



FOR LEADERS OF UU CONGREGATIONS

INTER Connections

Volume IX/ Issue 4

Published quarterly by the UUA

Fall 2006

DVDs and a CD Coming to Leaders

In October every congregational president will receive a mailing from UUA President William G. Sinkford, with two items:

- A DVD that features video presentations on four Breakthrough Congregations recognized at General Assembly for their successes in growth and vitality.

- A CD of *Drive Time Essays, Vol. 2: The Best of InterConnections*, with selected essays from the newsletter's first eight years.

Two other DVDs are available from district offices on request. The first, created by Jefferson Unitarian Church in Golden, Colo., features that congregation's exemplary welcoming and membership practices. The second features excerpts from UU University, the day-and-a-half program of workshops on membership, fiscal, and leadership practices held just before GA in June.

The Rev. Harlan Limpert, the UUA's director of district services, says the response to the first *Drive Time Essays* CD, issued last year, was very positive, and prompted them to look for additional ways to share useful information with lay leaders electronically.

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NOURISHING THE SPIRIT

Meaningful Worship Requires Attention, Focus

Good worship can be a challenge. The sermon may be inspiring and uplifting, with just the right tone and number of examples, but the transitions from one service element to another may not be smooth. Or the special music may not complement the sermon, or vice versa. Or the sound system may not work properly. Or the room may be too hot or too cold. Or someone may share inappropriately during joys and concerns. Or, somewhere, a baby cries. . . .

There is so much to get right. Several ministers of Unitarian Universalist congregations in the Atlanta area have been thinking about this, and they have come to the conclusion that there is more we can do to make worship meaningful. The Rev. David Keyes, interim minister of the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Atlanta (667 members), explains:

"We were discussing the fact that many congregations are not growing. Our contention was that there are multiple causes for that, but the one thing that is central is quality of worship." In brief, Keyes believes that much worship that takes place, especially in small and midsize congregations, is "family-sized worship" that can send signals to visitors that "we're a tight group here and you may or may not be allowed in."

Keyes and other Atlanta-area ministers last year began an "Excellence in Worship" project to gather information about UU worship in the belief that not enough attention is being paid to that topic denominationally. The project, still in its early stages, is interviewing ministers, music directors, religious educators, and lay leaders about doing

worship well. For the moment, the project presents its material on the website of the UU Congregation of Atlanta (uuca.org). It hopes to eventually have its own website.

Specifically Keyes believes four Sunday-morning elements are impeding growth—joys and concerns, announcements, the practice of inviting visitors to stand up and be recognized, and doing a children's story.

The Atlanta congregation does not do any of these, he says. Keyes believes that joys and concerns is difficult to do well, announcements disrupt the service flow, inviting visitors to stand up guarantees that "only extroverts will join your congregation," and doing a children's story "dumbs down" the service.

At UCCA there are no announcements except those printed in the order of service. Rubrics are used in the order of service so that congregants know when to sit, stand, and transition to new elements without the need for words. Rather than joys and concerns, members are invited to call out names—some let folks add a sentence, such as, "For my sister, who is facing surgery tomorrow." The minister ties all of these into a prayer.

Instead of a children's story at UCCA, during the 15 minutes of each service in which children are present, they are involved with the service in other ways. An older child lights the chalice each week. Children are present with their families for the call to worship, two hymns, and other special music, and then in a "turn and greet" segment adults and children welcome each other. The minister specifically

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INTER Connections

MISSION

InterConnections is an ally of board members and other leaders of Unitarian Universalist congregations, providing information and resources that empower them to be as effective as possible in their work to create and build healthier congregations.

InterConnections is a joint service of the UUA's Congregational Services, District Services, and Communications Staff Groups. It is made possible by congregations' Annual Program Fund contributions and the generosity of individual Unitarian Universalists to the UUA.

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WEB RESOURCES GUIDE

Answer congregational questions at *InterConnections Resources*, www.uua.org/layleader. It has four parts:

- Leadership Quickstart: Answers to your immediate questions.
- Resource Library: All copies of the *InterConnections* newsletter in a database searchable by topic or committee concern. Copy individual articles or whole issues.
- Leadership Events: a calendar of workshops and conferences.
- FAQ: More than 100 frequently asked questions, with answers.

