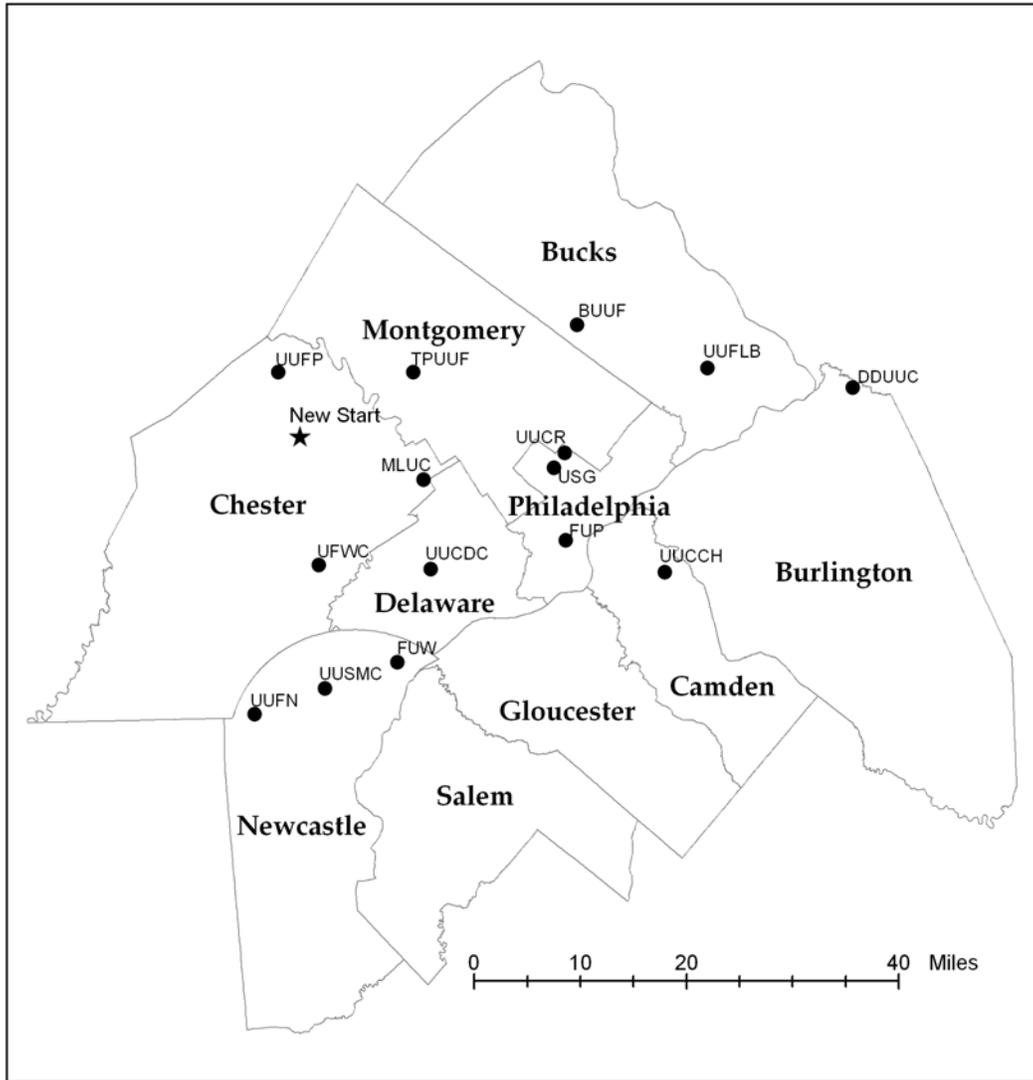


Vital Congregations

Final Report of the Philadelphia/Wilmington Metro Growth Committee

March 2005



BuxMont UU Fellowship
Dorothea Dix UU Congregation
First U Church of Philadelphia
First U Church of Wilmington
Main Line Unitarian Church
Thomas Paine UU Fellowship
UU Church in Cherry Hill
UU Church of Delaware County

