

As your District President, I work with all the Presidents of our nineteen districts from across the country. Over a year ago, the District Presidents Association met with members of our UUA Board of Trustees and discussed issues of governance, organization structure, accountability, and human resources.

We talked about our UUA developing a vision of Unitarian Universalism and asking their staff to work to implement this vision. And the fact that each of our Districts has a vision of Unitarian Universalism within the district, and we ask our District staff to work to implement that vision. But some of these staff members work for both our UUA and the District. Our District Executive, Rev. Kenn Hurto, is co-employed by our District and our UUA. So he is faced with trying to implement and report on two similar but different visions, and still serve our Congregations effectively.

We talked about our faith growing out of the Cambridge Platform of 1648, a document from the early Congregationalists that emphasizes polity: congregations being independently governed, and yet in covenant with each other, in a relationship to call each other back into covenant when a congregation breaks with the expectations of the faith. Our Unitarian Universalist culture is strongly independent, fiercely independent, and we strongly defend our independent congregations. But we often find that we have not developed the other part of polity as effectively: we are not well connected to other congregations within our faith, not in relationship, not in a position to call each other back into covenant when needed.

We talked about the human resources that could be developed, recruited, trained and put into service to our faith, to provide guidance, support and resources to our congregations. We talked about the value of connecting two or three congregations to each other in friendship, mutual support, mutual resource, sounding board, and in worship. We talked about the formation of geographic Regions, which has enhanced the growing cooperation of our District staff.

As a result of this work, Districts across the country have been meeting and exploring ways to increase cooperation across Districts, improve service delivery, joint use of resources, common planning, and coordinated service to our congregations. Further, there have been ongoing discussions within our UUA Board of Trustees, UUA staff, and within the District Presidents Association.

In December, our Florida District UUA Board of Trustees met with the boards of the Mid-South District, the Southwest Conference, and the Thomas Jefferson District, which together make up the Southland Region. Together we created a document, [the Orlando Platform](#), which summarizes the work we did. We offer this as a gift, a statement of our work, and perhaps one

more step in the work of redefining who we are called to be in our Unitarian Universalist Association. Clarifying who we are called to be together, and how we might move forward as a faith.

As a group of four districts we agreed that

- Our faith is at a crossroads, is not growing, and has little influence in the community and the culture at large
- We need to re-affirm the Cambridge Platform of 1648 that congregations cooperate with and be accountable to one another
- While each of our Districts work on vision and policy for our districts, we were each able to agree that the UUA vision is an appropriate broad vision for our faith. We need only one policy board, the UUA Board of Trustees.
- We must move from co-employment of district staff to UUA employment.
- We shall work together as district boards going forward in defining district roles
- We will work to strengthen clusters
- Elders, leaders in our faith of all ages, could be called on to be witnesses to the faith, augment shared ministry with district and UUA staff, and help hold congregations accountable to our covenantal polity

Consequently, at our January meeting of the Florida District UUA Board of Trustees, we worked in part to take steps in this transformation. We agreed to

- Suspend our district governing policies for a trial period of two years and adopt as our own the [UUA Board of Trustees global ends](#).
- Suspend our district governing policies for a trial period of two years and defer the supervision of our co-employed staff to the UUA as the singular employer.

What are our next steps? We are transforming ourselves and the world, making a change, making a difference through increasing the reach, witness and vitality of Unitarian Universalism in Florida. We will do this work by:

- Strengthening the bonds of community and covenant across our movement
- Promoting faith development
- Empowering youth and young adults
- Reaching beyond our doors for the greater good
- Growing the faith
- Encouraging inclusiveness; Celebrating and encouraging intentional multi-racial, multi-cultural congregations
- Encouraging accountability - to each other, to the future; lateral and vertical

- Developing leadership; cultivating Elders
- Honoring both professional and lay leadership
- Responding to a changing world – being flexible enough to address issues that arise
- Teaching, training, instructing and providing consultation
- Cultivating excellence (not perfection) in ministry
- Remembering this is religious work – no us and them

In the course of this work we will need to determine the role of our district board without governance as a priority. We envision that our work will be to serve in partnership with Kenn in service to our district and to our congregations. We will continue to call our District Executive into accountability about this service. We will be a sounding board and a separate voice to shine a bright light on things that are important. We will work to represent our Florida District in the work that is done within the district. We will develop a covenant with our UUA to clarify our new relationship and to assure that we have good communication regarding prioritizing the resources and the work, and considers our needs and specific district issues.

Our UUA Moderator Gini Courter said to those gathered in Orlando, “We don’t have 10-20 years to get this right. Let’s not put people passionate about Unitarian Universalism on the board but put them in outreach and as a witness to the faith. What is your dream? ... What if we gave you money to do amazing things? (To) get in touch with what makes your heart sing? What ministry are you called to? And what would it take to have that kind of amazement and energy and ministry? What is better – what we do now or what we could do then? This is the conversation.”

I hope you join us in the conversation.

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