

CATALYST SPECIAL ISSUE

MOSAIC MAKERS: LEADING VITAL MULTICULTURAL CONGREGATIONS CONFERENCE



Welcome to our special issue of *Catalyst*! Our time at the Mosaic Makers: Leading Vital Multicultural Congregations conference (February 17-19, 2012) was exhilarating, energizing, meaningful, and deeply informative. The event grew out of the Multicultural Growth Consultation (March 2011) and was a by-invitation gathering for congregations that are deeply engaged in the work of building intentional multicultural community.

Over 100 leaders from the following congregations and districts were represented:

All Souls Church, Unitarian in Washington, D.C.

All Souls Unitarian Church in Tulsa, OK

First Parish in Cambridge, MA

First Unitarian Church of Oakland, CA

First Unitarian Church of San José, CA

First UU Church of Richmond, VA

First UU Church of San Diego, CA

Mount Diablo UU Church in Walnut Creek, CA

Unitarian Society of Germantown, PA

UU Church of Annapolis, MD

UU Church of Silver Spring, MD

UU Congregation of Miami, FL

Metro NY District

Joseph Priestley District

*Mosaic Makers was a partnership between the **Multicultural Growth** team of the Unitarian Universalist Association and **All Souls Church, Unitarian** in Washington, D.C.*



Cover page photos by Terasa Cooley

We spent two-and-a-half days learning together, building intentional multicultural community, and generating new energies around doing this vitally important work in our communities and congregations.

Participants, presenters, and planners alike learned much from one another, and we're delighted to share some of the wisdom that emerged from the conference. These personal reflections center around the four pillars of intentional multicultural community: **Leadership, Worship, Justice Ministry, and Congregational Life.**



Photo by Colin Bent

Worship

A multiracial group of Unitarian Universalists sings and waves their arms; on a screen in front of them a much larger group is clapping, laughing, swaying. A choir sings with West African-style drummers; voices ring out a hymn from the Muskogee Nation; an evangelical Universalist African-American pastor preaches a “Gospel of Inclusion” to a responsive congregation.

Photo by Colin Bent

This was worship during the Mosaic Makers Conference. Bilingual readings, embodied rituals, materials representing genuine cross-cultural relationships, the intentional presence of multiple voices and ethnicities both in worship elements and in worship leaders—all this and more made our worship genuinely multicultural. Music was spirit-filled and contemporary; popular-style music—animated, harmonically rich, easy to remember and sing—reflected Black church tradition. No single culture dominated.

Both of us were struck by the way in which many participants let go our sense of control and allowed the experience to claim us. This, too, is a quality of multicultural worship—the openness of congregants to respond to the leaders’ call, so that we feed each other in a mutual spirit of trust. Multicultural worship is not just a matter of what is offered, but also of how it is received; the Mosaic Makers were a ready congregation, and it was a powerful joy and gift to be among them.



—**Rev. John Crestwell**, UU Church of Annapolis, MD and
Rev. David Takahashi Morris, Mount Diablo UU Church, Walnut Creek, CA

Chaplain’s perspective



Photo by Terasa Cooley

Connections, Re-Connections, Inter-Connections—the Mosaic Makers conference provided space for all of these and more. Storytelling paved the way, providing space and context for each participant to go deeper in the work of creating multicultural community. In my role as Chaplain, I had many opportunities to hold the conference community in love and in care; it was an honor and a privilege to do so during the conference and in and in follow-up conversations since then.

Within this community, I witnessed an authenticity that was heartening to see. People offered their whole selves to a deeper understanding of developing and honoring multicultural sensibility. Participants were encouraged to imagine what Beloved Community might look like and what their respective congregational or ministerial settings might reflect. Each of us was encouraged to

consider the role of Unitarian Universalism in moving us toward that vision, and identifying the places where those of us who are engaged in the work of transformation fit in.

In reflecting on my Jamaican motto, “Out of Many, One People,” I realize that we are moving steadily in that direction. The ripple effect of this prophetic conference will help us to get there.

—**Rev. Hope Johnson**, UU Congregation of Central Nassau in Garden City, NY



Photo courtesy of Terasa Cooley

Leadership

Three themes emerged from the Mosaic Makers Conference:

1) Leading vital multicultural congregations is a "shared leadership" job. No minister, religious educator, board member, or committee chair can do this work alone. Religious professionals and lay leaders must work together to project a bold vision and lead the change that enables multicultural community to thrive.

2) Direct experience in multicultural community is essential to motivating and supporting multicultural leadership development. The partnership with All Souls/DC provided critical pieces of the learning that UU leaders took home to their congregations.

3) To "grow leaders" for this transformative work, UUA staff, UU congregations, and innovative UU leaders must partner with each other. All of our staff groups are allied in sharing leadership and supporting the many facets of this work.

As staff group directors, we joyfully embrace collaborating and cooperating to support and nurture multicultural and multigenerational leadership in the Unitarian Universalist community.

—**Taquiena Boston**, Director of Multicultural Growth and Witness,

Rev. Terasa Cooley, Director of Congregational Life, and

Rev. Sarah Lammert, Director of Ministries and Faith Development

Congregational Life

Mosaic Makers provided a wonderful opportunity for growing, learning, sharing, and struggling together with colleagues from across the country. The work that each congregation is doing to help build congregational and UUA Beloved Community is vitally necessary. Opportunities like this conference—where we hear from colleagues who are using a variety of different approaches and from expert presenters, and where we learn how to better hold ourselves accountable—are crucial to our cause.

