

Regionalization Conversation

8 Mar 2015, Buckman Bridge Unitarian Universalist Church

Sarah Ritzmann: Florida District Board Trustee,

Maggie Lovins: Congregational Life Consultant, Southern Region.

~25 attendees

Disclaimer: These notes are offered to BBUUC as an attempt to communicate the content of the Regionalization Conversation, but may not be complete. The PR/Communications committee has done its best to convey the conversation that occurred, but asks for an understanding that these are not official, endorsed by any involved party, and may unintentionally exclude information or context. If you have any questions, please ask the person who spoke to the issue as noted. A partial recording of this event is available to BBUUC members. Please send corrections to pr_communications@bbuuc.org.

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Linda Mowers: Welcome. Reminder about Covenant of Right Relations

Sarah Ritzmann: Opening words. Need not to be afraid to grow. We can be a force if we find our voice and commitment, avoid silly fights. We can stay small if we choose. Or something can smart here, we can name and claim our leadership. Need to be selfless, nonterritorial.

[Presentation Slides](#)

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[Most of the questions are inaudible, as are some of the answers. You may want to follow along with the notes to see the questions.]

Sarah: Regionalization.

Former District structure:

- Involved business entity with annually elected board at DA.

- Responsible for asset, staff mgmt. Staff partially managed by district, partly by UUA.
- Managed some funds, operational expenses for district-hosted events, board meetings, leadership school, DA.
- Sole employer for administrative staff.

John G: What is the structure now?

Sarah: Regionalization part of a long process which is ongoing for past 5 years. At present time, all employees employed by the Region, which is part of the UUA. Gives us access to all employees for Southern Region. Can pull in people with broader set of specialties.

If the original plans work out, in 2020, process will be complete.

Big part of regional model is relationships. Being part of congregations around us, interacting with each other. Elders and clusters are part of the structures that will be implemented to reach these goals. An elder is an influential member of a tribe/community.

BBUUC part of Northeast Florida cluster. Clusters will become broader, not just business entity. Can be groups of congregations with similar interests, needs.

Charlie: Shouldn't just emphasize regional clusters. Other sources of clusters.

Sarah: That is where "relational clusters" come in. can be groups of congregations with similar interests, size, or needs.

Will: What does grow the faith mean? Numbers, influence, strength?

Sarah: All three.

Sarah: 1648, Cambridge Platform establishes structure where congregations in covenant with each other. Guiding value love neighbor as self. Many roles for the faithful. This is where term "elder" came from (does not mean age).

Orlando Platform 2010: wanted to be in covenant, fill roles in the faith, love one another. Each district decided to set aside own ends in favor of those of the UUA, employ staff only by UUA, train and empower lay leaders (elders), district boards duplicating work done by the UUA board.

Leadership development/training important. Not just spending money and time, but functional training.

Between 2010 and 2013, district boards worked together. In 2013 met at The Mountain to assess what had happened since Orlando.

Shared ministry will grown and thrive in new model

- Elders
- Clusters
- Fiduciary Committee

- Congregational Life Staff
- Trained lay Congregational Consultants
- UUA Board Linkage
- Regional advisory council

Morgan: What role will youth ministry have?

Sarah: Clusters, elders, similar to young adults. Youth are encouraged participate in nearly any role – equal to all ages.

Morgan: What about organizations, not just individuals.

Sarah: Similar to today. Beacon not directly administered by District.

Sarah: Fiduciary committee works with financial aspects of transition. Congregational life staff: Bring in to provide structure. Trained lay congregational consultants. (i.e. Smart Church Consultants.)
Democratic process: governance end of things will move to UUA Board of Trustees. Board has made a number of commitments to make the bond strong. Believes this will allow deeper engagement with UUA. “We” meaning congregations. Direct link from congregations to UUA Board. Congregational participation via voting at GA. Board to produce additional structure for input.

Dani: Working to create linkage. What does that mean, at a high level?

Sarah: Scott Tayler is Director of Congregational Life. Will be implanted with Regional Advisory Council.

Linda M: How does linkage occur?

Sarah: Still TBD. But there are commitments by UUA to produce it.

Maggie: Since new, still working on structure. When we have actual information, that will be posted. New model of deep relationships.

Chris: UUA Board linkage being watched closely, by whom?

Maggie: Other regions.

Sarah: Only one other merger has occurred, and that was merging two districts to a larger district.

Chris: We’re going to vote on this at DA? What if it doesn’t pass? I’m very involved, but why haven’t we heard about it before?

