



Letter from the Board

Nurya Love Parish

Here in Michigan, it's easy to see that the UUA's old model for starting new congregations hasn't worked out well. In our state, there are four UU churches started in the past nine years, all under the auspices of the New Congregation Ministry program. For those who know Michigan geography, they are located in Rochester (outside Detroit), Portage (outside Kalamazoo), Ludington (on the West shore) and of course our friends at Epiphany Community Church are in Fenton (outside Flint). (A fifth congregation in Brighton was started in the program, but dropped out after an unsuccessful match with their minister.) How are these new churches doing? All are struggling, and none could be called a success.

The Rochester church is nine years old, the oldest in the bunch. They can currently only afford a part-time minister and are considering closing their doors. The Portage church just saw the early resignation of their New Congregation Minister; they are still leasing space and have yet to break 100 in membership. The Ludington congregation's New Congregation Minister has also resigned; they too have not yet reached 100 in membership. And as you will read in Dean Drake's report, Epiphany is facing some challenging times as well.

When I began in New Congregation Ministry, success was largely understood as reaching 150 in adult membership and owning a building. The goal was to reach that target within the five years of the UUA's New Congregation Ministry program. I know there are churches which accomplished this, but not many did. Certainly none did in Michigan.

I participated in the New Congregation Ministry program believing that success was possible. I now wonder how realistic my expectations were. The program seemed to rest on certain assumptions: namely, that healthy congregations would automatically attract members (church advertising was not well covered in the training), and that excellent ministers would find it worthwhile to serve in new congregations over the long term. These assumptions have turned out not to be valid in Michigan. Without advertising, churches rely on word-of-mouth to attract members. When you start with only 40 mouths, membership growth is slow. And no new congregation in this state has kept a minister longer than seven years; two have left after only four (including me, for family reasons which could not have been foreseen!). As I continue in ministry, I discover that excellent ministers are generally able to find better-compensated positions in

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Do you know someone 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.
- *Would you like to give them a pamphlet yourself? We'll send you some: P.O. Box 486, Fenton, MI 48430-0468 or magi@universalistchurch.org.*

Why Planting New Churches is a Sacred Act

Ron Robinson

In the 17th chapter of Acts, the story is related of the Apostle Paul's mission to Athens. To both the synagogue and the marketplace, Paul took his message, his witness of what God had done in and through Jesus Christ. The message and mission of this great church-planter was the same throughout his journeys, but as Acts 17 makes clear Paul found new contexts were necessary in order to be understood in the new and different cultures. First, he points out to the Athenians that among their various objects for worship is an altar created for an "Unknown God." He then announces that the God revealed by Jesus is that previously unknown God. Finally, he seals his point by quoting from their own poets: "For 'in him we live and move and have our being'; as even some of your own poets have said; 'For we too are his offspring.'"



Today, Paul can be seen as the contemporary church, and Athens of the first century can be seen as America in the 21st century. Across the theological expanse of the Church, churches are faced with the situation of how to be heard by a new world. Those who do not listen first to the new world, who do not know its poets and its altars, will end up shouting louder and louder, but to no avail. To carry forth

the ancient mission of the church (to change lives and communities) into a changing world means the *church* must change.

Change is hard, though, and established churches find it easier to decline or to die than to change and grow -- especially not in the radical leaps needed for these times. New church plants that have a response to cultural change built into their DNA have been found to be the most effective way to grow and spread the message of God's transforming love.

In the past few decades many have tried to describe the wider cultural changes that require new church cultural changes. They variously describe and contrast the chasm opening up between the old and new worlds, between the machine-like knowledge-based modernistic worldview (where one size fits all, one view reigns true, and everyone tunes into the same news source and is a spectator at the same sports) and the newer organism-like experience-based relational worldview of a quantum-like culture (full of multiple learning styles, the rise of participatory "extreme sports" and a wide range of options of what one chooses to see, read, eat, and even, through multiple screen identities, to be). They tell of the impact of film and multimedia, and how electronic culture is bringing about changes in how humans respond to life only comparable to the way print culture itself changed the world from the heyday of the

manuscript culture, which itself had revolutionized the world away from the oral culture.