Often, we think of our ministries around diversity in isolation, only seeing our congregation and our own ideas, without sharing and learning from each other.

The conference provided a space to share freely and honestly as well as to push each other and allow ourselves to be pushed to do more.

All Souls' staff and volunteers were present throughout the weekend, learning from the experience and sharing their own insights into how our congregation does intentional multicultural ministry. Mark Hicks, Eric Law, and Gordon Dragt gave us perspective about our congregations and vision for the work that needs to be done. The conference felt like a wild success!

—**Lex Cade-White**, All Souls Church, Unitarian in Washington, D.C.



Photo by Colin Bent

Justice Ministry

The Mosaic Makers conference reminded me that justice ministry—indeed all ministry—is about relationships. I was thrilled and moved to discover that All Souls DC's relationship with the jazz clarinetist Evan Christopher (who dazzled us in concert the first night of the conference) had grown out of contacts made during a congregational service trip to New Orleans. Gifts in the service of justice are always returned tenfold, sometimes in ways we could never have imagined.

I appreciate the UU philosophy that social justice work must be done in partnership and with accountability to stakeholders.

In my small group session on social justice and outreach, I learned of congregations following these practices with immigrant advocacy groups, LGBTQ groups, and at-risk youth by providing a venue for an event, sharing advocacy work or participating in a joint service project. One congregation's large endowment is dedicated entirely to giving grants to local groups! I was inspired by the variety of ways in which we can do justice ministry and look forward to sharing them with my own congregation.

—**Karin Lin**, First Parish in Cambridge, MA

A Religious Educator's perspective

The Mosaic Makers Conference was well-attended by leaders from the UU Church of Silver Spring, the congregation that I serve as Director of Religious Education. We had music, religious education, worship, board, program council, and diversity team leaders representing many aspects of our wonderful community. Each of us had different perspectives and different goals in attending the conference. We entered as different pieces of a whole. We left with one heart, and a shared mission. We left united.

Hearing Evan Christopher and his band filling All Souls D.C. with exuberant, spontaneous, one-step-from-the-edge jazz music, we could not help but be swept up and together by it. Listening to Reverend Gordon Dragt speak about how hard work can lead to transformation, we knew that we could create this kind of transformation in our own congregation. Workshopping with Mark Hicks and Eric Law, we exercised the tools we had been given. We could not wait to share all we had learned and experienced with our greater church community.

The experience was invigorating and inspiring, but I found one of the most valuable takeaways to be the sense of shared purpose the members of my congregation felt at the end of the conference. We are ready to move forward in our multiculturalism work as one body, and we are ready to do so with joy.

—**Sarah Gonzalez**, UU Church of Silver Spring, MD

Photo by Terasa Cooley



A Presenter's perspective

James Baldwin famously said, “not everything can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced.” My experience during this amazing conference was, in large part, an object lesson for this phrase. Inside the supportive container of the conference, we all became “teachers” and “learners,” tackling some of the more prickly issues that surface when doing AR/AO/MC work.

One of my realizations as a diversity worker is how strikingly different the project of “building a beloved community” is for those socialized into white identities as opposed to those socialized as targets of oppression. I was gratified to hear both budding insights as well as wisdom-statements from both groups. For whites: the deeper realization of not only how privilege seeps into their lives, but also a modeling of how to interrupt its power and presence. For people of color, the relief that comes when what Charles Taylor calls “recognition” occurs, that is, when cultural expressions signal that the experiences that shaped your life matter.

When I departed All Souls on Sunday afternoon, my heart was both swelling with pride and brimming with confidence of what we can achieve.

—**Mark A. Hicks**, Angus MacLean Professor of Religious Education, Meadville Lombard



Photo by Colin Bent

Final Reflections and Ministers' Day

The 2012 Mosaic Makers Conference was a soul-stirring, life-enriching, and energizing experience for our team from First UU Church of San Diego. We were inspired, challenged, and renewed by our participation.

One takeaway for me was the thought-provoking contrast difference between multi-cultural work and anti-racism, anti-oppression work—and the fact that both are needed. I deeply appreciated, and was moved by, Mark Hicks' stimulating question: how much of our multiculturalism and anti-racism work is about interrupting white culture, rather than creating a space and devoting energy to the reality and faith development of people of color? He indicated that the question itself, and the responses to it, are religious education.



Photo by Tracy Ahlquist

After this full weekend, ministers gathered for a day to continue reflecting, learning and sharing. In the early afternoon, we chose to set aside the afternoon agenda and to gather in small groups to talk deeply about the weekend, the morning's session, and what they provoked in us. We then joined again in the larger group and spent the rest of the afternoon in large group and small group discussions about M/C work and ways to expand it in our congregations. I left with a deeper appreciation of my colleagues' willingness to listen carefully, speak honestly from the heart and stay engaged in the process of exploration. And I look forward to continuing this work with my colleagues, my congregation and the UUA.

—**Rev. Kathleen Owens**, UU Church of San Diego, CA