

Professional Matters

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What Does It Mean to Be Professional?

Before I begin on the presentation planned for this Liberal Religious Education Directors Association (LREDA) Fall Conference, I want to acknowledge your courage in packing your suitcases, making sure you have your driver's license or voter registration card or passport or other form of identification, closing your own front door, and getting in a car or a train or an airplane to be here with us in Toronto. You are here with your own grief, your fears and hopes, the anxieties of your families and friends, and a world turned upside-down. I am truly grateful to be here among religious educators as we try to make sense of what we are facing today.

I have no need to outline for you the changes in the larger world which weigh heavily on our minds at this time. The date "September 11, 2001" is seared into our consciousness. More than 5,000 people in New York and Washington, DC who left their homes that morning will never return. We are at war. The term "Muslim American" has entered our lexicon, although we don't speak of "Catholic American" or "Presbyterian American" or "Jewish American." Afghani women, children and men are facing the terror of 2,000 pound bombs and Cruise missiles striking their villages, cities, homes.

Each of us is faced with the task of dealing with our own shock, confusion, pain, fear, grief, anger and hope. Each of us is also faced with helping the youngest members of our faith community deal with the same emotions. Here in this room, we're wrestling with these issues at the same time we endeavor to be fully present with one another, and I want to acknowledge the maelstroms in our heads and hearts as we go on with our program.

I also want to say that for me, these presentations are something tangible plucked from an ongoing stream, rather than something that

stands alone with finite beginnings and endings. The conversations about what it means to be a "professional religious educator" have been part of our lexicon for many years. LREDA's role in examining what that means has also been on our minds. My processes have been greatly helped by the contributions posted on the LREDA list that provide information about what's on your minds in relation to this topic.

I've already told you something about my opinions on this, through the title of these presentations: "Professional Matters." Of course, I also hope you thought it was funny, since I love puns and plays on words, but bottom line, I believe that it does matter for religious educators to be included as part of the professional leadership team of a Unitarian Universalist congregation. Some of you already know that you agree or disagree with this premise; others are here to explore what it might mean for you to think of yourself as a professional religious educator. I'm not here to persuade you that my opinion is right or wrong. I'm here to help you with the process of exploration.

Some of you, who've known me for many years, know that although I was born in America, I lived outside of the United States between 1964 and 1978, so I missed some pretty major changes in American culture. I lived in North Africa, and then in Britain, and share the life experiences of thousands of other expatriates who leave their countries of origin, sometimes returning, sometimes not. I'm sure there are others here in this room who've shared this experience with me. In the context of this presentation, I want to focus on the changes that occurred in the lives of American women between the time I left and when I returned.

I grew up in a white middle-class home in the American Midwest, in Missouri and Illinois. My

mother worked outside our home, but not because white suburban women did that in those days; she worked because my father was an alcoholic, and his drinking was very expensive, both in terms of how much money it took to buy liquor, and in terms of his losing his job periodically. The fact that my mother worked was one of the big differences between me and the other white American children with whom I went to school. One of the things I remember about Laidlaw School is that there was no lunchroom. Children walked home from school every day to eat the lunches prepared by their mothers in the middle of the day. Then they walked back for the afternoon session. In order for a woman to work outside the home in that system, she would have to arrange for her children to go to someone else's home every day for lunch. As you can imagine, no one did that in Western Springs.

My mother used her considerable cooking talents to earn money by catering. She could decide when she worked, and still be at home when we arrived in the middle of the day looking for lunch. She was a college-educated English major, but could find no other way to earn money in the white, middle-class suburb where we lived. I think she also took on projects like customer service surveys for social scientists working in Chicago, work that she could do on the phone while still being available to her children. The roles of white middle-class women revolved around their husbands and their children.

There was no question that all three of us children were expected to attend college. Both of my grandmothers were college-educated, and I think their mothers were as well, so my family had a history of higher education for daughters as well as for sons. The uses to which that education was supposed to be put were markedly different, however. Men were supposed to earn a living and support their families. Women were supposed to nurture their children and entertain guests who could further their husbands' careers. There was never any conversation about how I might earn a living as an adult; there were plenty of messages telling me that "men don't like women who are too smart," "you're too smart for your own good," and "you need to find out what he's interested in if you want to find a husband." College for women was also a place for husband-hunting.