It is both an exciting time, and a desperate time, for the church. New church plants have the capacity to turn this crisis of church and culture into a real opportunity. They become the new ways God is experienced in the world. In doing so, they become sacramental. Some of the emerging characteristics of the new church plants are these:

1. They dream big and are vision and mission-oriented above all else, not expecting the world to come to them but going out to change the world.
2. They are permission-giving, team-oriented in structure based on high levels of trust and outlined roles and responsibilities rather than micro-managing chain of command oriented gate-keepers who keep making bylaws and meetings longer and longer.
3. Membership is focused on ministry and creating disciples who make other disciples, rather than on who is allowed to take care of church business.
4. Worship is multimedia, multisensory, highly participative -- and even when it is highly liturgical and has ancient touchstones (one new slogan is "go old to get young"), it is focused on the unchurched rather than the churched.

5. Small groups for intimate community are foundational (get big by getting small); it is not only *okay* if you don't know everyone on Sunday morning, that's the point--it means the church is growing and people are making connections there that will lead to getting to know one another in the kind of setting where you can actually move from "being friendly" to "becoming friends."
6. Stewardship is not about maintaining an "edifice complex" but about creating generous souls who not only give themselves away but look for ways to give the church away to the world, to turn it inside out--even literally through multi-site centers and/or house churches and, eventually and inevitably, newer church plants.

If this article were on the internet, here's where I would leave you with links for learning more. So consider this list of books instead, many of which contain useful Web links: Leonard Sweet's trilogy *Soul Tsunami*, *Aqua Church*, and *Soul Salsa*, and his *Carpe Manana*. Michael Slaughter's trilogy *Out on the Edge*, *Real Followers*, and *Unlearning Church*. Bill Easum and Tom Bandy's *Sacred Cows Make Gourmet Burgers*, *Dancing with Dinosaurs*, *Growing Spiritual Redwoods*, *Leadership on the Other Side*, *Unfreezing Moves*, *Moving Off the Map*, *Coaching Change*, and *Kicking Habits*. Lyle Schaller's *Discontinuity and Hope*, and *The Very Large Church*. Aubrey Malphurs *Planting Growing Churches for the 21st Century*. Roy Phillips'

Transforming Liberal Congregations for the New Millennium. Tex Sample's *The Spectacle of Worship in a Wired World*. And finally, Gil Rendle's *Leading Change in the Congregation*.

Then I hope you find the mission of the Magi Network to be a place where you can channel some of your enthusiasm and support for this new sacred act of church planting. I did. †



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significantly more stable churches than those started under the UUA's New Congregation Ministry program. Ministerial transition inevitably impacts the congregation's strength and numbers.

The staff of the UUA have learned from their endeavors in starting new congregations. A totally new model is underway, one which pours significantly more funds into a startup and aims to move toward a mid-size (150-250 or more) congregation in short order. The new strategy concentrates resources in one area, starting up a congregation not only with full-time ministry but also with professional religious educators, musicians, and administrative staff. As I write, this method is still in development, and the first congregation started under this model has yet to emerge. As a former UU New

Congregation Minister, I am extremely glad the UUA staff is moving in this direction. And of course I am somewhat wistful, certain that Epiphany could have grown much more quickly if we had only had access to the resources that are now to be part of many future new starts.

Will our friends at UUA headquarters choose to start a UU Christian church with this new method? They may, if we "Magi-cians" offer some incentive. Were we to raise an impressive sum, say \$100,000, and ask headquarters to match it, we might be able to partner in starting a new UU Christian congregation. And this time, it could be properly-funded, with appropriate staffing and advertising strategies. I can only dream of the impact such a church would make in its local community, among the UU Christians, and in the wider UU world. We on the Magi Board are seriously considering this possibility and invite your comments and advice.

This much is certain: we cannot afford to waste our money duplicating the new congregation starts of the past decade. Though they have surely changed lives, their impact is less than anyone dreamed, much less than it could be. If we are to start a new UU Christian congregation for this new century, it must be created with an awareness of the lessons of history, and especially the recent history being created here in Epiphany's home state, my backyard. I learned in seminary that the early disciples were characterized by boldness--and so must we be. †

Epiphany at the Crossroads

Dean A. Drake

Once again, Epiphany Community Church finds itself at a crossroads. Epiphany was founded five years ago as the first intentionally Christian Unitarian Universalist church since the merger of the two faiths in 1961. Epiphany grew rapidly under its first settled minister, the Reverend Nurya Parish, from twenty members to seventy in four years. By the time Nurya left to become a mother, Epiphany had grown from a family-sized church (50 or fewer members) to a pastoral-sized church. One of the major challenges facing our interim minister, the Reverend Anna Broskie, was this: although Epiphany had grown in numbers from a family to a pastoral-sized church, our organization and ways of relating to each other were firmly that of a family-sized church.

