

Newsletter - January 2010

Massachusetts Bay District of Unitarian Universalist Congregations



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Reading the Tea Leaves: the Future of Our Faith

by Rev. Dr. Terasa Cooley
District Executive



Each New Year begins with looking backward as well as forward. Something about the beginning of a new decade makes these reflections more intense. Much happened in the past decade that surprised us, both positively and negatively. Instinctively, and perhaps naively, we want to prepare ourselves for what will come. Of course, we can never really know, but that doesn't stop us from guessing! So let me join this trend and reflect upon the status of Unitarian Universalism. Is there great hope and prosperity in our future or do we need to be concerned about our survival?

We recently elected a new President for the UUA, the Rev. Peter Morales, who won this office by declaring we need a new religion for a new age. Many resonated with his recognition of our great potential to meet the challenges of a new age: we are the religion of complexity, acknowledging that there are no simple answers in life, and yet striving to make meaning out of chaos. An honest assessment of our numbers, however, reveals that instead of growing in size and influence, our movement has shrunk in comparison to the population at large. Our adult membership has remained roughly the same over the last several years, and the numbers of children and families have gone down.

What is happening here? Why are we losing ground? Are we fated to be a quaint relic of the past or can we look at changes in the culture around us and find a path toward revitalization and growth?



One tool that can help us make this assessment is a new study called "Faith Formation 2020." [[Click here](#) for a

Using Facebook and New Media Webinar (April TBD)

Collegial Conversation for Ministers and DREs on Faith Formation 2020 (April, TBD)

[MBD Spring Conference: Spreading the Good News through New Media and Social Networking](#) (May 1)

[Leading Through Change](#) (May 8)

Creating and Leading Dynamic Lay-Led Worship (June 12)

Events @ Congregations

To see what's coming up at congregations, check out the congregation calendar on the MBD website [here](#).

If your congregation has an event to list on this calendar, contact [Judy Murray](#) with your information.



complete summary of the study process and data. [Click here](#) to review highlights of the study in slide format.]

"Faith Formation 2020" is an analysis of demographic and cultural changes that helps us see what our challenges are.

Some interesting observations of this study:

- Participation in religious life is declining. If current trends continue, by 2020 14.7% of Americans will be attending worship; 85% of Americans will be staying away.
- By 2050, the white population will be no longer by the majority (47%). Minority ethnic groups will be the majority: Hispanics (29%), Black (13%), and Asian (9%).
- Protestants will lose majority status (51.3% in 2008) as the U.S. becomes more religiously diverse.

What does information like this say about our future, given our Protestant ethos and the largely white, older populations in our congregations?

In particular, this study presents us with a dramatic challenge in how we understand ourselves as serving the spiritual needs of young families and children:

- The structures and patterns of family life in the United States are changing
 - More couples are delaying marriage
 - Couples are having fewer children and later in life
 - There is a decreasing number of children in two-parent households
- Many are rediscovering the impact of parents and families on faith practice
 - Parent Influence: The single most important social influence on the religious and spiritual lives of adolescents is their parents.
 - Embedded Family Religious Practices: Effective religious socialization comes about through specific religious activities that are firmly intertwined with the daily habits of family life
- People understand education as happening in different ways than we traditionally understood. We are learning to pay attention to
 - Multiple kinds of intelligences
 - Diversity of learning styles
 - Active, in-depth learning

- Project-based learning
- Collaborative learning

Our traditional concept of religious education in our congregations was quite innovative when it was developed fifty years ago, but these cultural changes ask us to consider whether a model of conveying information about religion to children in developmentally appropriate ways is meeting the needs of people looking for more experiential, multigenerational and spiritually focused faith formation.

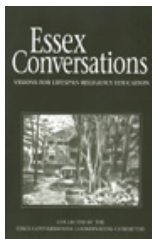
We spend enormous resources on trying to serve our children in congregations: sometimes more than half our congregation is involved in teaching in the church school. We have dedicated and skilled religious educators who work tirelessly to organize activities. In the face of all these good intentions and great effort, to recognize that our numbers of children are shrinking can be disheartening at best. But what if we freed ourselves from this disappointment by recognizing that the problem is not that we need to try harder or do better at the same thing. Perhaps we need to completely rethink the way in which we create opportunities for spiritual growth for people of all ages.

We at the MBD District take these trends and implications extremely seriously and want to help all of us engage in a creative conversation to re-envision our faith and its relevance to how people actually live in today's world. This is not just an issue for religious educators and RE Committees to pay attention to. This is a serious challenge for all of us who care about the future of our faith. We believe in the enormous potential of Unitarian Universalism and want to make sure we are a vital force in the future.