Other essential resources:

E-mail lists for many areas of congregational life, including membership, finance, and public relations committees: uua.org/lists. Sign up and get help from experienced people in other congregations.

- Congregational services: uua.org/cde
- Worship: uua.org/worshipweb
- Social justice: uua.org/justice
- Young adult ministry: uua.org/ya-cm
- Small group ministry: uua.org/cde/sgm
- Safety and ethics: uua.org/cde/ethics

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CIRCULATION QUESTIONS

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InterConnections (ISSN 1524-184X) is published in Winter, Spring, Summer, and Fall by the departments of Communications and of Congregational Services of the Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations. It is sent free to board members and professionals on the staffs of all UU congregations.

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welcomes the children and says a few words about what will be happening in their classes that morning. Then the children are sung out on the first verse of a third hymn. This fall an element of prayer may be added.

Also this fall there will be one inter-generational service a month in which children stay for the entire 70-minute service. The sermon will be a little shorter and more accessible to children on that Sunday, says Keyes.

"We're making a real commitment to teaching children to worship," he says. "Parents have discovered their children can sit through regular worship and participate in it."

Not all worship leaders agree that joys and concerns are bad. The Rev. Jason Shelton, director of music at First UU Church in Nashville, Tenn. (330), says joys and concerns work very well at his congregation following a change in practice (see page 3).

My big thing is transitions," says Shelton. "There are classy ways and lazy ways to get from Element A to Element B. To say 'And now we're going to . . .' is lazy. With a little more preparation transitions can be seamless and graceful. Don't be afraid to use 10 to 15 seconds of silence as a transition, he says.

Before a service, decide what the central message is you want people to take home, Shelton recommends, and then work to gear everything—the music, children's story, hymns, and sermon—to that take-home message.

Shelton has found it useful to put an adhesive note on every piece of music about the message he'd preach if he wanted to do this music. "Ministers have said it's such a relief to know they don't have to come up with every sermon idea," he says.

The Rev. Gail Seavey, minister of First UU Nashville, says children's stories can be done well: "The job of worship has always been to tell stories and do some interpretation of them and intellectual reflection on them."

Simply reading a story to children during a service is the wrong way, Seavey says, because it leaves too many people out. She trains people at Nashville to be storytellers, and to find the best story they can for any service. "It doesn't have to have a moral," she says, "but it does have to have concrete, sensate imagery. Tell it well and

all ages of people will take their own meanings from it."

The Rev. Greg Ward, minister of UU Metro Atlanta North in Roswell, Ga. (152), says part of the inspiration for the Excellence in Worship study was the realization that lay people looking to improve worship presentations and structure have few resources.

"Much is left to chance and vacillating personal tastes," Ward says. They want to focus on worship, determine which practices most support spiritual and congregational growth, and find ways to propagate best practices.

One worship resource is being developed by the Revs. Kathleen Rolenz and Wayne Arneson, coministers at West Shore UU Church in Cleveland, Ohio (589). As a sabbatical project they traveled across North America, visiting many UU and other congregations, experiencing their Sunday worship. They are writing a book on what they found. Some of their information can be found at their church's website, wsuuc.org/blog/churches.

Rolenz says the churches they attended that they felt had the most engaging worship had a clear purpose and a clear sense of who they were. "There was drama in the service," she says, "and it was clear that worship was created not by a committee, but by someone, usually the pastor, who focused it on a consistent message." She adds that the most inspiring services also had a sense of presence of the holy: "The message was, 'We have something really important to share and we invite you to share it with us.'"

RESOURCES

The Excellence in Worship study is at uua.org. Click on "What's New" and go to the bottom of that page. Resources include interviews with ministers, music directors, and lay leaders about effective worship and a semiserious questionnaire to rate your own worship services.

Worship Web, an online resource for ordained and lay worship leaders, is at: uua.org/worshipweb.

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