

Communion

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Letter from the Board:

Magi Network Newsletter Begins!

By Dean Drake

This is the first newsletter of the Magi Network, an organization founded "to ensure that everyone whose life would benefit from the practice of Unitarian Universalist Christianity has access to and room in a nearby congregation."

Today, as UU Christians are well aware, there are few congregations in our association that practice Christian worship, or even welcome Christian UUs. Existing organizations like the UU Christian Fellowship address the needs of existing UU Christians. But there has been no organization expressly devoted to satisfying the need for more UU Christian churches: places where the word "God" is spoken without hesitation, where sacraments like Communion are practiced, and where the teachings of Jesus are seen as life-transforming.

The Magi Network was founded in 1998 to promote the birth of new Unitarian Universalist Christian congregations (and the rebirth of existing ones) across the U.S. Our ultimate dream is to place a UU Christian congregation in every district and major metropolitan area of the country, providing a worship alternative for Unitarian Universalists who connect to God through the story of Jesus.

Studies of those who visit Unitarian Universalist churches once or twice and then go elsewhere suggest that the vast majority of these people were looking for UU Christianity -- a Christianity that is open to new revelation and encourages free inquiry, all within the framework of one all-loving God and the teachings of Jesus. Rather than go elsewhere, these people could, should (and someday will) be Unitarian Universalist Christians.

If there are UU Christians out there, what has prevented the organization of new congregations?

First, there is the lack of direction. There is no existing UU organization that provides encouragement, advice and assistance to people interested in starting new UU Christian congregations. Second, there is a lack of money. It takes over \$100,000 of "outside money" to get a new congregation to the point of self-sufficiency. Some of that money can come from various UUA programs, but over half must come from elsewhere.

The Magi Network addresses both of these needs. By bringing those who want to organize UU Christian congregations in contact with those who have already done so, information is shared. By providing small organizing grants, we offer individuals with a vision a way to reach out to other like-minded individuals. And by raising large amounts of money to provide short-term subsidies to congregations once they are organized, the Magi Network helps fill the need for temporary funding to make these new congregations successful.

The Magi Network is asking those who share this dream to join together and contribute what they can to help us make this vision a reality. Since our founding we have raised over \$7,000 and expect to raise much, much more in the years ahead. This newsletter is a means to connect all the Magi, share stories of our successes, and provide hope to all those UU Christians not yet able to worship and receive sacraments in a UU congregation. This newsletter is our connection -- our communion -- until our dream is achieved. It is a chronicle of our venture, our adventure, and we thank you for being part of it. †

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DO YOU KNOW ANYONE WHO WOULD LIKE TO JOIN THE MAGI NETWORK?

Spread the word about the Magi Network to interested friends, family, coworkers, neighbors, or others:

- If they have Web access, give them our URL: <www.magi.uni.cc>. They can read our pamphlet -- and even join-- online.
- Would you like to give them a pamphlet yourself? We'll send you some: uu_magi@hotmail.com or P.O. Box 486, Fenton, MI 48430-0468.



Church Startup Information on the Web

By Scott Wells

Those organizing new churches -- or even those pondering the creation of a new church -- need all the help they can get. Personal relationships with experienced leaders is best. There are also good resources in print. Some common sense will help as well. It is now also possible to go to the World Wide Web for resources. The following four Web sites are among the best for new church organizers.

Sometimes, new church organizers need help framing some of the issues they will face. **The Friends of New Churches** is a Cooperative Baptist Fellowship-related organization whose name says it all. Find it at <www.helwys.com/fnc.htm>. It shares some of the same functions as the Magi Network, but with an emphasis on spiritual and leadership development. Their site includes a frequently asked questions list describing such basic steps as getting an IRS Employer Identification Number and what incorporation involves. The Friends of New Churches also model good ways existing churches and individuals can help new churches both materially and spiritually.

An early problem any new worshipping group will have is preparing for worship. It is worship, per-

haps more than any other single facet, which distinguishes Unitarian Universalist Christians from other Unitarian Universalists. (Yes: I saw you going to the Episcopal Church for communion!) Preparing for worship is no easy task. **The Seekers Church** is a progressive, independent church in Washington, DC. Their site includes a good selection of liturgical material which they give free license for worshipping groups to use. (Read their fair use policy first.) See their site at <www.seekerschurch.org>.

