

Newsletter - September, 2009

Massachusetts Bay District of Unitarian Universalist Congregations



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Leading Through Change



by Rev. Sue Phillips

Director of Program Development

Leadership can be learned but not taught. So goes a common aphorism in leadership development circles, but I don't really believe it. There are certainly some ineffable, perhaps innate, qualities exhibited by great leaders: charisma, confidence, convening vision. With a little help though, even those of us with more modest skills can lead our congregations with vision and heart. Thankfully these qualities *can* be nurtured and taught.

Experience tells me that the most important skill congregational leaders can build is how to lead in the midst of change.

Change is a constant in Unitarian Universalist congregations. Lay and professional leaders are always grappling with change, from launching mission/vision processes to managing staff transitions, from adapting stewardship campaigns for tough economic times to introducing new programs. The best-equipped leaders are themselves agents of change, balancing vision and group process with a brew of cheerleading and faithful prodding.

The chaos that often accompanies change requires focus from leaders: focus on the mission driving the change, and focus on past practices that need to stop or shift to free up space for new ways of being together and doing church.

In short, leading through change requires that leaders know what we are saying Yes to and what we are saying No to.

The congregation's core mission is always the Yes. But

[Conference](#) (May 1)

in order for this Yes to have sufficient strength to hold the natural anxiety that emerges in times of change, the mission needs to be alive for the people. The mission needs to be fresh and meaningful and it must faithfully reflect the aspirations of the community.

Piece of cake, right?

Wrong, of course. Congregations spend many faithful and fruitful hours crafting inspirational mission statements, work that is vital to hone a congregation's sense of purpose. But most mission statements lack the specificity required to serve as a meaningful roadmap for leaders.

Thankfully it doesn't matter very much if a congregation lacks the perfect updated mission statement. What does matter -- what is essential for effective leadership - is that congregational leaders have a unified and unifying sense of purpose based on intentional listening with the congregation. With a clear, shared sense of purpose, leaders know what we are saying Yes to and why.

One of our congregations has a vibrant ministry to youth with a robust program that serves many young people outside the congregation. Faced recently with tough decisions about funding for staff positions, the board decided to add hours for the youth program coordinator rather than other staff positions. Their decisiveness was fueled by a new congregational mission statement that named work with young people as a defining ministry of the church. The board knew what Yes they were serving.

But it is the No's that tend to get congregational leaders in trouble. I could list a hundred examples of times when a troublesome reaction to a congregational leader's No led to conflict or distress, but I'm sure you have your own. And while there are as many causes of distress as there are stories, I'm betting that one cause undergirds most of them: the failure of leaders to point non-anxiously to the Yes behind the No.

Lest this sound like a Zen koan, let me be clear. Effective, mission-focused leaders keep our eyes on the prize of congregational purpose. This focus requires us to say No to anything that doesn't directly support this purpose. Effective leaders say No because we are clear what we are saying Yes to. When we show our people the affirmative value behind a negative decision, they are much more likely to understand. Effective No's refocus the conversation on the Yes of congregational purpose.

When the board in the example above emphasized youth programs in the personnel budget they had to say No to adding hours for the music program, despite the heartfelt wishes of some congregational members. It was a disappointing decision for some people. And yet the board could hold this disappointment because they knew they were being faithful to the core mission of the church.

Leading through change is challenging for everyone. But the best part of

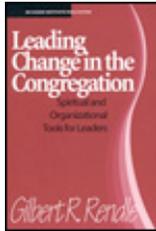
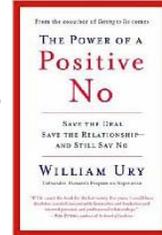
congregational leadership is that we get to put ourselves in the path of leadership lessons like these, and we do it in very good company, knowing that we are saying Yes to our people and our faith.

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Resources for Leading Through Change

The Power of a Positive No by William Ury

The co-author of the landmark book *Getting To Yes* explores how leaders can use power effectively, respectfully, and healthfully in service of mission. Available from [Amazon.com](#).



Leading Change in the Congregation: Spiritual and Organizational Tools for Leaders by Gil Rendle

Many books have been written about leadership and change, but until now none has focused on the kind of change that can cause deep congregational conflict. Alban Institute senior consultant Gil Rendle helps us understand change, especially the resistance that leaders can experience. Available from the [Alban Institute](#).

