

April 2009 - Newsletter

# Massachusetts Bay District of Unitarian Universalist Congregations



## In This Issue

### Congregational What?

Resources on  
Congregational Polity

Mystery Worshippers  
Program

### **Annual Meeting**

April 25, 2009

There's still time to  
[register](#)  
your delegates for  
the MBD Annual  
Meeting.

Fair Share status not  
required to attend or  
vote.

### **Spring Conference**

April 25, 2009

### **Seeking Wholeness in a Fragmented World**

An opportunity for UUs in  
our district to join in a day  
of worship, renewal and  
community reflection on  
ways that we can sustain  
our spiritual communities  
during a time of uncertainty  
and realignment.

You can also sign up to sign  
in the District Choir!

[DETAILS](#)

[MAIL-IN REGISTRATION](#)



## Congregational *What?*

by [Rev. Sue Phillips](#)

Director of Program Development

*"Although churches be distinct, and  
therefore may not be confounded one with  
another: and equal, and therefore have not  
dominion one over another: yet all the churches ought to  
preserve Church Communion one with another, because they  
are all united..."* (Cambridge Platform, 1648)

Most of us sitting in the pews on Sunday morning take pride in the autonomy of our Unitarian Universalist congregation, which calls its own minister, creates its own annual budget, and decides which symbols adorn its sanctuary. All those important decisions are ours and ours alone.

This same sense of congregational independence was equally prized by our Puritan forebears - indeed they were its authors. But those wise people also knew that unchecked autonomy is no healthier for individual churches than it is for individual people. They knew that autonomous congregations - like people - are stronger when they band together. And so the early churches joined in a covenant, promising each other "care, consultation, admonition, participation, recommendation and relief." This is congregational polity.

And this is why the Massachusetts Bay District of UU Congregations and the Unitarian Universalist Association exist: to help congregations help each other. The 55 UU congregations in the Mass Bay District band together to offer one another leadership development, technical training on everything from worship to stewardship, assistance during the search for professional leadership, grant funds for growth projects and District staff to turn to when they need support.

Ours is a living theological tradition, but our polity has remained virtually unchanged for hundreds of years. The

FORMONLINE REGISTRATION

The congregation that registers the largest percentage of members can send a team to one Learning Congregation workshop for free next year!

### Coming to Salt Lake City in June?



General Assembly is June 24-28 in Salt Lake City and [registration](#) is now open. Come see a new UUA President elected and enjoy [UU University](#) as an integral part of GA programming.

Salt Lake City was such a wonderful site for 1999 GA that we are back again! The city isn't what many think. A majority of the population is non-Mormon, 40% are people of color, and three state legislators representing the city are openly gay or lesbian. Beautiful pre/post GA vacation opportunities abound!

We hope to see you there.

relationships among congregations that we nurture here in the Mass Bay District are very much what our religious ancestors envisioned.

The Puritans came to the New World to recreate the early Christian communities described in the New Testament. They left England to escape the authority of decidedly man-made ecclesiastical hierarchies, which these deeply religious people felt infringed upon pure Christianity. But the innovations our religious ancestors introduced were not primarily theological. They were organizational. They were about polity, about how the new communities should relate to each other, rather than what they should believe. And so, in 1648, just years after the first settlers arrived in Massachusetts, leaders gathered in a swampy village just over the river from Boston to talk about how the new communities could walk together while still honoring their autonomy. Together they created an amazing document known as the Cambridge Platform.

The Platform spells out all the rights of local congregations that we still enjoy today. Each church could elect its own leaders and minister and worship in a format of its choosing. Given their history of religious persecution, the Puritans wanted local churches to be free from all outside control. But even so, the polity they created stressed not the *autonomy* of churches but their *communion*.

Imagine this for just a second: the communities were miles and miles apart, people traveled primarily on foot, and for months out of the year the villages were snowbound. But despite all the hardships they faced, their primary concern was how to help each other and to stay in relationship.

The modern-day congregations of the Mass Bay District have two opportunities coming up to help each other and stay in relationship. The District's [Annual Meeting](#) on April 25 allows delegates from each congregation to share wisdom and vote on important issues facing our religious movement. Congregations also have the opportunity to support each other (and themselves!) by pledging their Fair Share of District dues. These contributions get plowed right back into our congregations in the form of consultations, leadership development trainings, retreat facilitation and a host of other District services.

Congregational polity is so much more than a justification for independence. It is the vehicle of interdependence. In a religious movement without a shared theological center, our

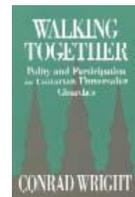
polity is what holds us together - it's the covenant at the center of our free faith.

## Resources for Congregational Polity

### Interdependence: Renewing Congregational Polity

An excellent [resource](#) from the UUA's Commission on Appraisal exploring the theology behind and current practice of congregational polity in our religious movement.

### Walking Together: Polity and Participation



A helpful [overview](#) of the history and evolution of congregational polity in Unitarian and Universalist congregations.



### Mystery Worshippers Program

Congregational interdependence at work! When your congregation requests a visit from a team of Mystery Worshippers, trained volunteers will attend services on Sunday morning and help evaluate your congregation's hospitality toward newcomers and visitors. To learn more, or to request a Mystery Worshipper visit, [click here](#).

### [MBD News Editor](#)

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