Sarah: That is a good question.

[Clarification: The discussion about communication of the information about regionalization was specific to BBUUC.]

Scott: Communication has not been happening.

Sarah: Newsletter, web site, events like this one.

Linda: Some communications have been coming to Board, church. Admittedly, this has been pushed to the bottom of the priority list since moving into the building, but has not been completely abandoned. There has been no denominational affairs volunteer for several years, but the board intends to fill that position.

Jeremy: Communications should be coming to pr_communications.

Scott: Not happening.

Maggie: Technical glitches should be overcome.

Lisa: We need change to make things better, we need to grow up. Even though it has been going on for a long time, people aren't hearing about it. Change needs to help people become more involved, not just to make things easier for UUA.

Sarah: Not easier for UUA at all, looking to improve involvement coordination.

Lisa: Improved communication a key.

Sarah: There have been a lot of bumps. Communication improvement important.

Maggie: Communication key, also part of relationship. Trying to move towards that model. Staff here to serve.

Communication coming through Margie Manning posts to web site. When the elder's council model comes into effect, they will help with communication. We have a lot of depth and richness.

Share ideas, be open to relationship.

John G: District right now is for Florida. Moving to a region, means more people sharing same people, but they are employees of UUA, not us.

Maggie: We've been UUA employees for 3 years. You've seen me more than Rev Hurto when he was doing similar job. Gives me additional resources when I don't know answer. I serve congregations in north FL and every congregation in GA. Currently serve 3 districts. Means I know about things that are inventive and interesting that can be shared between congregations. Want to know when things are going well, and when not. Spending more time building relationships rather than having a reporting structure. Staffing has already changed several years ago, resulted in additional services.

John G: If there is any voting to do, we can only vote yes or no.

Jeremy: Our congregation approved this change 2 years ago.

Sarah: Are you asking, without a district board asking staff to do something for us, what holds staff responsible?

John: What is the change in the linkage to the UUA Board, since we're still going through the region staff? So not really different from district?

Maggie: In that respect (staffing), correct. What is changing is that unified regional staff is connected to congregations, elders, clusters, regional advisory council. Regional advisory council will have direct access further up the food chain.

John G: Your workload increases?

Maggie: Will stay with where I am today. Assignment of responsibilities done during earlier transition. we need the Elders council and Smart Church Consultants in addition to Congregational Life Staff to get the work done. Able to be in more contact with congregations than before.

John G: A lot of thought went into this. If there is a denominational affairs group, should have been reporting to congregations all along. Congregations don't have the information.

[Clarification note: This was about BBUUC and the need for an in house denominational affairs team.]

Jeremy: I have been involved with this for 4 years. All I did was read newsletters; Regional newsletter, Breeze. Needs to be a relationship where we meet regional, district leaders in the middle. Sent out communications since Dreambuilders.

John G: Has been president, president of cluster, relied on people who were involved. Not everyone should have to go look for it.

Sarah: This congregation needs a denominational affairs committee. Lack of communication the fault of all parties.

Dani: Everyone should take a deep breath. Dreambuilders invited 5 or 6 leaders, only 2 went, made a presentation to Council that we miss big denominational things because we don't have a minister.

Charlie: PhD in organizational behavior. Know that this is important, but not interesting to many people. We ought to read the newsletter.

Sarah Ricke: Moving away from organizational questions. In charge of CUUPS. Wants to know from perspective of other ministries, groups, how will this affect them? What other resources will be made available for us.

Maggie: This is why we're moving to this model. So we don't re-invent the wheel. Affinity clusters a part of the new model. Need to build relationships to make these things happen. Wants to lift up people who want to make things happen. All these groups come from the congregation, not from the Region.

Sarah Ritzmann: Traditionally districts and region responsible for trainings and tools and resources.

Veronica: If several congregations wanted to vote out of the Southern Region, what would happen?

Sarah: Congregations can leave UUA, district or region at any time.

Maggie: Congregation would be leaving the UUA, no longer receive benefits of membership. And would no longer get staff, training, tools, resources and would need to rename themselves as they would no longer be Unitarian Universalist congregations.

Helen: Things don't work if everything just gets mashed together, becomes too big to be manageable. How do we manage all these different clusters? Too big, too broad, too open.

Sarah Ritzmann: All of us feel the size is appropriate, just a different way to look at ourselves.

Jeremy: Broadens inclusion of groups. Important as a denominational faith. Young Adults did not exist in District previously. Now have access to other groups that are very good. Can build relational clusters outside traditional structures. Was previously difficult to achieve. Was difficult to pursue leadership positions.

