

Report on the UUA Board of Trustees April 2006 Meeting

**From Charles Blustein Ortman,
Metro NY District UUA Trustee**

The Board of Trustees of the Unitarian Universalist Association met from Wednesday, April 19th through Sunday, April 23rd. The weather was a little bit on the cool side, but still spring was in full bloom on the Common and on the State House Lawn. The heavy rains managed to hold off until just before our adjournment and journeys home. The meetings included an extended session so that we would have an additional day and evening in order to further our conversations on policy governance. As, together with the administration, we have worked to provide more effective leadership to the Association, we have discovered that we really need to create a policy governance language that is our own. We began these conversations working with the Carver Model, and as we have progressed we have recognized the need to create a structure and an articulation of that structure which is more particular to the Unitarian Universalism. It has been an interesting process and a beneficial one; I will continue to keep you informed.

The remainder of my report will be some of the highlights that I feel should be brought to your attention. For particular resolutions or rules voted on by the Board, I refer you to the Association's web site at <http://www.uua.org>.

One of the topics discussed at considerable length was related to a report from the task force that had been assigned to review the process and formulate the learning opportunities related to that Pathways start up congregation in Texas. For those who are not familiar with this endeavor, the Pathways project was a new church start up near the Dallas area. It was intended to immediately become a large congregation. A large amount of money, staff, and other resources were invested in this effort, which has produced, not so much a large congregation, as a very healthy congregation of about 80 members. This project was mostly under the domain of the local congregations in the area. Some of the learnings articulated in the report include a more active and directive role in future endeavors by the UUA administration. They also included an awareness of the immediate need for an up and running religious education program, and the need to add staff progressively to the rate of growth of the congregation. There were several other important gleanings and all of them are being put to use or will be in current and future new church start ups.

We learned that talks regarding the possibility of a future merger between Meadville/Lombard Theological School and Starr King School for Ministry have continued. The outcome of those conversations is still unknown at this time. There is considerable hope that a clear conclusion will be reached by sometime this summer.

The Board moved another step toward the re-organization and reallocation of Independent Affiliate Organization status. The intention here is to link local Unitarian Universalist programs and projects to local Unitarian Universalist congregations and districts. The hope is to create a

more clearly defined structure so that the Unitarian Universalist Association can be more decisively and directly involved in serving Unitarian Universalist congregations.

The Board approved of a tentative health-insurance program that has been created as a self-insured program of the UUA using the mechanism of Blue Cross Blue Shield of Pennsylvania. If at least 500 Unitarian Universalist ministers, members of church staffs, or employees of any Unitarian Universalist institution, all of whom are eligible, sign up for this program during its open enrollment phase, we will move ahead with this excellent opportunity to provide health insurance for many of our professionals and staff who would otherwise have a difficult time securing insurance benefits. The program will be priced competitively on a regional basis. This is a great opportunity and I would encourage all congregations to consider changing over to this program or in utilizing it were ever no program currently exists.

Helen Bishop, chair of the Accessibility is Committee, reported the State of the UUA in relation to able-ism and accessibility issues. The committee's report is on the UUA web site, and it contains a wide range of potential interventions that can make our congregations so much more accessible to so many people. The interventions range from very simple adjustments to very complex and expensive innovations. We might all take the opportunity to explore ways of promoting justice and radical hospitality to many folks who too often go unconsidered in our communities.

A highlight of our meeting was the unanimous vote of the Board to honor two persons at General Assembly this year with the Distinguished Service Award. The recipients were called on the speakerphone from our meeting and agreed to be at General Assembly to receive the awards. They are Jerry and Denny Davidoff.

While it has continued to be my pleasure and my honor to serve as your district representative to the Board of Trustees, I recognized the need to stand down from my position as my term ends at this time next year. And so I have announced my decision not to run for reelection. I continue to be grateful for your trust in me, and I look forward to serving you throughout this next year.