When I was growing up, then, the word "professional" implied "male." All the ministers I

came in contact with in those days were men, as were all doctors, attorneys and business people. Interestingly enough, all elementary school teachers were women, while most school principals were men. That wasn't true at Laidlaw School in Western Springs, where Mrs. Stanley was both a fourth-grade teacher and also the principal, but I didn't know of any other elementary school with a woman principal. We also had one male teacher, Mr. Lewis, who taught sixth grade, the highest grade in the school. In junior high, there was a pretty even mix between men and women teachers, but principals and deans were still men.

In Western Springs, we attended First Congregational Church, where the minister was a man and most of our Sunday School teachers were women. Women also cleaned the church, ran the Vacation Bible School, arranged the flowers, sang soprano and alto in the choir, and laundered the robes. Men served on the board, sang tenor and bass in the choir, served as ushers, looked after the weekly collection, took care of building repairs and looked after the lawn and flower beds. The minister did have a woman secretary -- to the best of my knowledge, she was the only woman who collected a paycheck for her work at the church.

In junior high school, all the girls were required to take a course called "Home Economics," AKA "Home Ec." All boys were required to take shop courses ranging from woodworking to welding. In Home Ec, all girls learned to cook and sew. One of the experiences seared into my memory is that near the end of seventh grade, the girls in Home Ec were required to wear things they had sewed themselves to school on the day when boys were invited to the kitchens, where we served them muffins, tea and sandwiches which we had made in Cooking class. After the boys left, we washed up the dishes we had served them on, using the towels we had embroidered in Sewing class. Girls were never invited to shop to take a look at welding projects or the car engines boys tinkered with.

These gender stereotypes were also reinforced outside of school through activities such as Rainbow Girls and Girl Scouts, where you could earn a badge in Hospitality if you could demonstrate how to set a formal table for eight people. We girls were also taught how to sit (knees together, feet crossed at the ankles), how to wear hats stylishly, and how to launder the white gloves we

wore on all social occasions.

Magazines like *Seventeen* were filled with articles on how to find out what boys were interested in (mostly sports and cars) and demonstrate how fascinated you were with everything they had to say on those subjects. Girls were only supposed to open their mouths to ask questions about what boys liked. The null curriculum, of how people were supposed to act if they were attracted to their own gender, or to all genders, or to none, or believed they had been born engendered into the wrong sort of body, certainly wasn't in our minds at all -- not in the Midwest, anyway!

Most of the books I read on Christianity (the only kind of spirituality I knew anything about in those days) were written by white men, like Dr. Norman Vincent Peale, Rev. Billy Graham, and Pat Boone, a well-known crooner. White women like Dale Evans wrote books about their disabled children who were angels in disguise, sent by God to illustrate his love for people until he was ready to haul them back into heaven. I didn't knowingly read a book by an African-American author, male or female, until I was in college and discovered Ralph Ellison and James Baldwin, in part because I attended an historically black school, Lincoln University, in Jefferson City, MO.

The connection between the word "professional" and males was almost impossible to break in those days, particularly for people living in the Midwest. I don't know how true this was for people on the East or West Coasts, but I'm also pretty sure it applied to people living in the South, where gender roles were even more stereotyped than they were in Missouri and Illinois. While young women went to college to join sororities and find a husband, young men prepared themselves for law school, medical school, business school or seminary.

What's all the more interesting about this is that it followed World War II, in which women demonstrated their abilities in all areas of public life from riveting to racing, from baseball to the boardroom. With men off fighting in Europe, Africa and Asia, women held the nation together, and did it well. When the men returned in 1945, however, they turned public life back to men. Australian lesbian singer-songwriter Judy Small put it like this in a song called "Mothers, Daughters, Wives:"

*And after it was over
you had to learn again*

*To be just wives and mothers
when you'd done the work of men.
So you worked to help the needy,
and you never trod on toes,
And the photos on the pianos
struck a happy family pose.
And the first time it was fathers,
and the last time it was sons,
And in between our husbands
marched away with drums and guns.
And you never thought to question –
you just went on with your lives,
When all they'd taught you who to be was
mothers, daughters, wives.*

