking process or emptying the core of the earth so as to pollute the oceans could really be called 'ministry.' In fact, we're concerned that both of Kevin's projects could have unintended, horrific consequences. But we had a really good conversation with some folks in Stewardship. They helped us see Kevin in a new light. In fact, we decided to forego preliminary fellowship altogether. He's got final. What the heck! We hope Kevin will be a friend for life."

The UUA Welcomes New Fellowship



"I had a dream," says Manfred Littlefield, "of Unitarian Universalism right here in Topshaw County." Three years later, that dream has come true. At General Assembly 2015, the UUA will

welcome the The Walter Whiskers Memorial Fellowship of North Topshaw. Topshaw County, Arkansas, is home to a population of only 300 people. "But," Littlefield points out, "People's not the only ones that live here."

A long-time aficionado of, and companion to, house-cats, Littlefield found himself in a quandary when, in 2009, his longtime "fur-baby," Walter Whiskers passed away. "The Methodists wouldn't give him a proper funeral. The Church of Christ wouldn't even answer my calls." So, Littlefield began to search the Internet. He learned about an inclusive religion that cast a wide net. "Unitarian Universalism welcomes everyone--doesn't matter if they happen to walk on two legs or four," he says with some passion. "I knew I'd found a faith tradition I could call my own. Besides, it had been a few weeks since Walter had passed. We needed to get going on the burial then."

In the presence of the 47 other cats who also live with him, Littlefield held a Unitarian Universalist service to celebrate Walter's life. But it didn't stop there. Littlefield sent off

for application materials to form a new congregation in Topshaw County. After some initial get-togethers--"purely social," Littlefield says--the group was ready to form into a congregation. So far, it has grown quickly, with 236 members

and at least 32 friends. Littlefield and his sister, Janet, remain the only Fellowship members who are, technically, human, but they have hope. Janet's husband has expressed curiosity, tinged with mild concern, over the group's weekly meetings. "He was raised traditional," explains Littlefield. "When he was a boy, you wouldn't set out kibble at coffee hour. You wouldn't have a scratching post, say, at the annual meeting. He'll come around."

As for the UUA, there is nothing but excitement. "When we started to discuss 'Congregations and Beyond,'" says staffer Holly Warren, "we wanted to dream of expanding the faith. But we never thought about cats."

Plans are underway to design General Assembly 2016 in Columbus, Ohio. "Litter boxes," says Warren. "Designated basking zones where shafts of sunlight often come through the windows."

For now, the Walter Whiskers Memorial Fellowship has encountered its first minor setback that has the congregation discussing the limits of inclusion. "Last week, when we met for potluck," says Littlefield, "one of the members brought a dead mouse."

POPE FRANCIS ADDED TO BULLETIN BOARD OF FAMOUS UUs***

People who walk into Dancing River UU Congregation of Wangly Falls (DRUUCWF) will soon see a new face smiling out from the Bulletin Board of Famous UUs***. Joining the Dalai Lama, Mahatma Gandhi, Rumi, Martin Luther King, Steve Jobs, and Moses, will be Pope Francis.

"It wasn't an easy decision," explained Mary Gilbertson, board chair of DRUUCWF. "People really disagreed about this one."

Opponents of adding the Pope to the bulletin board were upset about his lack of initiative to ordain women. John Ferguschild, spokesperson for "Not With Our ThUUmbtacks," explained, "We just don't see Pope Francis respecting the inherent worth and dignity of every person. We have to have standards." When this reporter observed to Zimmerperson that all of the people featured on the bulletin board were male, he sighed. "We're all works in progress," he said. "No one is perfect."

The majority of DRUUCWF members, clearly, disagreed with Ferguschild, and the vote to add the Pope to the bulletin board was 27-19 (with 12 people submitting their own proposals with alternate wording, and abstaining from the vote).

Churchmember Betty Nelson was elated. "We have listened to this pope's words, and watched his actions, and clearly he is UU***," she declared. Nelson makes seed art portraits of all of the Famous UUs*** which are the center of the bulletin board. She says that it is "inspiring to share a faith "with a Famous UU*** like the Pope, although she is concerned that neither white beans nor navy beans are as bright as his robes.



The church board voted to create The Bulletin Board of Famous UUs*** for their fiftieth anniversary in 2007. An ad campaign by the Unitarian Laymen's League brought them together in 1957, when an ad in the Wangly Falls Weekly asked, "Are you a Unitarian without knowing it?" A traveling minister then met with 7 people, and helped them to gather more to organize what was then called the Wangly Falls Unitarian Fellowship (WFUF). DRUUCWF is one of more than 400 UU congregations which got their start in this way.

"Just as we didn't know we were Unitarians," explained Ferguson, "We know that many others have lived and even died without coming to their true religious identity as Unitarian Universalists. Sadly, they just did not evolve that far in their spiritual lives. This bulletin board feels like handing on our legacy, paying it forward."

***who don't know it

UUA Headquarters to Relocate Again

It's conventional wisdom in 2015 that the pace of change is accelerating, and nowhere is that truer than at 24 Farnsworth. Or 24 Farnsworth, for the time being, at least. Already, there is a stack of cardboard boxes down near the front door. Once again, the UUA is on the move.

"It's important to know how to fail," says UUA Director of Failure, Dobbins Pierce. "You can't always do the safe thing. So, we gave it a go on Farnsworth. Didn't work. Time to move."

From reports, there were several aspects of the Farnsworth location that did not serve the UUA staff well. At the root of the trouble was the open office design. The Farnsworth offices were set up so as to encourage an open flow of ideas and inter-change. The experience, say staffers, was less than ideal. Reports have circulated about a fight, one morning in February, about the temperature control settings for the main work

area. The fight escalated, became physical, and could only be soothed when the bakery next door provided complimentary muffins.

More generally, UUA staffers have experienced ongoing contact with co-workers to discourage, rather than encourage, productivity. "There's this guy in finance," says one anonymous source on UUA staff, "who watches old Saturday Night Live episodes on the internet at night. Then the next day? He wants to act them all out. Like on the half-hour! I can't get anything done."

Other staffers, according to reports, are now known to hum or to mutter as they do their work. And there was a day, in April, when a room full of staff-members realized that they had spent five hours of the work-day assessing summer fun-wear, rather than completing work on the UUA budget.

"It's been great for my social life," says one staffer (anonymous). "But I have to say, I'm glad we're moving



At the root of the trouble was the open office design.

again. There's a lot of work to catch up on."

"I don't care if I have a small office," says another staffer, in a senior position. "What's key is a door. A door you can shut. Some people just never stop talking."

The UUA senior staff, which, according to some reports, had suffered some mild organizational malaise, akin to post-partum depression, are said now to be energized by the pending move. "We live in an era of change," says Vice President of Risk, Winn Tinder. "We need to keep up. Relocating the headquarters every few months will make us a more nimble, agile organization."



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