Helen: Feel like you're just repeating previous points.

Maggie: What is behind the question?

Helen: We are going to lose individuality of congregations.

Maggie: Request is to disband district governance, not district. Culture in different areas different. That is what clusters are for. Those gatherings and assemblies will fill that function. Not everyone being asked to be the same. Clusters will help keep identities but enable people to reach outside of walls. Asking everyone to dream big. We can be the people we say we are, and the people we need to be. Thank you to Sarah for your service. The district board members have worked on this for a long time. Comes from a deep desire to be better and closer. People outside our walls are waiting for us to be so relational.

Will: Where does policy making happen?

Maggie: At UUA Board of Trustees.

Jeremy: What specific type of policy?

Morgan: On Southern Region's web site, covenant of understanding mentions minister's role throughout document. What if church does not have a minister?

Sarah: If no minister, Board is first contact.

Maggie: Southern Region has largest percentage of lay-led congregations. A lot of legalese, but Boards would be the leadership.

Lisa: Thanks to Helen about cookie cutter question. Seems to be seeking of conformity and top down rather than bottom up approach. Dani mentioned that the information was offered. What opportunities were offered?

Jeremy: We brought back conversations to Council, Board, set up times, sent things out on Yahoo!

Lisa: Dissemination of information needs to be addressed. How can we find out about other UU knitters?

Maggie: I can help put people in contact with interest groups from other congregations.

Dani: Who sanctions clusters?

Maggie: Congregations make the clusters.

Dani: Could Beacon be a cluster?

Maggie: Yes. The reason we are having issues is the safety policy issue. Region would only support things that fall within the safety policy. If there is an affiliation, there needs to be a relationship piece in there.

Dani: If we wanted to gather youth leaders, they could only send 14-18 year old kids, not entire groups.

Maggie: 12-14 year olds can attend as member of congregation, but not as members of Beacon. No decisions made to hinder growth of group.

Jack: What is difference between Beacon group and other members?

Maggie: If in-congregation, set your own policy. If you are looking for administrative support, only available if you follow Southern Region youth safety policy.

Jack: All district/assembly meetings overnight. Not everyone can come and stay overnight.

Maggie: Younger people can stay with parents or adults. Younger members can't come as representations of the group.

Sarah: All usual policies need to apply.

Joyce: We've had this type of problem before. Some other areas of the region don't have an affiliated group.

Sarah: Beacon groups operate outside of their congregations. No other group like that.

Will: How can this be interpreted as being outside our congregations?

Maggie: Youth come together as an event as representatives of their congregation, not as representatives as their group.

Sarah: When Ken created a space for Beacon to have their voting at same time as District voting, made it look like they were together.

Hannah: In the chart, who does the congregation get to vote for?

Sarah: Not a vote for a person. But can choose people to participate in Elders or Clusters. Those people will be engaged with larger system. Every congregation has people involved.

Jack: Specified number?

Maggie: Eldership document on web site. To Hannah, are you asking about governance? (yes)

Maggie: Voluntary organizations for eldership, clusters. Voting takes place at UUA level. Voting can take place to GA even if cannot attend physically. Expanding ability to be democratic process.

Sarah: Part of covenant of understanding involves broader, easier access.

Jack: Voting for what? GA open for online voting?

Jeremy: Can ask questions directly.

Maggie: This is third year, every year we get better at it. Will vote on UUA Board. UUA Staff/Director of Congregational Life reports to Board.

Jack: Staff members not voted on.

Maggie: Like HR procedure, vetted.

Sarah Ritzmann: A lot of this is reflective of the way we operate a congregation. Not every person votes on all staff positions.

Hannah: We don't get a say on the professional staff, especially Congregational Life Consultant.

Jeremy: Nobody voted on Dani, but we had a committee that took applicants through a process.

Maggie: Vetted by multiple people, like a committee, looking for a good fit and right skillset. Those people empowered to make those decisions.

David: Many of the concerns raised have been addressed in Breeze and NE Cluster newsletter.

Lisa: What if regional staff finds knitters to be toxic, but our congregation likes them. What happens then?

Maggie: Then that decision belongs to the congregation. I am here as a servant leader, can provide best practices information, ask clarifying questions. Advice about things like checking your insurance for coverage.

Jack: Please say a word about regional advisory council.

Maggie: Scott Tayler was minister in Rochester. They did amazing things there. Looking forward to seeing him and the advisory council come into fruition.

