



THE DISTRICT PRESIDENTS ASSOCIATION REPORT

Reflections of a past Board Observer, October 2004

THE DPA SPONSORED WORKSHOP AT GA 2004

"I'm the President of WHAT???" a workshop for congregation presidents was this year's DPA-sponsored workshop. Harlan Limpert and Lynda Bluestein presented the workshop twice with attendance of about 130 the first session and 110 at the second. Evaluations written at the time of the workshops were quite positive.

Lessons Learned: As partners in leadership, it seems appropriate that the DPA's Workshop slot should be planned to compliment whatever the UUA Board is doing at GA. In years past, the leaders of the DPA have struggled to come up with a workshop idea and/or presenters at GA that made sense in terms of whatever GA was supposed to accomplish. Some years we have been more successful than in others. Some years it seemed clearer what GA was hoping to accomplish too.

It seems right that in our newfound spirit of collaboration we coordinate our GA events *as* elected leaders *for* elected leaders of congregations. Timing is important here. The DPA meets only once before GA to do all the planning for the GA Meeting so, if at the October meeting of the Board there could be a discussion about the GA theme/plan it could be acted upon at the November DPA meeting.

THE LEADERSHIP SUMMIT AT GA 2004

The DPA voted to assume complete financial responsibility for the Summit 2004. While it may not have been crystal clear to all exactly what the purpose of the Summit was, the DPs who attended felt that it was important, worthy of financial support and worth doing again – perhaps the next time with more collaboration in the planning from other constituencies like the board and field staff.

Lessons Learned: Having a clear idea of what we (UUA Board, Officers, HQ Staff and DPA) want to accomplish agreed upon well in advance of the event would have been helpful. I found it very difficult to plan this Summit because 1) I didn't have clarity of purpose; 2) some sense of the expectations (what did the Board want to get out of this event, if anything, other than "show support for the DPA"); and 3) the current DPA members didn't have a clear concept or understanding either. If we all (and here I mean board, staff, dps and perhaps UUMA chapter presidents) agree it is a good thing to break bread together the night before GA opens then I would suggest that all parties engage in a conversation about purpose and expected outcome. I would have appreciated having agenda-planning help and think this would be worthwhile for those who are giving up their pre-GA Wednesday evening to attend.

CONGREGATION PRESIDENTS AT GA

The District Presidents, I think, worked very effectively to promote GA in Long Beach to CPs in their districts and with a fine result. Of course we weren't the only ones talking up GA to our congregations' leaders, but we certainly contributed and were vested in the outcome of the Board's initiative.

Lessons Learned: The DPA truly is ready and willing to be supportive of UUA BOT initiatives. The collaboration this year should be come a model for how we craft and communicate messages regarding the involvement of congregations' leaders at GA. DPs are also willing partners in doing 'stuff' at GA that helps link leaders in our districts with the Association's leadership. I think we would welcome many more opportunities to participate with the BOT in this way.

Inviting the DPs to have lunch with the Moderator (on the Moderator?) before the double session with congregation presidents was very much appreciated. The DPs who attended the double session sat with CPs from their districts and not only did they enjoy the experience, but it created new linkages that DPs were able to take back to their districts in support of greater denominational involvement. Thank you Madam Moderator, thank you Board. We noticed.

LEGACY FINANCIAL AGREEMENTS IN SUPPORT OF FIELD STAFF

A task force of seven (two DPs, two field staff professionals, two headquarters staff and a past district treasurer) has been working on re-thinking the formula for district support. This group met for the second time face to face (we had numerous e-mail conversations) at GA. It took us very little time to review the collected data and the various alternative proposals for redistribution of district support dollars to realize that we were neither ready nor willing to pursue any tinkering with district funding formulae at this time.

The current funding formula lacks clarity and fairness and it is not based on discernable criteria. The task force looked at many criteria – including size i.e. # of UUs in District, # of congregations, # of sq miles, # of staff; growth, i.e. real growth in recent years or potential for growth; staff equalization – i.e. giving more weight to districts that have only 1 field staff consultant; financial equalization i.e. taking into consideration whether districts have endowments or other funding sources, etc. etc. etc.

Fixing the district funding formula(as if that could be done and we all agreed that it was a pretty daunting task) is the tip of the iceberg in terms of addressing the underlying issues of how to best deliver services to congregations.

Lessons Learned: My husband has a sticker on his guitar case that says "Oh no! Not another learning experience!" which pretty much summarizes where I think we are with this particular task force. While I believe that collaboration among the players selected for this task force – district presidents, field staff and

headquarters staff was/is an excellent way to tackle the issue, we didn't have enough of what was needed to be equal to the initial assignment. The learning experience here was that we set out to fix a screwy funding formula only to find that we had hit a barrier because we weren't getting to the real heart of the issue which is service delivery.

Things that are working well UUA Board - DPA:

1. Having the president of the DPA be the regular Board Observer during his/her term seems to provide both the DPA and the UUA Board with continuity and a direct channel for communication. (past me – future Connie Haas-Zuber)
2. Having a liaison from the UUA Board (Eva Marx) attend the DPA meetings in November is a good thing – it offers the DPA acknowledgement of its importance to the Board and provides a conduit for communication.
3. The role of DPA President as 'scribe' for the UUA Board meeting was good for me and I suspect that my successor will find it to be positive as well. It gives more meaning to being an observer (not just passive but active participation) and I believe has contributed to our overall improved understanding of one another.

Thank you all again for every consideration you showed me this past year that I have served as your board observer, scribe and participant in board and working group conversations.

In faith,

Lynda Bluestein

Lynda Bluestein

Past President and current Secretary of the District President's Association

09/15/04