Leading Through Change: Steering the Rollercoaster

a Learning Congregation workshop

with Rev. Sue Phillips, Director of Program Development

October 17, 2009 - 9:00 AM to 2:00 PM, [First Parish Church in Weston](#)

Congregations are living organisms -- constantly adapting and adjusting, growing and contracting. Members come and go, church programs evolve, staff changes, demographic bubbles move through the organization, new lay leaders are elected. In short, congregations are cauldrons of change. Meanwhile, many lay and professional leaders feel tremendous pressure to devise the perfect plan to manage the congregation in the midst of these changes, with the hope of keeping people happy. *Leading Through Change* will help lay and professional leaders build the skills they need to lead in the midst of these pressures. The workshop will help leaders:

- use change as an opportunity to learn rather than a crisis to be solved
- reinvigorate congregational mission as a discernment and priority-setting tool
- identify how congregational systems react to change, and how leaders can work to build health in the system
- understand the conflicts that companion meaningful change
- identify spiritual resources for leadership

[REGISTER HERE!](#)

Leading Change in Your Congregation

a video presentation on DVD by Gil Rendle as offered at UU University in Portland, Oregon in 2007. The DVD is available at no charge through the District office. See Coupon below.

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Many Hands....Faithful Work!



Chalice Lighter grants support innovative projects in congregations seeking to nurture multigenerational connection, enhance growth, strengthen professional staff, build connection among congregations, and promote transformational leadership.

The more people choose to become Chalice Lighters, the more funding we can provide. If you have not already signed up, please do so now. Your semi-annual gift of \$30 multiplied hundreds of times can add much to the power of Unitarian Universalism to change lives and create community!

[Sign up here.](#)

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350+ Congregations Needed



The UU Ministry for Earth invites all congregations to participate in the International Day of Climate Action on October 24 in collaboration with 350.org, an international campaign to create

an equitable global climate treaty that lowers carbon dioxide below 350 parts per million. Help build a movement to take one day and use it to stop the climate crisis.

[CLICK HERE](#) for more information.

[CLICK HERE](#) to learn how your congregation can participate.

[CLICK HERE](#) to register your congregation's project.

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Get Your "Standing on the Side of Love" Banner

"Standing on the Side of Love" banners are now available to congregations. Consider getting a banner to hang from your building as a witness to all who pass by.



[Order here](#)

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Financial Support Available for Renovation and Construction

The UUA has several loan programs to help congregations with building construction and renovation:

- **Site Acquisition Loan Program** to assist congregations purchase their first property at a location whose demographic profile indicates high potential for growth. The loan assists with covering a portion of the property purchase price

of the property and then can be converted to a construction loan when the congregation obtains long term financing to repay the loan.

- **Loan Guarantee Program** to assist congregations acquire land/buildings or to make renovations and accessibility improvements to existing property, by having our UUA serving as a guarantor of a portion of the loan, making the congregation's loan requests more attractive to local lenders.
- **Green Construction Award Pilot Program** to encourage congregations to design/construct/renovate/operate green facilities by funding some of the costs associated with achieving LEED certification.
- **Small Project Loans Pilot Program** to help congregations with smaller projects, e.g., exterior signage, parking lot improvements, mildew removal, playground equipment, roof repairs, adding energy.

For information contact UUA Congregational Stewardship office, Wayne Clark, Director, wclark@uua.org.

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Free!

while
supplies last

- "Breakthrough Congregations 2007" and "Breakthrough Congregations 2008" - two separate DVDs in which 4 congregations on each describe how they achieved numerical growth and spiritual depth.
- "The Best of InterConnections" - CD with Drive Time Essays
- "Leading Change in Your Congregations" - DVD of presentation by Gil Rendle at UU University 2007
- "Ministry in the Borderlands" - DVD of a presentation by Rev. Nick Carter at UU University 2008
- "Strengthening Lay and Professional Leadership" - DVD of presentations by Gini Courter & Rev. Rob Eller-Isaacs at the UU New England Regional Conference in Worcester, MA
- "Welcoming the Newcomer" - a video workshop from the UUA
- Wilderness Journey: The Struggle for Black Empowerment and Racial Justice with the UUA (1967 to 1970) - DVD produced by Ron Cordes

These DVD's and CD's available for the asking. Please send an email to Judy Murray, District Administrator at mbd@mbduua.org to make your request. Be sure to include your full name, mailing address and the names of the particular items you are interested in.

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[Meck Groot](#), Editor
[Massachusetts Bay District of UU Congregations](#)

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