When I left the United States in 1964, it was still impossible for me to consider going to medical school. My grades were high enough for me to consider getting past the barrier of the Admissions Committee, who thought it was a waste of time providing medical education for someone who would get married, get pregnant, and decide to stay home with her children within a few years. The fact of my permanent disability, however, was the final nail in that particular coffin. I could major in Home Ec or Elementary Education; it was OK to obtain a teaching credential, since that was something you could always use if your husband died and you had to support yourself. Thanks to the lifelong sacrifices of suffragettes, women were allowed to vote, although not to run for elective office. We were one step beyond the of Beatrix Potter, British Unitarian author of the Peter Rabbit books, whose parents forbid her to marry her first love on the grounds that he was a publisher and thus "in trade." It wasn't a very big step, however.

I should add that the picture I'm painting here was not true for women of color. There was a history of black women working outside of their homes since the time their ancestors were brought to this country on slave ships. African-American women worked as cooks, governesses, and domestic servants cleaning white women's houses. In communities like Harlem in New York and Bronzeville in Chicago there were also entrepreneurs like Madame C.J. Walker, entertainers like Billie Holliday and Ella Fitzgerald, Lena Horne and Marion Anderson, justice activists like Rosa Parks, and administrators at all levels of schools attended by black children. Asian and Latina women also worked outside their homes, primarily in areas with large Asian/Latino

populations or where the services they offered were desired by whites.

While I lived outside the United States, I understand that things changed a bit around here. I've read books about consciousness-raising groups, where women got together to read books by Gloria Steinem and Betty Friedan. When I came back to the United States, I was able to throw away my collection of white gloves, which had gone with me around the world. I was also, for the first time in my life, able to stop wearing skirts, which I hate.

More to the point in terms of the word "professional," when I came back I found that the world of work had opened to women, with a few caveats. Women still earned around 59¢ for jobs that paid men \$1, a disparity that is still in existence, by the way. Women could get jobs outside their homes, but were still expected to be responsible for cleaning, cooking and child care inside the home, even if both husbands and wives worked. Women routinely experienced a "glass ceiling" beyond which they weren't promoted, in part because they were not allowed in all-male social clubs or in the golf foursomes of the "good old boys" where key business decisions were made. If a child fell ill at school, the secretary still called the child's mother to come and collect him or her, while the father remained undisturbed in his workplace.

In many cases, these things are pretty much as true today as they were in 1978. There is currently one woman serving as the Chief Executive Officer of a Fortune 500 company, Carly Fiorina, who heads up Hewlett-Packard. Nancy Pelosi was elected just this week as the first-ever woman to serve as the Democratic vote-counter in the House of Representatives (called the "whip," if you'll excuse the expression).

In other arenas, however, things really have changed. Women and men have been called up to serve in all areas of the armed forces in the current conflict against terrorism. Women can now get tenure as university professors. And within the last two years, women reached parity with men in serving as ministers in Unitarian Universalist congregations.

No such sea changes have occurred in the field of religious education, either in Unitarian Universalism, or in other faith communities. The people who are responsible for programs designed to acquaint the young with the tenets of their faith are overwhelmingly women. These women have

joined the ranks of what used to be known as the "juice and cookie ladies," those wonderful people who volunteered their services in myriads of ways when they found the world of work closed to them.

For many of you here in this room, the world I'm describing is as foreign as Ethiopia. For others, you remember the feeling of those white gloves on your fingers as you got ready to go to church. And for the few men among us, you've probably never had white gloves on at all, unless you attended a military academy. Since you are grossly under represented in the ranks of UU religious educators, you may need to think of yourselves in comparison with men in other fields where women predominate, such as nursing. The professional comparison is with doctors, where men still outnumber women, and where a hierarchy of power and authority is alive and well.

For all of us, engaged as we are in the field of religious education, the great question is not whether to imprint our ideas on the minds of the young; it's whether we want to be regarded as professionals or not.

