

Community Church of New York UU Participants at the UU Leadership Team Institute Share Their Experiences

The UU Leadership Team Institute (UULTI) is a collaborative initiative of the Murray Grove Association and the Joseph Priestley, Metro New York, Ohio-Meadville, and St. Lawrence Districts, funded in part by the Fund for Unitarian Universalism of the Unitarian Universalist Association, with a scholarship grant from the New York State Convention of Universalists.

The UU Leadership Team Institute was designed to highlight the values and stories of our faith and our commitment to justice for all peoples. They asked participants, which included ministers, district personnel, RE personnel, administrators, church staff, and lay leaders, to explore how their own faith and actions inform and deepen their individual leadership, their work in growing their congregations and communities, their justice-making and outreach efforts, and their commitment to families and children and to a multi-cultural world of Beloved Community.

The Community Church of New York had one of the largest teams at UULTI. Members included Mary Dugan, Diane Kaylor, Ruth Miller, Mark de Solla Price, Peter Robinson, and Winifred Zubin. Janice Marie Johnson, Community Church's Director of Lifespan Religious Education, was a member of the core team that designed UULTI. In addition to participating as UULTI Staff Person and Chaplain, she was an integral part of our Community Team. Upon returning from the six-day intensive, CCNY's team wanted to share a short notice debriefing other church leaders on the experience.

The following are participants' comments:

Mary Dugan

"We welcome the transformation you bring." Could this phrase be developed as one of the ways that we greet visitors? This was among many exciting ideas gained in the UULTI training which was exciting, empowering, and spirit-filled. This was the best organized conference I have ever attended! I have been a UU since 1968. The UULTI training helped me grow stronger, acknowledge my leadership gifts, and learn about the spiritually mature leadership to which all Unitarian Universalists may aspire. Tom Chulak's vivid UU history presentations – going back to year one – were phenomenal. The turn towards spirituality, the energy of youthful UUs, and the many challenges we have were laid out. We had daily small covenanted groups to ground us. The extraordinarily rich seven days at UULTI taught me that lay governance in our environment, where the congregation governs us, is a form of ministry; our efforts as lay leaders could help enhance our faith development. In addition to Bruce Southworth's life-changing ministry, we, the lay members, have roles in ministry. Can we do "Inspired Planning" in addition to or instead of "Strategic Planning" for our future?

Janice Marie Johnson

UULTI gave us a powerful toolkit to learn and practice better ways of embodying Unitarian Universalism. We strengthened our understanding of Unitarian Universalism and its growth here

at Community – past, present, and future. UULTI also used engaging, interactive techniques to heighten awareness of and teach skills of shared leadership, conflict resolution, and appreciation of music and worship.

UULTI afforded us the opportunity to internalize our respective understandings of our congregation as a system, and ways in which we might connect that understanding to our respective lives. We shared deeply with persons from diverse congregations. We articulated our commonalities and differences. We discussed universal themes of faith, growth, oppression, conflict, feelings, relationships, and community. UULTI offered tools that will help us to show how much we do care about and appreciate each other.

On a professional note: I loved my diverse roles: storyteller and storygatherer, covenant group leader, vespers leader, logistics person, and chaplain. In my role as chaplain, profound truths were shared with me in confidence, trust, and hope. The privilege of serving as UULTI Chaplain will ever remain in my heart. On a personal note, I was reminded, once again, of the importance of community . . . and Community.

Diane Kaylor

The UU Leadership Team Institute has more than met the expectation bar that several previous participants (in Unilead and Eagles training) had raised before me. It is both reinforcing and comforting to be among other UUs, to share in their gifts and get glimpses of their congregational life. I am also receiving a substantial amount of information, not only on my track topic of governance but in how the other tracks relate to it. The design of the conference works well for a great deal of exchange, so that we experience nearly the entire range. And despite long days and full scheduling, I have learned something about self-care that preserves energy so that I can participate fully. I am looking forward to being part of the team that shares some of these gifts.