UU Church of the Restoration
UU Fellowship of Newark
UU Fellowship of Lower Bucks
UU Fellowship of Pottstown
Unitarian Fellowship of West Chester
Unitarian Society of Germantown
UU Society of Mill Creek

The Joseph Priestley District's
Philadelphia/Wilmington
Metropolitan Growth Planning Committee

Vital Congregations

March 2005

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The Joseph Priestley District's
Philadelphia/Wilmington
Metropolitan Growth Planning Committee

Vital Congregations Summary

March 2005

The Metro Growth Planning Committee has developed a plan to stimulate the growth of Unitarian Universalism in the Philadelphia/Wilmington area. Here is a summary of our recommendations:

- 1. An Annual Metropolitan Worship Service** for the revival and extension of Unitarian Universalism and Unitarian Universalist congregations.
- 2. A series of activities to strengthen congregations' programs and to prepare them to grow. Networks** of congregational leaders that share ideas and collaborate on local and area initiatives.
- 3. A Unitarian Universalist Awareness Program** to raise the visibility of the denomination.
- 4. An area-wide initiative for Living Our Faith Through Social Justice.** This includes a Social Action Council and the hiring of a social justice professional.
- 5. An ongoing process to form New Congregations.** We endorse the Main Line Unitarian Church's starting a new northern Chester County congregation. Second, we recommend that the District organize new congregations on a regular basis. Third, we endorse the program proposed by the UUA and the district to offer two-year growth consultations to congregations in areas adjacent to new starts.

The Joseph Priestley District's
Philadelphia/Wilmington
Metropolitan Growth Planning Committee
Vital Congregations

Our Vision

Our vision for Unitarian Universalism in the metropolitan area:

- Healthy, vibrant, full service congregations that serve people of all ages, abilities, socio-economic statuses, ethnicities, races, and sexual orientations.
- Congregations planted in response to possibilities, demographic trends and projections.
- A rich abundance of congregations, of varying sizes, styles, theological leanings and missions.
- Congregations that work together, communicate, cooperate with and support each other.
- Congregational members who know what it means to be a Unitarian Universalist, who are proud to be Unitarian Universalists, and who can name and locate other Unitarian Universalist congregations in the area.
- An awareness among the general population about Unitarian Universalism and an increase in people visiting and joining our congregations.
- Congregations and their members that live their Unitarian Universalist faith beyond their church doors and whose lives embody the UU principles.
- An increased Unitarian Universalist presence in the struggle for peace and justice.

The Process

The Joseph Priestley District organized the planning committee in the summer of 2003. Our assignment was to create a multi-year plan for the growth of Unitarian Universalism in the metro area.

We have sought to involve the metro area's congregations in the development of our plans to as great an extent as possible. We will have made four rounds of visits to congregations: during the winter and spring of 2004, during the summer of 2004, during

February 2005, and during March 2005.

Simultaneously, we set up task forces to correspond to areas in the vision. We gave each task force the assignment to study and make plans for pathways to growth. These groups spent the summer of 2004 creating growth plans. The groups are as follows:

The Task Forces

- **Existing Congregations** – assisting existing congregations in achieving numerical and spiritual growth by strengthening current programs and by encouraging cooperation among area leaders.
- **New Congregations** – launching new large congregations. There were two task forces for this: one for northern Chester County, the other for future congregations in other areas.
- **Publicity and Outreach** – bringing a new level of awareness of Unitarian Universalism in the metro area through a coordinated publicity program.
- **Social Justice** – promoting social justice by working together in ways that show how Unitarian Universalist congregations live their values.

An additional and essential task force explored potential **Funding** for the initiatives.

The Recommendations

Here are more detailed descriptions of our recommendations, based on the work of the task forces.

1. Annual Metropolitan Area Worship Service

We think it would be wonderful if UUs from all over the metropolitan area worshipped together every year. This annual worship event might start modestly, but it is our hope that it will grow into an annual Unitarian Universalist revival! People of all ages would attend, and there would be a special program for children. There would be an area-wide choir. It is not intended to compete against or be an alternative to the regular congregational worship services. The offering could support an area social justice program. The purpose would be to:

- Reinforce Unitarian Universalist identity for local members.
- Increase members' morale and pride and their commitment to Unitarian Universalism.
- Reach unaffiliated Unitarian Universalists.
- Give seekers a way to discover area Unitarian Universalist congregations.