There's no one right answer to this, as we'll explore during our sessions together. First of all, you can decide to call yourself "professional" until you're blue in the face, but no decisions you make, no credentials you earn, will necessarily make you professional in the eyes of others. Second, I'm here in part to outline some of the things that will need to happen in one way or another for us to be considered "professional," and some of you won't want to do those things, or will be so angry that you're required to do them, without a commensurate increase in your salary or benefits or time off, that you'll refuse. Still others of you legitimately became religious educators in order to find something to do that didn't demand the kind of commitment and background that you didn't have and didn't want to earn. For some of you, working part-time suits you and your family just fine.

All of these decisions are perfectly legitimate. There is no one right answer to the questions we're raising. However, it's also appropriate to consider the mind set, background, credentials and training needed to enter the realm of professionalism. It's not right to expect that everyone will jump through these hoops, but neither is it right to neglect to set the hoops up for those who want to do so. We'll also need to take great care that we don't work to establish a sys-

tem that reinforces hidden racism, fails to dismantle the racism that already exists, or that results in undue burdens on people of color but not on whites.

Finally, we must also consider the impact of the decisions we make in relation to others. Emotional systems work reminds us of the necessity of being self-differentiated in relationship. In *The Fifth Discipline*, Peter Senge reminded us that our work is not finished when we've developed a personal vision for ourselves, because in learning organizations, we also need to develop a shared vision.

All of his five disciplines are interactive, and require the involvement of others. I hope that as part of your "personal mastery work," you will develop or revisit your own personal vision, with a clear sense of what it would take for your own congregation to become a learning community. In addition, however, I'd like us to look at the system in which we are all involved: church leader-

Personal Mastery

"The central practice of personal mastery involves learning to keep both a personal vision and a clear picture of current reality[ies] before us." [Fieldbook, p. 195] I happen to love the word "bifurcated," and that's just what's needed here: the ability to hold two things in your mind at the same time, both the vision you have for yourself and also what's real for you, in whatever way you define realities. We're going to begin this morning by allowing time to draw forth your personal vision, or to take it out, polish it up, and move around it if you've already done this work. We'll come back to current realities in a little while, but this is the time for visioning.

We're here together in a hotel conference room in Toronto. Some of you may wish we were in a setting of great natural beauty. Others may wish for a quiet place where you were by yourself, or for a space that human beings have crafted. Fortunately, we all have imaginations, and that's what we'll need to use to move out of this hotel room and into one of those other kinds of places, if that helps you to focus. Relax. Breathe intentionally for a minute, clearing your mind of the distractions around you and the messages tugging at you, reminding you of work or home or family. Relax the tension in your neck and shoulders. Close your eyes if you want to. Pay atten-

tion to this time and this space.

tion to this time and this space. We need to look at some of the mental models which underlie the things we do or don't do, and at the forces in Unitarian Universalism which reinforce or balance the need for change in the field of religious education. Disciplines, of course, need practice, so you'll have an opportunity to try three of these disciplines here: personal mastery, mental models, and systems thinking. The remaining two, team learning and shared vision, will have to wait until you're with others who make up the teams in which you work. We'll begin with a consideration of personal vision, address some of the mental models which impact our work as religious educators, then move into the systems thinking, to look at areas where we must be in dialogue about professional matters. This is the work we're about this weekend here in Toronto. We're off and running -- metaphorically speaking, of course!

tion to this time and this space.

Now imagine, just for yourself, the result in your life that you most deeply desire. It may be to welcome another child into your family, or to strengthen a primary relationship, to live where you most want to, or to be recognized as a full-fledged professional in the work you do. Stay there for just a moment, letting the full manifestation of this result flood over you.

Open your eyes. You're going to spend a few minutes creating a word picture of this vision, through answering a series of questions. You'll find this most useful if you take the time to write your answers as you go through this material, so you may want to get yourself a cup of tea or coffee, and find a comfortable place to write.

To begin, as you consider the experience of creating this result for yourself, use words or images to answer these questions in the present tense, as if your vision were already a reality (Appendix A):

--Who is around you?

--Where are you?

--What does this result look, sound, smell, feel like?

Here are some reasons why some of you might

have found this exercise difficult:

* You think you can't have what you want. See if you can suspend your doubts, worries, fears and concerns for the moment, as if the abundance of the universe was yours to tap. We won't ignore reality forever, but we're putting it to one side right now.