Sarah: Lay leaders directly advising Scott Tayler. Currently temporary structures in place, but regional advisory council will be permanent.

Jack: Lay or staff?

Sarah: Lay voice to staff.

Maggie: Better said congregational voice.

Jack: How to be chosen?

Maggie: Nominated by district boards.

Jack: After changes, how are they chosen.

Sarah: These are volunteers, may include ministers.

Maggie: Leaders would be selected through conversation.

Linda M: How will governance work? We're only sending delegates to GA? No in-between level? But services through region funded by UUA? Youth advisor training? Board members, RE, presidents? All through region?

Maggie: Yes. Smart church consultants would work with Board, for example. Some things will be provided through cluster level. DRE training come through UUA. Staffing will be maintained as long as pledges maintained.

Linda M: More opportunities for training?

Maggie: Hope elders will be able to help. Elders may be dispatchable to help with needs.

Linda M: We will have a conversation with Beacon at the close of this, how they fit in.

Chris: Chaplaincy/leadership training for youth has been lacking, expensive. Scholarships not enough. Need region to provide services.

Maggie: That is programming level. Youth always invited to training. Open to anyone 16 and over.

Jack: Way too expensive for most youth to participate.

[Clarification: This conversation is wrt the leadership experience, which would be paid by the congregation.]

Maggie: \$1500 for 5 days of training, lodging, etc. Economical compared to other training opportunities. Some scholarships available. Want to have people there.

Jack: The ones who need help the most are smaller congregations who can't afford that.

Sarah: Regional budget includes expanded scholarship funds, so more will be available than there has been in the past.

Chris: How about web training. Other regions offer services specifically for youth. Why don't we?

Maggie: We don't have a staff person specifically for this nor do we have current funding for additional staff.

Chris: How do we get something like that going? How can people on the ground to be involved with that?

Maggie: We do not have a specific staff person for YaYA, but that we are working on some trainings and hope to implement other layers of relationship.

Sarah: Many things like this will come to fruition after Regionalization occurs. We have been building structures, now it is time to implement and use them.

Jeremy: Will provide resources that are doing training online.

Helen: Youth accessible for 16 and up doesn't allow leadership development for the majority of the youth.

Maggie: If we are at a leadership experience, no siloing, so entire group learning together. Would like to see some weekend events hosted by youth that the adults learn from. Interested in asking if age can be moved to 14. Need to meet people where they are.

Helen: Currently 13 and one of the Beacon chaplains, would like access to training.

Maggie: Leadership experience an intensive 5-day experience. Need to schedule time to be with one another. If we can start doing more of these things intentionally multigenerational, will help. Communal aspect important.

Jack: A few points. This is a stepping-off point, should look at things going forward. For many years, critique of UUA as a top-down approach to the faith. This structure attempts to address that, make more accessible to churches. We have less to worry about than many other places in Florida. We have an active cluster.

Maggie: Congregations have power through GA vote. Closer relations will be different. What we were doing wasn't taking us to the next level.

Scott: Can we use more technology to extend access of leadership to training.

Maggie: Some value to face-to-face gatherings. Maybe face-to-face on cluster level can help. Leadership experience an intense and deeply spiritual learning time. Progression of training. Starts with one day events. New model being worked on at cluster level, leadership experience made up of 1-day events spread over months.

Jeremy: Smart church training: spread out over time with a lot of online training. Need a mix.

Sarah: Expanding webinar capabilities. Need to understand that webinar does not cover what in-person does.

Maggie: After leadership experience intensive experience, begin conversations to share approaches. Don't want it to be once and done, but continuing experience.

Lisa: Would like to see more web training. Also got a lot from Maggie's last visit. Read every book Maggie recommended. Enjoyed in person training.

Lisa: Read Mark Yount's mail.

(Mark): Two issues combined that should be addressed separately. Should professional staff positions be re-allocated to regional level. Governance removed from district to professional staff. Fears professional staff taking over policy. Specific example of Beacon policy change without input from affected youth. District Board not consulted, but has gone along.

Maggie: No vote on staff regionalization, already done, working well. Congregations getting more services. No governance by staff. Policy done at board level, outside of view of professional staff.

Sarah: Will break remainder off to Beacon conversation.

Next webinars from region:

- Thursday, March 12 7:30pm
- Saturday, March 28 11am
- Sunday, March 29 4pm

Linda: We used to be more engaged, look forward to increasing engagement. Adjourning to Forrest Church room.