- Exhibit inter-congregational cooperation.

It would be appropriate for the local ministers chapter, the Priestley-Kingsbury Chapter of the Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association, to take responsibility for the annual worship service. The chapter could appoint a small committee of ministers serving metro area congregations. These ministers would then recruit music directors, religious educators, administrators and lay members to work with them.

2. Strengthening Our Congregations

This effort will strengthen local networks of congregational officers and staff, as well as district resources. These can be organized around their functions. During regularly scheduled meetings, people will have the time to share best practices and learn more about each other's churches (for example, Mill Creek's taking its capital campaign expertise to another congregation for a how-to workshop). There can also be sharing through the Internet. Some functions can include:

- Web masters
- Newsletter editors
- Administrators

This initiative is mainly a series of local programs, workshops and networking events, utilizing district and congregational resources. The programs will help congregational leaders gain insights into ways to enhance existing materials and programs. By coming together for workshops, leaders from different congregations will share ideas and collaborate on local and area initiatives.

In addition, the growth consulting program for congregations in areas adjacent to new starts, described below, will also strengthen our congregations.

3. Unitarian Universalist Publicity and Outreach Program

This multi-year initiative will help people learn about Unitarian Universalism and our congregations, motivating them to visit and eventually to join. This effort can involve building on the three-phase process created by the Unitarian Universalist Association. Phase 1 has little cost and focuses on the congregation. Phase 2 begins by assessing the larger community, and then reaching out to it. It includes using the media and publicity. Finally, Phase 3 is a full-fledged media campaign. A committee can choose which parts of this plan to implement and can get support from the UUA and the district staff.

Parts of Phase 1 are included in the Existing Congregation recommendations in this report. Other parts would include:

- Displaying and using Unitarian Universalist bumper stickers, jewelry and

stationery

- Conducting a Unitarian Universalist t-shirt design contest, and selling the winning designs.
- Taking a new members' and visitors' survey and discovering the reasons people have for coming to and participating in our congregations.

Phase 2 builds on the first effort and starts involving congregations with each other. Area church leaders and members meet together and share thoughts and ideas on bringing in more visitors and members. Each congregation then determines its own way of tracking attendance and participation. With these elements in place, the next step is to start having radio and public service announcements as well as articles in local newspapers.

Phase 3 is a full-scale media campaign. This covers print, radio, television advertising and includes public events.

4. Living Our Faith Through Social Justice

The Social Justice task force is starting a social action coordinating council, consisting of the social action chairs from the congregations. The first meeting will be in April 2005. The purpose of this council is to:

- Enable congregations' social action groups to work cooperatively and collectively.
- Partner with groups of shared values and objectives in interfaith programs
- Organize and promote an annual Living Our Faith Through Social Action Sunday

We believe that this effort will grow and need the support of a district staff person. Therefore, we recommend that the district hire a social justice professional. This person will support the social action council. They will work with the broader faith community and provide theological grounding. They can connect with the other UU religious professionals in the region. Lastly, they will be a public voice for Unitarian Universalist social action and a media resource.

Our goal for filling this position is September 2006. We see the Social Action Council and the District Executive appointing a Search Committee to conduct the hiring process.

5. New Congregations

The Philadelphia/Wilmington area consists of more than 1,000 square miles. There are over 250 communities, with a population of more than 5 million. But there are only 14

congregations to serve this area. Since 1990, only one new congregation has been started in this area. In Southeastern Pennsylvania, there has not been a new congregation in 37 years. We need to match our congregations to the area and its demographic trends.

With these facts in mind, we endorse the initiative to start a new congregation in northern Chester County. This is a partnership between Main Line Unitarian Church, the Unitarian Universalist Association, the Joseph Priestley District, and this committee. This initiative will lead to a mid-size or larger congregation within a few years. The UUA and the steering committee will pay close attention to integrating the new congregation in a way that strengthens existing congregations in its proximity so that we extend the denomination, its number and purpose.

