

Mini-History - UU and UUA Men



In 1996 my wife attended her first Unitarian Universalist General Assembly in Indianapolis. I tagged along for fun.

If you've been to a GA you know what an exciting, busy, hub-bub of learning and sharing it can be. But I was wandering around, really just waiting for happy hour to begin. That's when I saw it. An information table with a banner stretched over it reading "Where Are the Men?" This was the information table of the UU Men's Network, a national organization whose mission included: "to build and sustain a mature liberal religious masculinity and to develop a resource network supporting the personal and spiritual growth of men." I was drawn to this table like a moth to a flame.

At that time, I found the congregation's program offerings for adult women were fantastic – the women's spirituality class "Cakes for the Queen of Heaven", women's Seder Dinners, women's groups, women's retreats and a girls initiation to womanhood weekend. To me the question was not just "where are the men?" but "*what is here for the men?*" The UU Men's Network gave the men and staff of our congregation the boost we needed to start thinking about how we might assure the interests of our all of our genders.

The denomination's concern over the lack of male involvement goes way back. In 1907 the League of Universalist Laymen was organized due to the comparative lack of involvement of men in church affairs. The Unitarians formed their Laymen's League in 1919, with an active chapter here in Ann Arbor. The two Leagues joined with the Unitarians Universalist merger in the early 60s, but when the League allowed women to join in 1968, several of the major chapters protested, refusing to follow suit. This opposition ultimately signaled the end of the League.

The 1983 General Assembly issued a General Resolution entitled *Support Groups for Liberal Religious Men* to "affirm the commitment to the equal treatment of both sexes; and encouraged the formation of support groups for liberal-religious men..."

With this blessing and modest encouragement the UU Men's Network began.

This group developed male-centered program material and disseminated it mainly at General Assemblies to attending professionals and lay-leaders. I served on the steering committee for the UU Men's Network, until it dissolved in 2010 our Association dropped its support for affiliate groups at the General Assembly.

But, we can be proud of legacy left by these “liberal-religious” men – it is alive and well here in Ann Arbor. Totally un-scientifically I would say that say participation by men is up since the 90s, and our SGD program has a fantastic balance of gender unheard of in other UU congregations.

So what’s happening now for the men in our congregation? We formed a Men’s Council. This group of volunteer guys helps assure an annual UU Men’s Retreat, the annual Men’s Dinner and they support our coming of age program’s “Boys Initiation into Manhood” weekend. There is a monthly drop-in Men’s Breakfast (thank you Fred Lynch!) and since 1999 we have formed 14 or so groups called “Men’s Circles”, 5 or 6 of which are still meeting, one of them for over 15 years!

These men are Brothers – they are gay and straight UU men, each seeking their own meaning of gender. And while seeking and worshipping together – they also have *a lot of fun*.

I wish our 19th century Boston minister Theodore Parker could witness one of our annual Men’s retreats. Noting the lack of religious exuberance among his 19th century Unitarian colleagues, he wrote:

"They most powerfully preach to the conscience and the will - the cry was ever 'duty, duty, work, work!' They failed to address with equal power the spirit, and did not also shout '*joy, joy, delight, delight!*' *Their vessels were full of water...* but they did not *gush* out!"

Brother Parker - rest easy, we’ve got some gushing exuberance for you!

Presented by Bob Hospadaruk
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