* Someone else is telling me what I want. Whether that person is an adult, such as a parent, spouse or partner, instructor or supervisor, or a child, s/he is not here with you right now. This is a time to concentrate on what you want for yourself. It may involve a relationship with someone else, and that's fine, but include it only if it's what you want.

* I'm not important enough to get what I want. That's a biggie for many of us, who were raised to believe that we're not worth much. Just for this moment, put those thoughts into a box in your head and close the lid. Imagine what you'd want if you did deserve it.

* I already have a vision of what I want. Good for you. This is an opportunity to polish up that vision, take it out, turn it around, and look for new facets or areas of your vision that aren't a reality yet. The thing about visions is that you don't create them just once; as you change in reaching for your vision, it changes, too.

* I'm afraid of what I want. The fact that you're in touch with your fear is another good sign. You know your own boundaries and limits. If you know what you want and are frightened by it, you can put it away in your mind and re-visit it later, in six months or three years or whenever. It'll still be there waiting for you.

* I don't have a clue what I want. This may be a sign that you've lost hope, especially in these difficult times. You may be thinking, "In a world where such awful things happen, having a vision is a waste of time." I want to remind you that Anne Frank never succumbed to that despair, through years of life in that Dutch attic and later in the concentration camp where she died. None of us can choose what will happen to us in the next few minutes, but we can all choose life, and that's what I'm inviting you to do. We can choose to live fully in the time we have, to grieve our losses and go on. You may need to find a trusted friend, a counselor, or a spiritual director to help you find the wellsprings of hope again. For now, ask yourself, "If I did have a vision of greatness, what would it be?"

* There's no way I can achieve my vision in the

situation I'm in. Again, you're going back to current reality before you've spent time on what your vision is. First of all, you could be wrong. Your congregation may be delighted to help co-create your vision of yourself. Your spouse, partner, children, instructor, minister or supervisor may be much more receptive than you think. Second, you could be right. Then your vision may include the possibility that by girding up your loins to move on, your possibilities may be greatly enhanced.

* I've already achieved my vision. Wow!!! I hope it's as wonderful as you thought it might be. You may be taking a mini-sabbatical for now, and that's great. Somewhere in the back of your mind, though, you know that you can't stay on sabbatical forever. Perhaps it's time to re-vision and think what comes next.

OK -- I hope that's helped you to move your internal objections to one side, so you're ready to return to the vision you've started to work with. Keep working in the present tense, and answer whichever of these questions is relevant to you, with words or images (Appendix A):

* What qualities would you possess if you were exactly the kind of person you wanted to be?

* What would you like to own? What would you like to give away?

* Where would you like to live?

* What would you like your body to be like?

* What kinds of relationships would you like to have, at work, with friends, and with family?

* What would you like to learn?

* What's your vision of the society or community you live in?

* If your unique purpose in life were completely fulfilled, what would that purpose be?

Most people have a mixture of things that are pretty self-centered and quite selfless on their lists. That's fine. It's part of our common humanity to want things for ourselves. However, we also have the capacity to sort out what's transient and what really reflects our deepest longings, so now I'm going to ask you to go back over the components of your personal vision, and for each thing you've written down, ask yourself, "If I could have this right now this minute, would I take it? What would that bring me?"

This part of the exercise is like peeling an onion, finding layer after layer. We're expanding the vision, bringing a richer image to the front, finding new areas to explore. For the things you

really want, ask, "Why do I want that? What does it mean to me?"

The next thing I'm going to ask you to look at is the list of values, both work and personal (Appendix B). Feel free to add other values as you wish, but in the next few minutes, select just ten of the values listed here as those that have the highest priority for you.

Now that you've winnowed the list down to ten, you're going to prioritize still further until you get rid of five of those. Take the next minute or so to get your list down to five.

Now cross off another, to bring your list down to three.

And now one more, so you're left with only two.

And finally one more, so you're left with the one item on this list that you care most about.

If possible, what you need next is to find someone with whom you can talk about your choices. A coach, friend, spouse or partner, minister, or professional colleague would be a good person to talk to about how your life would be different if your personal vision reflected this value, how it would be if your congregation encouraged you to live up to it, and how you felt when you were forced to make these hard choices. If your circumstances don't permit conversation, take some time to reflect on this process, perhaps through journaling.