We also realize that there are new start opportunities in the remaining metropolitan area. We recommend that the Joseph Priestley District's Growth and Extension Committee organize new congregations on an ongoing basis.

It is premature to state a site for the next congregation. When looking at the area and the population, we see many under-served areas. There is definitely space for growth. There are a variety of models for how to start new congregations, and new congregations can come in different sizes, depending on the circumstances. They can vary from large congregations planted by the UUA to fellowships sponsored by existing congregations. We would welcome, in addition, entrepreneurial ministers or self-starting groups.

We realize that the attention and publicity surrounding a new start – especially a new start designed to result quite quickly in a large congregation – has an impact on existing congregations, especially those in closer proximity to the new congregation. The district and the UUA are committed to assisting congregations in such a time of opportunity. The district, in partnership with the UUA, will offer to those neighboring congregations that demonstrate a commitment to growth a two-year program of growth consultation, at no charge to the congregations. Under this consulting arrangement, a UUA growth consultant would make periodic weekend visits to assist the participating congregations in planning for growth and in implementing their plans.

6. Funding

The costs of these recommendations range from relatively modest to substantial investment. The Northern Chester County Church already has financing commitments from the UUA, the Main Line Unitarian Church, and the JPD. The UUA funds are from restricted gifts designated only for large church start-ups. There are no plans to ask for money from other congregations in the area for the Northern Chester County Church.

For other initiatives, there are potential financial sources that might include but are not limited to:

- The JPD **Chalice Lighter** program
- Grants from **congregations**
- District **dues**
- The **Delaware Valley Area Council**
- The proposed district **endowment**
- Grants from committed **individuals**, obtained with help from the UUA
- The **Pennsylvania Universalist Convention**
- The Fund for Unitarian Universalist **Social Responsibility**, for the social justice professional
- Working with **UUA financial consultants**
- The **Fund for Unitarian Universalism**, for the publicity program
- Miscellaneous grants from the **UUA**, from restricted or unrestricted funds.

Implementation Responsibility

To help implement these plans, we recommend that the District establish both an Implementation Committee and a staff position to assist the committee.

Our criteria for success will be increased attendance at our churches, more UU presence in the area, a larger number of financially healthy congregations and more churches working together.

The Implementation Committee would be charged to:

- Study the plan's recommendations
- Find appropriate funding
- Develop strategies to implement the goals
- Implement the goals
- Measure the progress
- Monitor the results.

At the end, in the next five to ten years, the committee would start a new planning cycle.

The District Executive could select the co-chairs. They could then select their committee members. It would help to have no more than one member from a single congregation.

To assist the Implementation Committee in implementing the plan, we recommend that the district provide a part-time staff person.

Congregational Endorsement

We, the Metro Growth Planning Committee, believe that our congregations making a commitment to cooperate by endorsing this proposal would indicate success; we are certain our congregations making a commitment to cooperate and then following through with dedication to the implementation of this plan will result in all of the participating congregations growing stronger, and in the growth of the our UU movement in the area.

The metro growth planning committee, through its representatives, is asking the area congregations to endorse this plan. While we cannot bind or dictate the future decisions either of congregations acting collectively or individually, it is our hope and expectation that a congregation that endorses this plan:

- Generally agrees with supporting the growth of Unitarian Universalism.
- Generally agrees with this plan.
- Commits to providing some resources and financial support for implementing the plan, knowing that churches will cooperatively and equitably make specific decisions on financial contributions.
- Commits to staying engaged in the metropolitan planning process and to working cooperatively with other congregations.