Watch for opportunities to join with us in this conversation and to develop new strategies for growing into our future. As always, please feel free to contact us with any questions or concerns you have about your congregational life.

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Resource for Re-envisioning RE



Essex Conversations: Visions for Liberal Religious Education

Skinner House, 2001

A provocative collection of essays written by some of our premier religious educators asking us to re-envision our understanding of religious education.

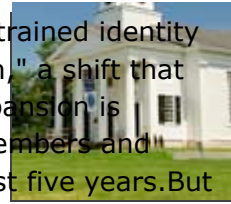
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First Parish in Sherborn Chosen as UUA Breakthrough Congregation!

We are thrilled to announce that the [First Parish in Sherborn](#), a Unitarian Universalist Area Church has been chosen by the UUA to be one of the four "Breakthrough Congregations" to be celebrated at General Assembly this summer.



In just a few years, this exciting congregation has moved from a constrained identity as "First Parish in Sherborn" to the "Unitarian Universalist Area Church," a shift that both creates and reflects the congregation's expanding vision. This expansion is reflected in sheer numbers: a 42% increase in the number of adult members and 180% growth in children registered for religious education over the last five years. But more importantly, the congregation has activated its vision with expanded programs, strong financial support, gifted lay leadership and a dynamic minister, all the while deepening its relationship with the District, our religious movement, and the wider community.



The church will be producing a short video to be presented at GA, as well as a workshop in which people will have a chance to ask questions and learn from their model. The video, along with those from the three other congregations, will be put together as a DVD available following GA. Video clips from previous UUA Breakthrough Congregations are available for viewing. [Click here to access.](#)

It is so wonderful to have a congregation from Massachusetts prove that we are a vital and growing faith! Congratulations to all!

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MBD Begins Webinar Trainings

We are happy to announce that the District will begin offering trainings using webinar technology. The first two trainings include:

- **Beyond Fundraising** with Wayne Clark on February 9 from 7 to 8:30 PM. [Click here](#) for more information. [REGISTER](#)
- **Ten Good Ideas for Small Congregations** offered through the Northern New England District with Karen Brammer. This will be offered twice, once on February 10 from 7 to 8:30 PM and again on February 11 at the same time. [Click here](#) for more information and registration details.



Look for more webinars in the future.

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Winter is the Perfect Time to Think about Summer - in Minneapolis!

February is an excellent time to start making plans to attend General Assembly, June 23-27, 2010 in Minneapolis. Although registration for GA will not open until March 1st, this is an ideal time to look at air fares and to budget for your expenses for this not-to-be-missed 5 day meeting.

Minneapolis (also known as the "Mini-Apple") is an ideal setting for GA. Not only is it a progressive, culturally diverse, LGBT friendly city, but it is also rich in cultural arts and boasts a stunning natural environment. There are 900 lakes and 170 parks in the Twin

Cities area, making this GA an excellent family vacation destination.

The Local Volunteer Committee has put together four pre-GA tour packages ideal for singles, couples and families. Tour #1 visits 3 local UU congregations and Sculpture Gardens; Tour #2 is a narrated boat ride down the Mississippi River. Tour #3 is an ethnic cook's tour of Minneapolis and St. Paul (if you like to eat this tour is for you!) and Tour #4 is shopping and dinner (on your own) at the Mall of America. All Tours take place on Tuesday, June 22, 2010 and were created by UUs who are also in the tourism biz.

There are also many housing options at GA this year and at a variety of price points. The GA Planning Committee offers some scholarships, and there may be other financial aid available if you start planning now. Air fares deals abound at this time of the year as well.

But the biggest draw is General Assembly itself - the largest assemblage of Unitarian Universalists (thousands of them) from congregations large and small. You'll experience wonderful and uplifting worship services -morning and night-with glorious music and inspiring messages. Networking with UUs from other congregations, attending panel discussions, workshops, lectures and, of course, shopping in the amazing Exhibit Hall all make GA each year an experience UUs treasure.

Below is just a sample of special events and programs planned.

- At Opening Celebration and Banner Parade on Wednesday night will feature the talented, singer, songwriter, and UU Peter Mayer. Check out his sound at www.petermayer.net/music. You may be familiar with some of his songs: "Holy Now" and Blue Boat Home."
- The Ware Lecturer this year is Minnesotan Winona LaDuke, an internationally renowned Native American (Anishinabe) activist working on issues of sustainable development, renewable energy and food systems.
- GA in Minneapolis coincides with the Twin Cities' Pride Festival & Parade; our Public Witness event this year will be part of that event.

Read all about GA 2010 at www.uua.org/ga

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