Much of the last year was spent changing the way we were organized to reflect the sized church we had become. Unfortunately, this inward focus had an undesirable side effect: we stopped growing. Established congregations can stay the same size for years without jeopardizing their existence. Congregations founded under the UUA's New Congregations Ministry Program, as Epiphany was, cannot. Such congregations are given five years of declining assistance from the UUA, and it is expected that, at the end of five years, the congregation will have grown enough to be self-sufficient. Had Epiphany grown in the last year as it did historically, we would be close to be-

ing self-sufficient. Instead, as of this writing (and we hope this will no longer be true by the time you read it), we are at least \$20,000 short of funding a full-time minister next year.

But it is even more complicated than this: in spite of all the effort that Epiphany's Pulpit (Search) Committee put into finding a settled minister, a good match was not found. Thus, Epiphany is entering its second year of search. And our current interim minister cannot stay for another year, so we are also in search for another interim!

Epiphany is at a crossroads. One road involves "living within our means" and scaling back to be a family-sized fellowship for the foreseeable future. The other road involves taking the risks necessary to grow in our second year of interim ministry and become self-sufficient. What is required to travel the latter road – the road to self-sufficiency – has been mapped out. Churches grow as a result of exciting and energizing ministries. Epiphany needs to become more focused on ministries and less on internal organizing. But to do this with a congregation of people who are already giving more in money and time than they can sustain will require that we stop doing things that rob us of energy. And the biggest single thing that takes our energy without giving anything back is our weekly setup and tear down in our rented space. So a larger space that can be ours 24/7 is needed.

We have begun the process of developing the ministries that can lead us to a year of excitement and growth. Included on this list are things like a Wednesday night contemporary service with a Christian youth music group, monthly lecture series, Saturday morning breakfast prayer groups, and a tent revival! We are actively seeking space, and are looking at a building which could be ours for no more than we are currently paying in

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Board of Directors

President: *Nurya Love Parish*,
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**Your 2002 ballot
is enclosed in this issue!**

Meet Derek Parker: Candidate for the Magi Network Board

Not only is Derek Lee Parker a candidate to serve on the Magi Network Board, he is also a candidate for ministerial fellowship with the UUA. He has been a member of Saint John's Unitarian Church (Cincinnati, OH) and of Epiphany Community Church (Fenton, MI). From 1998-2000 he served as Director of Campus Ministries for the former UU District of Michigan, and he has just completed a 15 month contract as the equivalent of a DRE at a Friends meeting in downtown Muncie, Indiana. His writings are frequently featured in the *Universalist Herald*. He is 28 years of age, and presently resides in Richmond, Indiana where he is studying for the M.Div. degree at the Earlham School of Religion. †

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rent, if we can raise the down payment and remodeling money. We have applied to Boston for an interim minister, and are praying that we will be lucky once again in finding a match.

Two roads lie before Epiphany. Like the traveler in the famous Robert Frost poem, I believe Epiphany will choose to take the road less traveled, and that will make all the difference. †

Publishing Information

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exhaustion and overwork and pre-occupation with inessentials, which have become the *ad hoc* essentials because the real essentials have been forgotten.

I speak not from the outside of this situation, but as one who has been immersed in it for all of my full-time ministry, and as one among the many others who have felt in their minds, hearts and bodies the consequences of this overwork and anxiety.

Most people (or am I wrong?) are looking for refreshment and maturation, not busyness. They are glad to give, but they fear burn-out and overcommitment.

Thus it seems to me -- and, of course, I could be dead wrong -- that the first thing a congregation must know is the answer to "What is essential?" What nourishes, sustain, informs, inspires and directs a congregation? And how will this be real among us?

Before we hire a choir director, organize a church school, write by-laws, send out fliers, make up a list of committees -- in short, plunge into the model of mainline Protestant and UU churches -- we need to feed our hearts, minds and souls.

What is the good news? And how will this be *good* news among us -- *this* congregation -- in a way that will rejuvenate and not deplete us?