Ruth Miller

The time spent at UULTI was one of the most spiritual that I've ever had. The people that I met, both the instructors and the other participants, were so enriching, warm, and loving. I learned so much, in the Small Ministry Group track, the Workshops, the Covenant Group, and other meetings and appreciate so much to have been able to have this opportunity for growth and learning. I am looking forward to bringing this learning back to the members of Community Church of NY.

Mark de Solla Price

I was a last-minute replacement as of the seven people representing Community Church at the week-long Unitarian Universalist Leadership Team Institute. The rest of our team included Winifred Zubin, Peter Robinson, Molly Scott, Diane Kaylor, Ruth Miller, and Mary Dugan. Janice Marie Johnson was on-staff for the event, but certainly part of our church team too.

It was a wonderful experience, both for learning practical skills and inspiring me. It was personally enriching, helping me better understand my personal faith more in-depth and as a group-building process that will help better teams (and leaders) at Community Church and in the larger community and in the Unitarian Universalist movement. I would strongly suggest this experience to all others interested in being part of the team creating the future.

Peter Robinson

UULTI was a powerful experience unlike the personal transformation I had at my previous Unilead experience. The blending of teams, the strategic, values-based, and spiritual focus of congregations, and the overall faith history of Unitarian Universalism combined to make it the most challenging, informative, and inspiring conference I have ever attended – although it was intense from sunrise to sunset. The organizers, presenters, and facilitators are to be commended for an extraordinary effort and learning experience.

I look forward to incorporating my personal learning and shared vision with that of the other team members into the life of our church and into the work of the Council and the Board. I found sharing our congregation's experience with that of other congregations empowering. We, as congregants, are not alone in our desire for the kind of body – spiritually and professionally – which will serve not only our members, committees, and groups, but also the world community at large.

I come out of the experience believing strongly in our ability to be authentic – spiritually, professionally, and compassionately with intention and right relations. This is my commitment and I hope others will look at attending UULTI next year and make CCNY again one of the largest church teams participating. Our commitment as a congregation to our health and mission was evident given our presence. Kudos to our Board, for its continued commitment to develop and enhance leadership skills.

Molly Scott

I was so pleased to be a part of the largest team at UULTI. A team of eight who are active in a wide variety of ways in the leadership of our congregation and I am grateful to the Board for authorizing the money for us to go from the Olsa Fund which was established with funds donated to CCNY years ago by a caring and dedicated family, the Olsas, which continues to enrich us. This money enabled us to send delegates without limiting attendance to those who could afford the weeklong cost as most other congregations participating needed to do.

Of the five tracks offered, I took the Congregational Development and Growth track helping me to get a perspective on why we are not growing despite all that we have to offer and introducing me to ways we can change that, if we choose to.

On arrival we were presented with a tote bag to carry a heavy, resource-filled notebook and other resource material we would gather throughout the week. It reads "Unitarian Universalist Leadership Team Institute (UULTI) Transforming UU leaders so they can help transform their communities and the world." Wow! What a challenge! But . . . I came away convinced that we

can do it . . . and that by doing it we will enrich our lives as individuals and as a congregation.
Let's do it!

Winifred Zubin

My experience at UULTI was enriching and challenging. The model of learning was largely experiential education enhanced with teachings of experienced leaders in the Unitarian Universalist faith. My understanding of congregation emotional systems and how to function in them was deepened, lay leaders role in faith development was demonstrated, and much more. The conference was organized with a shared ministry focus with most sessions woven together by two leaders, one ministerial and one lay. Three aspirations I am bringing home to Community are 1) to communicate what the church is all about and how it functions, 2) to elevate faith development as a fundamental identity of Community, and 3) to develop a mechanism for assessing the ministries of the church. I also met a lot of interesting UUs and had fun along the way!

– *Contributed by Peter Robinson, Board Member, Community Church of New York UU*