The following congregations endorse the plan:

BuxMont Unitarian Universalist Fellowship
Unitarian Universalist Church in Cherry Hill
Dorothea Dix Unitarian Universalist Community
Unitarian Society of Germantown
Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Lower Bucks
Main Line Unitarian Church
Unitarian Universalist Society of Mill Creek
First Unitarian Church of Philadelphia
Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Pottstown

Unitarian Universalist Congregation of the South Jersey Shore
Thomas Paine Unitarian Universalist Fellowship
First Unitarian Church of Wilmington

These congregations have not yet made a final decision but we believe that they are moving toward endorsement at their April meetings:

Unitarian Universalist Church of Delaware County
Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Newark
Unitarian Universalist Church of the Restoration
Unitarian Fellowship of West Chester

The Committee

Philadelphia/Wilmington Planning Committee members include:

Rev. Dr. Stephan Papa (Main Line parish minister), co-chair, also new congregations I task force liaison

Marilyn Dyson, Ph.D. (Restoration), co-chair

Cathie Albair (Cherry Hill)

Bill Clinton (Delaware County), also new congregations II task force convener

Rev. Monica Cummings (Lower Bucks minister)

Amy Hillier Fraatz (Philadelphia 1st)

Rev. Dr. Florence Gelo (Thomas Paine minister)

***Rev. Dr. Holly Horn** (Philadelphia 1st Church co-minister)

Ron Hovis (Pottstown), also new congregations I task force

Virginia Kirk (Thomas Paine), also social justice task force liaison

Fran Loeffelholz (Mill Creek)

Rev. Kent Matthies (Germantown minister), also publicity and outreach task force

Rev. Melanie Morel-Ensminger (Cherry Hill minister).

Ken Olin (Philadelphia 1st), also social justice task force

Robin Pugh (BuxMont director of religious education), also existing congregations liaison

David Sheppard (Wilmington), also funding task force convener

Rev. David H. Hunter, Joseph Priestley District Planning Consultant

* no longer on the committee

The District, the Unitarian Universalist Association, and the Unitarian Universalist Funding Program provided funding for the staff that supported this committee.

Also, the committee thanks the Unitarian Universalist Church of Delaware County, and its administrator, Rina Jurceka, for graciously hosting our meetings.

Task Force Participants

The committee thanks the following individuals who have participated in task force activities:

Marian Augustine (Thomas Paine), new congregations I
Jeff Baumann (Thomas Paine), existing congregations
Lincoln Baxter (West Chester), new congregations I
Terry Berge (Cherry Hill member, Main Line intern minister), social justice
Tracy Bleakney (BuxMont), social justice
Arnold Bradburd (Restoration), funding
Rick Briscoe (Main Line), new congregations I
Kathé Cairns (Main Line), publicity and outreach
Malcolm Campbell (Main Line), new congregations I
Kim Christy (Wilmington), publicity and outreach
Rev. Greg Chute (Newark), publicity and outreach
Steve Cohen (Wilmington), social justice
Dena Condron (BuxMont), social justice
Diane Cornman-Levy (Main Line), social justice co-leader
Doyle Dobbins (Wilmington), social justice
Katherine Elder (BuxMont), publicity and outreach convener (deceased)
Becky Falkowski (Wilmington), social justice
Pam Finkelman (Wilmington), publicity and outreach
Katherine Fisher (Main Line), new congregations I
Chris Gluesing (Germantown), new congregations II
Rohn Hein (Cherry Hill), social justice
Alan Hollister (Main Line), new congregations I
Pat Hughes (Main Line), funding *and* new congregations I
Larry Jeffers (Main Line), new congregations I
Rev. Virginia Jerocha-Ernst (Main Line), existing congregations
Carla Johnson (Pottstown), social justice
Frank Kaplan (Main Line), new congregations I co-chair
Bruce Koepcke (West Chester), publicity and outreach
Frank MacArtor (Mill Creek), new congregations II
John Maiorano (Wilmington), new congregations II
David Marshall (BuxMont), existing congregations
Marie Oakberg (Wilmington) social justice co-leader
Roberta Penniman (BuxMont), publicity and outreach
Kathy Platt (Main Line), new congregations I
Rev. Dan Schatz (BuxMont), existing congregations convener
Glen Schmiesing (Newark), new congregations II
Barbara Smith (Philadelphia 1st), publicity and outreach
Elizabeth Terry (Philadelphia 1st), funding
Del Tweedie (Main Line), new congregations I co-chair
Pamela Webb (Main Line), new congregations I