



UULMNJ Joint Presidents' Annual Report

2014-2015

The Legislative Ministry Boards continue to work on building the infrastructure to support our growing advocacy role in addition to making decisions on the policy directions that that organization will take. We began the year with a Board Retreat including Task Force Chairs that focused on strategic planning for the organization. That was an energizing experience for us as we thought about how we wanted the organization to look in five years. We examined our strengths and capacities always orienting to our prime objective: being the voice of UU values in public sector decision-making. This planning process recognized our major achievements in addition to our needs.

We envisioned an organization that expands our role in congregations working in cooperation with other faith-based groups, in the community and in the public policy sector. As a result of this experience we focused in on four strategic goals to guide the boards' efforts during the year. This is a review of those goals and the ways that they have guided our efforts this year and will guide the organization's growth in subsequent years.

Goal: Prepare a development plan to allow us to fully realize an organization with more staff support.

This goal was the focus on the Development Committee chaired by Board Member Nick Lewis. Developing our financial base would allow us to build an expanded role for the Legislative Ministry including increasing current staff hours and to more fully support Task Force activities. We made some steps in that direction this year, with increasing the Executive Director's hours to 30 hours per week and the administrator's hours to 20 hours per week. Our eventual goal of an enhanced UULMNJ role took a significant step forward with a donation dedicated to hiring a part time staff person who focused on development. That staff person, Diane Connell, was added in January and is working with the Board and the Development Committee to release a development plan in the fall which will involve all congregations.

The Development Committee also created a "Justice Is Served" model for presenting UULMNJ to congregations, focusing on our foundation in UU values, achievements, organization and how to be more involved. This led to several meetings in Morristown and Montclair. Those meetings were very successful in bringing the Legislative Ministry to individual congregations and building commitment to our programs. We also held a UU Music Festival which brought choirs from several congregations together to sing, celebrate and hear about the Legislative Ministry's work. This effort, organized by our administrator Laurice Grae-Hanuck, was very successful in fund raising and in expanding our visibility; we plan to make this an annual event.

Goal: Create more visible presence for the Legislative Ministry in congregations

The Congregational Relations Committee chaired by Elaine Nigam led this effort. Each congregation has a contact on the committee who is charged with providing support to that congregation. Building on a joint effort with the Development Committee, the Committee organized five ways to reach out to congregations: Executive Director Rev. Craig Hirshberg leading a Sunday service with a possible meeting after the service with Board members; a service led by Board members; informal meetings in congregations using the "Justice Is Served" model; leading a discussion based on YUUR Voice in Trenton videos which focus on advocacy efforts; and presentations at Board Meetings. Outreach was done with several congregations, including South Jersey Shore, East Brunswick, Ridgewood and Wayne. Other activities are planned for the Hunterdon, Summit and Bordentown congregations within the next two months; and we are anxious to reach out to other congregations.

Goal: Work on improving visibility in the community

Board members Toby Tyler and Missy Stables developed this initiative with the Communications Committee. A major effort was made to redesign the web site to make it more compatible with small devices, to modernize the design and to make the web site easier to update. This work was accomplished with assistance of a consultant and there will be an official launch in the next month.

Goal: Identify a volunteer coordinator to involve more people in volunteer roles.

The Board has been involved in building a strong support system for the Legislative Ministry. But there was general recognition of the need to involve more volunteers who would bring increased energy and new skills. Board members Judy Strachan and Andrea Lerner led the successful effort to find a coordinator for volunteers, Bill Slezak.

All the board members of both the UU Legislative Ministry and the UU Legislative Ministry Public Policy Network have functioned to develop a vision for the Legislative Ministry and to develop the structure to support these activities. Members of both boards meet together monthly to hold strategic discussion and monitor progress towards our Legislative Ministry objectives as a whole. At the end of their joint meeting time, the Boards convene separately and hold their respective meetings to direct the two organizations and vote on relevant issues. Members of both Boards also serve as volunteers on our Board committees, Task Forces and as congregational liaisons. Our success in these efforts depends on their continued energy and dedication working in community with congregations.

Submitted by:

Frances Prestianni, President, UULMNJ Board of Trustees
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