Substantial and appropriate religious education material is something else a new Unitarian Universalist Christian church would need. Sometimes it seems that much of the Unitarian Universalist material is not Christian enough and the Christian material is insufficiently liberal. (This, on closer inspection, is not always the case.) One site, however, delivers for youth and adults more than one would first think. The PBS Frontline special, **"From Jesus to Christ,"** which ran in 1998, has a remarkable support page -- more of a book, really -- complete with teachers' and viewers' guides. The tapes are available for sale, but a clever class leader might be able to stimulate conversa-

tions from the online transcripts. Find this treasure at <www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/>.

Lastly, as Unitarian Universalist Christians, we are prone to feel alone, and miserable. The truth is that we have many friends who share more or less a common approach to faith. Look to the **Center for Progressive Christianity** for a moral and spiritual boost at <www.tpc.org>. They have a common form of welcome that most Unitarian Universalist Christians would accept. Indeed, the Center has a good study guide for this form of welcome which lends itself to adult education classes and meetings of hopeful church-gatherers who need some guidance with questions like "why are we liberal Christians?"

The Web has much good and bad, if we would only look discerningly. †



Epiphany Community Church

(Continued from page 4)

Not too long ago, this place didn't exist. Fenton was poorer then; each person who comes was poorer then. They woke up on Sunday with nowhere to go... with no community to explore their spiritual journey... with no table at which to feast on bread and wine.

In how many more communities is a free Christian church needed... a church in which Christianity is a journey rather than a destination, a

church in which, as Epiphany's motto states, "All are worthy, all are welcome"?

We Magi know that there are other people hungry for meaning, hungry for a common language to explore life's mysteries, hungry for a connection to their Christian heritage.

What about your town? How many will wake up this Sunday morning and feel they have nowhere to go? †

Publishing Information

Communion is published four times a year by The Magi Network, a nonprofit organization dedicated to helping fund the startup of new UU Christian Churches. This issue's editor is Anna Russomano Broskie.

Send letters or other submissions to uu_magis@hotmail.com (put "newsletter" on the subject line) or Newsletter, P.O. Box 468, Fenton, MI 48430-0468.

This newsletter is also available online at <www.magi.uni.cc>. †

Building Homes for Ourselves

By Anna Russomano Broskie

"If you like Christianity so much, why don't you go join the Methodists?"

How many of us got that reaction when someone in our "mainstream" Unitarian Universalist congregation learned that we identify ourselves as both UU and Christian?

How many of us wondered why it was okay to base Sunday services on The Baghavad Gita, *The Origin of Species*, The Lotus Sutra, The Wheel of the Year, The Qu'ran, or the newspaper, while the prime document of our own Unitarian and Universalist theological origins, The Bible, was considered unfit for use in Sunday worship—and by some, outright dangerous?

How many of us *did* go down the street and try the Methodists (or the Presbyterians, or the UCC, or ...), and felt frustrated when we were expected to assent to a Trinitarian creed, espouse a partialist view of salvation, or accept without question every jot and tittle of the Bible as the infallible Word of God? Where is our spiritual home?

As the people of Epiphany Community Church have discovered, for UU Christians, our spiritual home is a UU Christian church—even if we have to start one ourselves (see article page 4). Nowhere else can we unite, in the words of the Rev. Charles Ames, "in the love of truth and the spirit of Jesus Christ...for the worship of God and the service of [humanity]."

In a Humanist UU fellowship, we can unite in the love of (some) truth, for the service of humanity. But we will miss the spirit of Jesus Christ and the worship of God.

In a Theist UU congregation, we do a little better. Here we can unite in the love of (some) truth, for the worship of God and the service of humanity. But the spirit of Jesus will be lacking.

In a non-UU Christian church, we can unite in the love of (some) truth, for the worship of Christ *and* God, and the service of humanity. But we may be uncomfortable with limited salvation and the deification of Jesus.

It is only in a UU Christian church that we can have it all: the love of truth, the spirit of Jesus, the worship of God and the service of humanity. And thus it is only in a UU Christian church that we can be fully at home.

But there are so few UU Christian churches left. And so many of them are in New England. What is a lone UU Christian in Virginia or Wisconsin or Oklahoma to do?

In the love of
truth and the
spirit of
Jesus Christ,
we unite for the
worship of
God and the
service of
humanity.