What we're going to do next is to explore what your current reality is with regard to each element that we looked at before when you were writing your vision statements. Write answers to these questions (Appendix C):

Mental Models

Now that you've unpacked your own personal vision, prioritized the values you use in your professional and personal life, and considered some of the current realities you're facing, you're ready to move from Peter Senge's first discipline, personal mastery, to his second, which are called "mental models." Senge described these models in terms of some of the ways we do or don't work to bring our personal visions to life.

Peter Senge's concept of mental models is built on the work of Chris Argyris, one of the early scholars and practitioners of what's known as "action learning." The premises of action learning are these:

- * What is my current self-image?
- * What do I own now? What's the real state of my tangible possessions?
- * Where do I live now? Is this where I long to be?
- * What is the state of my health? How fit am I? How do I feel about my body right now?
- * How are my relationships going? What's my current state with regard to family, friends and relationships at work?
- * How's my career going? How closely does my career path match my vision?
- * What's the current reality regarding individual learning, travel, reading, or the other activities I love outside of work?
- * What's the current state of the community in which I live? How does that match with my vision?
- * What's the current reality of my life in terms of my deepest aspirations and purpose?

The tension between your personal vision and current reality provides the energy you need to realize your vision. That tension is reduced as vision and reality move closer together; when they are perfectly aligned, it's time to celebrate your success, take a sabbatical, and begin this process all over again.

We're not finished with your vision just yet, but this would be a good time for you to take a break, move around, and come back. The next part of this work will involve a consideration of the ways in which you may be holding yourself back from realizing the vision you've just created.

- * Adults need to be actively engaged in learning processes. They must also take on the responsibility for their own learning.
- * New information must be linked to what adults already know.
- * Individuals and organizations should prepare themselves for the only constant there is: change.
- * We are quick to leap from what we observe or perceive to judgments. The next leap is from these judgments, which have little or no basis in fact, to action. Little wonder that our actions frequently produce just the opposite result from

what we wanted, and that we find it difficult to figure out what to do to put things right.

The first of these premises explains why a presenter can't just open up someone's head, pull back, and pour information in. By sending out a request that you read *The Fifth Discipline* and answer some questions before you got here, I signaled that this wasn't going to be a "sit in your seat and absorb information" kind of presentation. Sometimes I send out what's called an Action Evaluation form before presentations, asking participants to list up to three goals they have for a workshop or seminar. Then I ask them to say why those goals are important to them. Finally, I ask them what actions they're prepared to take to be sure their goals are met.

If participants return these forms prior to the workshop or seminar, then the presenter can look for common goals, listed by more than two participants; unique goals, listed by only one person; and contrary goals, which can't be met as a result of the workshop. As an example, I once had a participant in a workshop like this one say that he wanted to finish a book he'd been working on for quite awhile, and wanted plenty of time to meditate and relax as well. I have no idea whether he managed to finish his book, or meditate and relax. I am sure that none of these outcomes was linked to my part of the workshop.

The second premise of action learning is that adults need to hook new information to something they already know. In some cases, this can be done by using experiential learning such as role plays or simulations. In others, this means that adults need time to figure out what they already know to get ready to add new information. That matches up with the praxis model which Thomas Groome developed from the work of Paolo Freire and others. People need to name their own knowing before they reflect critically and hear the community story.

The third premise is that change is all we know or can expect. Here are a few of the changes that have taken place in the Unitarian Universalist Association in the last year:

- * We have elected the Rev. William Sinkford as the first African-American man ever to serve as President of the UUA.

- * The third major woman candidate for the position of UUA president was defeated. In addition, the Rev. Diane Miller is no longer the director of the UUA's Department of Ministry, a position now held by the Rev. David Hubner as acting direc-

tor.

- * The Canadian Unitarian Council has voted to sever its formal ties with the Unitarian Universalist Association and become an independent, self-standing organization, effective June 30, 2002.

- * The Rev. Lena Breen, whom most of us knew as "Cynthia," is no longer the director of the Religious Education Department.

- * Judith Frediani, a UU layperson, is now the acting director of the RE Department.

- * The Task Force on Structure and Services has issued a report which raises the issue of whether UUA "headquarters" staff should continue to work on Beacon Hill in Boston. The same report includes the possibility that the UUA will establish regional centers for training and services not connected with the traditional district offices where district executives and program consultants work.

