

CROSSROADS

NEWS FROM THE JOINT TASK FORCE
OF THE NEW HAMPSHIRE/VERMONT AND
NORTHEAST DISTRICTS

AUGUST
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THE TASK FORCE

Buffy Boke, *Co-Chair*

Perkinsville, VT • 802.263.5487
bboke@tds.net

Roger Comstock, *Co-Chair*

Yarmouth, ME • 207.846.4846
rcomstock@gwi.net

Karen Brammer • Saco, ME

Alden Center • Amherst, NH

Bill DeWolfe • Damariscotta, ME

David Kolb • Freeport, ME

Brad Greeley • New Castle, NH

Bruce Johnson • Hanover, NH

Jane Dwinell,

NH/VT District President, ex officio
Montpelier, VT

Charles Boothby,

Northeast District President, ex officio
Bangor, ME

Olav Nieuwejaar,

NH/VT District Executive
Milford, NH • 603.673.2465
olav@viking.mv.com

Judith Smith-Valley,

Northeast District Executive
Kennebunk, ME • 207.985.8697
revjsv@adelphia.net

The Joint Task Force met on August 4th in Portsmouth for another lively and productive meeting. We spent our time reporting back on our research tasks – demographics, needs of the congregations, money to support this Task Force, and information from the two new districts that were recently created through merger of four previous districts: Clara Barton (primarily Western Massachusetts and Connecticut) and Heartland (primarily Michigan and Ohio).

We looked at the numbers of Unitarian Universalists and congregations in those three states from 1961 (the merge of the Unitarians and the Universalists) to the present, looking for patterns of decline and growth. We considered the demographics of each state in terms of general population growth, income, culture, etc. [In a newspaper article published since our meeting, it was pointed out that median income in New Hampshire has grown considerably, in Vermont has grown slightly, and in Maine has decreased.]

An initial congregational needs assessment was done in conference with the three District Executives and the Small Church Specialist. A brief survey has been developed and sent to all congregations and leadership in each District. Please fill out your survey and return to your District Office by September 15th. If you did not get a survey, and would like one, please contact your District Office.

The Unitarian Universalist Association will make \$1000 available to the Task Force for our work. We agreed to ask each District Board to also make \$1000 available to the Task Force. [Each Board meets in September where this expenditure will be voted on.]

We learned some of the joys and challenges of the conversations and process for Clara Barton and Heartland Districts – understanding that District cultures really are different in many ways even though there are similarities, and not to underestimate those differences in our deliberations and process. There are many things to consider including conferences, committees, Boards and governance structures, religious educators' groups, ministers' chapters, offices and staff, and money.

Finally, we planned our September retreat. We will spend Thursday evening, September 23rd, and Friday, September 24th, together in Portsmouth for conversation, meals, and planning our next steps. The results of the congregational needs assessment will be available to us, and we will have more information from the Clara Barton and Heartland folks. Between now and the retreat, each task force member will share our individual dream of what our districts can be – several of those dreams have already been shared and have provided much food for thought. The retreat should be a productive and exciting time.

If you have any questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to contact any Task Force member.



