



**From Shirlee Geiger, Board Moderator
December, 2012**

The Board this year settled on the following goals for our work in 2012-13: Board Goals 2012-13

The Board is aware of the need to continue to exhibit non-anxious presence in the face of change, and to anticipate and foster clear channels for expression of concerns, ideas, and aspirations. With this in mind, we will:

- review ends statements, in order to establish metrics for oversight.
- develop and implement ways to engage and communicate with congregants, especially with regard to church policy, the decision making process, and stewardship.
- support the process of finalizing the refinancing of the Buchan Building and monitor the financial ramifications.
- conclude the work of the ad hoc leadership development committee, resulting in a report on recruiting, supporting, and sustaining lay leadership.
- develop and model good practices concerning diversity in our Board work.

These goals inform the use of our time in meetings of the full Board and our sub-committees. In pursuit of the first goal, we have dedicated a large portion of each our meetings this year to conversation about one or two of our ends statements, hoping to get a deep and detailed understanding of what it would be for our church to fully live into that end. Crucial to the oversight work of the Board, we are focusing on how to tell how our church is doing on each end. Some of the metrics will be based on the new annual congregational survey implemented last year. (Year to year changes will be especially useful, once we have multiple years to compare.) Other metrics will come from church staff, compiled into a report provided to the Board from the Executive Team. We want information that is key to evaluating our success at living our mission, but that is not onerous or hugely time-consuming to compile. Crucial to success at this goal will be the work of the Policy Evaluation Committee, ably chaired by John Thompson. Luckily for us, our intern minister, Patrice, has experience and expertise in this area, and will be joining in the work.

Our Communications Committee is building on the wonderful work done recently, and

creating a “Play Book” to consolidate what we have learned from our experiments with various two-way communication efforts of the past two years, intending to be of use to future Board members. These include the Listening Project meetings, online forums, the congregational survey, enhanced information on our website, along with creation of FAQs regarding our financial situation in 2011-12. This committee is chaired by Debbie Boots and Ameena Amdahl-Mason, and a number of former Board members have stayed involved and contributed good ideas and hours of work.

Our Finance Committee, chaired by church Treasurer Camille Wright, has also been working hard this year. In addition to creating a “dashboard” of key indicators to share with the Board and congregants, Camille and Pat Malone have been working with Kathryn Estey and church staff on the re-finance project for our Buchan Building. They have logged a LOT of hours, and I am deeply grateful to their dedication and love for our church community.

Glenn Montgomery is co-chair of the Board ad hoc **Committee on Leadership Development**. Along with co-chair Teri Martin and the full committee, they conducted two very well attended Café Conversation sessions, and are working to compile the ideas generated. Their goal is to have a recommendation at the end of this year for a more permanent approach to identifying and supporting congregants as they step into leadership roles. In a church as large and diverse as ours, the work of lay leaders is a vital to the well-being of our spiritual community.

Our last Board goal – regarding diversity -- is on-going for us, as it is for our denomination. Last year, Bill shared a form with us used by the UUA Board for its own process observation piece. Although it is not enough, it is a good addition to our work. When he first sent it to me, and I opened the attachment and started to read, I was glad that I was alone in my office at work -- because I started to cry. I know that not everyone will tear up over a form with check-boxes.... But this one went directly to my heart....

I have attended many meetings where I fought with myself, trying to decide whether I should speak up – as a lesbian, a feminist, a religious person, or the mother of a bi-racial son. I would weigh my sense of what I would be risking against the often meager likelihood that something would be gained.... Have you been to meetings like that? The assumptions and shared blindness of the participants would weigh so heavily on me.... But not every day is a day when I felt strong enough, or centered enough, to say what I felt so urgently needed saying.

- Not all families are hetero-sexual.
- Not all members of “mankind” are men.
- Not just conservatives, but some liberals and progressives seek and find the sacred, and then rely on their churches to keep them sane....
- Some children are hurt just by the routine question on the forms, making them pick which race is theirs... which parent is their “real” parent.

Sometimes I said the things I felt needed to be said. Sometimes I didn't. But it was always such an intensely personal and secret struggle within my heart, and within my soul....

Ah, but there, on the UUA form -- to be used at the end of every single meeting, for the full group to deeply consider -- is a checkbox:

Did discussion of issues indicate that [Board] members are conscious of the systemic power of oppression?

There, crying in my office at work, reading this attachment sent by Bill, I thought how different my life would have been if all those meetings – the ones that led to me to horrific and wrenching internal struggles -- had concluded with a question like this.... What would it have been like if ALL participants were actively engaged in asking themselves how their work overlapped with or helped prop up oppressive power distributions? What if we ALL pitched in to try to identify the ways we act --inadvertently, if not exactly innocently – to maintain structures of domination and injustice?

There are lots of ways to try to bring change to our ways of being in the world...to substitute respect and compassion for relationships of power and oppression. I know that it will require more than a new checkbox on a form.

Oh, but still.... I love that checkbox....

Blessed be. And Amen.

Moderator's message, Fall 2012 The Board started the church year with a retreat in late August. Part of our purpose was to come to a shared sense of the most important and highest priority tasks, so as to come away with Board goals for the year. This year, our retreat was particularly productive, with lots of good interactions and conversations. We know that we will need to be working to complete refinancing of the Buchan debt (which is proceeding in a timely fashion), and to continue to focus on our ideal of transparency, which emerged with special urgency in our conversations around the budget last year.

But (we asked ourselves) what else is of importance, in this coming year?

Under policy governance, the most important function of the Board is to remember what our church is about, and to keep the mission and values of our congregation in clear and sharp focus in all that we do. With that in mind, the Board decided to devote a large part of each Board meeting this year to conversation about one of our “ends statements.” We considered how to prioritize these value statements, relying on results from the congregational survey last year. After deliberation, we have decided to start with these ends statements:

First Unitarian Church:

--is a welcoming and loving community that provides a safe haven where diverse people of various ages and cultures may gather to build nurturing relationships

--cultivates and nurtures leaders who serve and inspire the church community

--is a sustainable church community in which congregants, Board, staff and ministers share stewardship of both our tangible and our human resources

--takes a leadership role in the larger Unitarian Universalist movement, maintaining connections with other Unitarian Universalist congregations and institutions as well as the local interfaith community.

In collaboration with our executive team, we will be working to try to understand what these beautiful—but lofty—statements of core values mean, in detailed ways, right now, in this time and place. We will especially be considering “metrics”—how we can tell if we are living our values, or if we still have important improvements to make. It can be a long and daunting conceptual distance between an abstract and general statement of value, and the actual lived experience of decisions and allocations in keeping with those values. There is room for lots of differing visions and understandings. What exactly is it to be welcoming? What makes a place a safe haven? What would it be to nurture inspirational leaders? And that recently popular word, sustainable—where does that fall between envisioning possible (but difficult and ambitious) futures for our church, and living realistically within our current means?

These are the kinds of questions we will be talking and thinking about and (at least some of us) praying over this year. We will be trying hard to understand what our core values really mean.

There is wonderful, exciting, and deeply meaningful work to be done. Thank you for being part of this beautiful church community.

--Shirlee Geiger Moderator, 2012-13

[News from the Board](#) , Aug. 29, 2011 --- by Shirlee Geiger, Moderator