Perhaps this means a minimal church, a church of Christian simplicity, rather than an unsuccessful mini-version of the 400-member sister in the next town.

As Christians, we are asking how the presence of Christ will be real among us.

Perhaps we will study the Bible instead of hearing a sermon. Perhaps we will learn to sing well together, rather than isolating some singers in a choir. Perhaps we will learn to worship with our children, instead of apart from them. Perhaps we will share the prayers and readings among the congregation. Perhaps we will learn to fly by the seat of our pants rather than the top of our brain.

Even as I write this, I wonder if I am creating one more impossible

ideal. Perhaps my readers will shake their heads and sadly say, "Wouldn't it be nice if this could work? But it won't. You can't get a church going this way."

Perhaps my readers are right. I'm not sure I have a plan for re-creating a church.

But I do know that the presence of Christ in a person or a congregation brings power and surprising direction. And I believe that too many churches have become workhouses, often filled with exhaustion and anxiety about their survival. And I cannot believe that this must be so.

A church of Christian simplicity. Is it possible today? †


**2002
"Christian
Track"
Events**

- **"Who are the UU Christians?"**
(Fri. 2:30 p.m.)
- **"Nurturing Christian Spirituality in a UU context"**
(Sat. 2 p.m.)
- **Christian Hymn Sing** from *Singing the Living Tradition* followed by the UUCF Annual Meeting
(Sat. 3:45 p.m.)
- **Communion Service: "Witnesses to the Resurrection"** with Clergy from Ground Zero & DC
(Sun. 4 p.m.)

Sponsored by
The UU Christian Fellowship & The Magi Network

The UU Christian Journey at G.A.

Looking for ways to deepen your spiritual life? Curious about Unitarian Universalism's "home grown" spirituality? This year, there's something new on the G.A. landscape: a UU Christian programming track you can follow in whole or in part.



† The purpose of the UUCF is to serve Christian Unitarians and Unitarians according to their expressed religious needs; to uphold and promote the Christian witness within the UUA; and to uphold and promote the historic Unitarian and Universalist witness and conscience within the overall universal, open, non-sectarian.

† The mission of the Magi Network is to ensure that everyone whose life would benefit from the presence of UU Christianity has access to and room in a nearby congregation. www.magi.uni.cc

See You at GA!

Look for the ad above on page 87 of the General Assembly program for the list of events co-sponsored by the Magi Network and the UU Christian Fellowship at GA in Quebec City, starting June 20th. †



Contributing to the Renaissance of Unitarian Universalist Christianity

Summer 2002

A Church of Christian Simplicity

Carl Scovel

Since I've retired I've been looking at churches and I'm struck by how much time and energy the members spend in order to staff committees, raise money, send out mailings, keep up morale, heat, light and maintain the building -- in short, to support an institution.

Often, it seems to me that church folk are so busy at the work of keeping the ship afloat that they don't have time for prayer, learning and pleasure, which they need in order to know God and grow as a religious people.

They are already working longer and harder at their jobs than did their parents. Sometimes they are caring for those parents or for their children. They have obligations as citizens. They are under stress. And the church itself makes demands and presses its concerns.

As one who now sits in a pew I often hear behind the appeal for funds, volunteers and new members, an anxiety about whether or not their church will survive. This

anxiety about institutional survival does not attract people and it is not inspiring.

When I hear ministers and layfolk discuss this situation, they acknowledge it sadly but with a sense that it can't be changed.

I can't believe this is true.

I can't believe it because I can't believe that a busyness which brings fatigue, resentment and anxiety is God's will for the church. I can't be-

To ensure that
everyone whose life
would **benefit** from
the **practice** of **UU**
Christianity has
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nearby
congregation

lieve that God intends these feelings or this structure for his (or her) people.

I believe that God wants first to refresh us and then use us.

But the initial change won't come with an Alban Institute program (good as they are) or with reading any of Lyle Schaller's or Loren Mead's excellent books.

The initial change comes in our response to God's intention.

First one must pray. Someone, maybe only one person, needs to pray, and in time another will, and another. In time half the congregation could be praying.

Praying means opening one's self to the intention of God, God's will that we take pleasure in the divine presence and enjoy that presence and in the light of that pleasure learn the specific plans and directions which will help our church become a less institutional and a more faithful community.

It is not dogma or inadequate funds or cultural secularism (or even pedophiles) that kills churches. It is

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