First, if you are not a member already, *join the UU Christian Fellowship* (UUCF). The UUCF has been around for over 50 years providing resources to individual Christians in the UUA, particularly those who are not in a UU Christian church and must nurture their faith in isolation.

The UUCF is your source for a range of UU Christian materials, from pamphlets to historical documents to copies of the King's Chapel *Book of Common Prayer*, and for ideas on how to get a UUCF chapter started in your own UU congregation.

You can find the UUCF at <www.uua.org/uucf>, P.O. Box 629, Lancaster, MA 01523 or (978) 365-2427.

But what if starting a UUCF chapter isn't enough? What if you long to help build a spiritual home for yourself and others?

This is the role of the Magi Network. Our mission is "to ensure that everyone whose life would benefit from the practice of UU Christianity has access to and room in a nearby congregation." And in our first year we have already received a number of inquiries about how to start a church.

We are thrilled that there are UUs out there who feel called to start new churches. We have resources in development and appreciate your letting us know what would be most helpful.

It is neither quick nor easy to start a new church (initial planning can take a year). Obviously, you will want to *pray about your intentions, and seek spiritual discernment*. In the meantime, here is some logistical information on building a new church.

Join the Magi Network if you haven't done so already. The more members, the more funding there is for churches, both from individual contributions and matching grants.

Begin to determine if there is enough interest in your region to support a new church. An excellent way to start building a base of enthusiastic people is to offer an adult education class (see Scott's article on page 2), making sure it is well-advertised in the geographic area you hope to serve.

If there is already a UU congregation in your community, *make sure that the region you target is not the same as the primary area served by the existing church*. If the existing church serves one town, you may wish to explore a regional church. If it serves mostly people from "the North Bay," you may wish to focus organizing efforts on "the South Bay."

Once you have an enthusiastic base of about 30 to 50 people, you are ready to move on to the next phase.

If you are considering taking the first steps to starting a church, know that you are in our prayers and that we encourage you to start exploring the possibilities. God be with you. †



*Contributing to the Renaissance of
Unitarian Universalist Christianity*

To ensure that
everyone
whose life would
benefit from
the **practice** of
**Unitarian
Universalist
Christianity**
has **access** to
and **room** in a
nearby
congregation

We're on the Web:
www.magi.uni.cc

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New Church Update: **Epiphany...The First of Many**

By Nurya Love Parish

It's Sunday morning in Fenton, Michigan.

People wake from sleep, pull the *Flint Journal* from the front steps. Some will put on coffee, dress, and go to church. They'll go to the Fenton United Methodist Church, founded 1837. They'll go to St. John's Catholic Church, built with stones the first settlers dragged in from their fields. And some will come to Epiphany Community Church, Unitarian Universalist, driving to the Fenton Community Center and making church happen there once again.

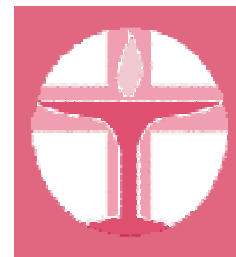
Ten or so will come early to set up the outside sign, put out the hymnals and the nametags, rehearse with the choir. Another forty or fifty will come just as the service is beginning, as the music for meditation ends and the welcome is given.

Only three years ago, no one woke up on a Sunday morning to come to Epiphany: the first morning service was held on Easter, 1997.

Those who come make a choice. They do not rest on the decisions of their parents or the customs of their community. They throw their oars in with people rowing against the current. They come to start a Unitarian Universalist Christian church.

The call to worship sounds: "This is indeed the day that the Lord has made... Let us awake to its glory and enter into its joy." The people respond: "*We are a people seeking truth, seeking the presence of God.*" And back and forth: "With active minds and open hearts, we gather as one body." "*We gather to learn to love more perfectly.*" "God of mystery and grace, abide in us and with us and through us." "*Take our hearts and hands; make us good stewards of your world.*" And finally the covenant is affirmed once again: "In the love of truth and the spirit of Jesus Christ, we unite for the worship of God and the service of humanity."

For those who come, this is their home. This is the place where they drop their



baggage and discover what blessings and burdens lurk inside it. This is the place where they discover current thinking in Christianity, where they learn about the context of scripture as well as its content. This is the place where they sing and care and work and pray and learn and grow.

(Continued on page 2)