

Report of the Futures Exploratory Committee
Fox Valley Unitarian Universalist Fellowship
Green Bay Area Unitarian Universalist Fellowship
May 5, 2014

The Futures Exploratory Committee is a joint committee of the Fox Valley Unitarian Universalist Fellowship (FVUUF) and the Green Bay Area Unitarian Universalist Fellowship (GBAUUF). The purpose of the Committee is “to explore enhanced cooperation and collaboration between the two congregations including such examples as shared programming, shared staff, and a fusion where the two congregations become one congregation with two or more sites.” The Committee was charged with providing a status report to the two congregations in May 2014, and this report is intended to fulfill that charge.

Background

A goal included in the FVUUF Five-Year Plan, which was adopted in May 2013, stated “We will strengthen our Oshkosh satellite and collaborate with our neighboring and partner Unitarian Universalist congregations to make Unitarian Universalism stronger and more vibrant.” Furthermore, a strategy idea contained in the Plan was to “work with the Fond du Lac and Green Bay congregations to strengthen our relationship and engage in collaborative activities.” Consequently, Rev. Roger Bertschausen contacted the governing boards of the Fond du Lac and Green Bay congregations to assess their interest in exploring increased collaboration. While the GBAUUF board was immediately receptive to this idea, the Fond du Lac board declined to participate at this time.

In July 2013 a joint FVUUF-GBAUUF committee was formed. Rev. Bertschausen, Miriam Douglass, Lou Hull, and Rick Krumwiede represent FVUUF on the committee, and Vicki Fresen, Janice Galt, Kari Beth Krieger, Ed Millermaier, and Mary Wallschlaeger represent GBAUUF. Hull and Millermaier were selected as co-chairs, and Rev. Leah Hart-Landsberg and Eric Riggers also attended some meetings.

Process

The committee met nine times between July 2013 and May 2014, discussing a variety of topics.

Date	Meeting Focus
07/31/13	Introductions, get acquainted
09/05/13	Selection of co-chairs, future agenda topics
11/07/13	Appleton & Green Bay Harmony Café example – S. Kenevan
01/11/14	Review work to date, plan future work, healthy congregations document, discuss Oshkosh & Fond du Lac roles

Date	Meeting Focus
02/26/14	Administration, staffing comparison, staffing needs for collaboration
03/26/14	Bylaws & governance comparison, policy governance
04/23/14	Budgets, collaboration costs, possible cost-sharing
04/27/14	Conclusions, content of status report

Additional Factors

The Committee also reviewed the experience in the Houston area where three UU congregations decided to merge in 2013. They agreed that they were better off together than they would be by each continuing alone. There is a trend in the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) toward multisite ministry, and the UUA is very interested in the results of our discussions. In addition, Rev. Bertschausen will be participating in an intensive multisite learning circle that the UUA is sponsoring.

In February, Rev. Bertschausen met with the board and planning committee of the Open Circle UU Fellowship (OCUUF) in Fond du Lac, and he reported they indicated an interest in being part of the process to explore “a fusion or some other sort of increased collaboration with other area congregations.” The Futures Exploratory Committee kept this in mind while working to complete its charge, and OCUUF intends to assess its membership’s interest in participating should the Futures Committee continue its exploration in 2014-2015.

More recently, Rev. Bertschausen met with the board of the Prairie Lakes UU Fellowship in Ripon. It’s not clear at this time whether the Ripon congregation has an interest in exploring collaboration with us.

Conclusions

As a result of its work, members of the Futures Exploratory Committee achieved consensus on the following conclusions:

1. Enhanced collaboration and cooperation between UU congregations would provide a tremendous opportunity to extend the reach of Unitarian Universalism in the area. A combined effort among area congregations would enhance the ability of every participating congregation to achieve their collective missions, thrive, and grow.
2. The Committee was charged with exploring the continuum of possible collaboration from engaging in a few cooperative activities to a fusion where the two congregations combine into a single congregation, and it quickly concluded that the goal of enhanced collaboration should be the establishment of a single Fellowship (i.e., one legal entity) with multiple locations.

A single multisite congregation would offer the most complete programming, ministerial services, and administrative services to all sites, providing all locations with the best opportunity to thrive and grow. A single congregation would also take advantage of economies of scale, eliminate duplication, and maximize the use of financial resources. All locations would be equal partners in furthering the mission of Unitarian Universalism.

3. While there are some differences in the operations of FVUUF and GBAUUF, the committee does not believe that any of the current differences are so significant that they could not be overcome to establish a single multisite congregation.
4. Recognizing that all congregations would lose some autonomy in the creation of a single entity, the creation of a single entity must be mutually beneficial to all participating congregations in order for it to be successful, i.e., the advantages of a larger unit must outweigh the loss of local autonomy.
5. The policy-based governance model, currently used by FVUUF and other large congregations, would be the appropriate governance model for a newly created entity comprised of two or more area congregations.
6. While FVUUF is staffed for its current operation, additional staffing would be required in order to provide appropriate programming and ministerial services to a single multisite congregation comprised of the FVUUF and GBAUUF. Because of economies of scale, the staffing required to serve the Appleton, Oshkosh, and Green Bay locations could also appropriately serve a location in Fond du Lac. Including Fond du Lac would increase the financial resources available to a single multisite congregation.
7. It is estimated that the minimum cost for the necessary additional staffing needed for a multisite congregation with locations in Appleton, Fond du Lac, Green Bay, and Oshkosh would be approximately \$80,000 a year.
8. Given the current finances of FVUUF and GBAUUF, both congregations would need to increase their available financial resources, by increasing pledge income or reducing current expenditures, before it would be feasible to create a single congregation. Should a single congregation be established, the bulk of the additional funding required for staffing would need to come from GBAUUF and OCUUF.

Recommendations

The Futures Exploratory Committee respectfully makes the following recommendations for consideration by the respective congregations. These recommendations, if approved, would narrow the focus of the committee's role from exploring all types of collaboration between the Fox Valley and Green Bay congregations to developing a specific plan for establishing a single multisite congregation.

1. It is recommended that the FVUUF and GBAUUF congregations authorize the committee to continue its work for another year and to invite OCUUF to participate on the committee.
2. It is recommended that the committee's charge for the 2014-2015 year be to create a detailed plan for the establishment of a single multisite congregation, comprised of the current FVUUF, GBAUUF, and OCUUF congregations, to serve locations in Appleton, Fond du Lac, Green Bay, and Oshkosh. Furthermore, the plan shall:
 - a. Include detailed information about the governance, staffing, program, and budget required to successfully operate a newly created multisite congregation.
 - b. Include a list of steps and a timeline for establishing a single congregation with multiple locations.
 - c. Be presented for consideration at the 2015 annual meetings of each participating congregation.
3. It is recommended that the committee make quarterly reports of its progress during 2014-2015 to the governing board of each participating congregation.

It is important to note that approval of these recommendations does not commit either congregation to any kind of future fusion or consolidation. Approval of these recommendations simply authorizes the Futures Committee to continue its work for another year in order to prepare a detailed plan for consideration a year from now.

Should the Committee develop a satisfactory plan for establishing a single multisite congregation that is approved by the participating congregations in 2015, it's likely that July 2016 would be the earliest that the operation of a single congregation could begin. However, it's possible that commencing operation as a single multisite congregation could require a short multiyear phase-in.