- * There are now two fewer districts than there were a year ago. Heartland District resulted from the merger of Michigan and Ohio Valley Districts, and Clara Barton District resulted from the merger of Connecticut Valley and Central Massachusetts Districts.

- * We welcome these new program consultants to district work: Virginia Jarocho-Ernst in Joseph Priestley District; the Rev. Dr. Elizabeth Strong in Massachusetts Bay District; Nada Velimirovic in Pacific Central District; and Jennifer Nichols-Payne in Southwest District.

- * Review and Renewal of Unitarian Universalist Ministry, a publication available last year through the Department of Ministry, has been superseded by *Assessing Our Leadership: Promoting Effectiveness in Congregational Leadership*. LREDA's name did not appear on the cover of Review and Renewal, but it does appear on the cover of *Assessing Our Leadership*.

Within your congregations, change may include:

- * an announcement that your minister is retiring at the end of June

- * doubling of the number of people attending worship since September 11, along with a 40% increase in the number of children under 12 attending your RE program

- * your helping with memorial services for several congregants who have been missing from their jobs in the World Trade Center or the Pentagon since September 11

- * a tense meeting with the board president who

indicated that the congregation would be looking for a new DRE after the end of this church year

- * a fire that destroys the RE wing

- * an announcement that a long-time parishioner has died and left the congregation \$400,000

It doesn't matter whether change is positive or negative, although we certainly welcome one more than the other. Change in either direction is equally unsettling, as people who win a huge lottery award can attest. Our organizational systems find it difficult to cope with change, although it is in fact the only constant there is.

The fourth of these premises is that we make judgments and decisions on the basis of flawed or partial information. Senge's concept of action learning relates to the idea that most of us perceive or observe something, and leap up what Chris Argyris calls "the ladder of inference" to explain why it happened. Here's an example: we were giving a workshop on conflict management once, and I instructed the kitchen manager not to provide bananas for a certain group at breakfast. Of course, they could see that other people could select bananas, but the manager removed the bananas when this particular group came up to the serving area. First the group demanded bananas. When the manager said, "No, I'm sorry, there are no bananas for breakfast," the group began screaming at her that she was a manipulative. . . I think you can guess what else they called her.

This group of people observed something: bananas were on the serving table until they got to the front of the line, then they were removed. They leapt pretty quickly up the ladder of inference to the conclusion that the kitchen manager didn't like them and wanted to treat them unfairly. No one in the group asked her why she had removed the bananas, and they leapt pretty quickly up that ladder of inference.

Senge included dealing with mental models as one of the five disciplines because so much of what we do is based on faulty decision making. We're going to look at some examples of mental models in relation to UU religious education, but first I'd like to give you a tool which can help you slow down and take a deep breath when you're tempted to leap from observation to judgment. The mantra is "Remember MA." "MA" stands for "Moment of Awareness," and when you find yourself starting to leap, you can pause, get control over your breathing, and ask yourself these

questions (Appendix D):

- * What is happening right now? You can break this down into parts, too:

 - What am I doing right now?

 - What am I feeling right now?

 - What am I thinking right now?

- * What do I want right now?

- * What am I doing right now to prevent myself from getting what I want?

Focusing on a Moment of Awareness relates to the spiritual practice of awareness as well. Paying attention to the here and now can help keep us grounded. It can remind us of all we have to be grateful for, which is aside from anything else a wonderful way of dealing with anxiety, and can keep us from leaping up that ladder of inference as well. I'd like you to "freeze" right now and answer those questions for yourself, about wherever you are and whatever you're doing at the moment.

- * What is happening right now?

 - What am I doing right now?

 - What am I feeling right now?

 - What am I thinking right now?

- * What do I want right now?

- * What am I doing right now to prevent myself from getting what I want?

Here's a Moment of Awareness that I unpacked in a crowded workshop recently.

- * What's happening right now?

--I'm returning from an unscheduled bathroom break and while I was out of the room, someone has moved a folding chair into the only space where my scooter would fit. She's sitting in the chair. The chair is taking up half the space where I was sitting in my scooter. I'm afraid I'll run over her foot, and she'll cry out. I'm uncomfortable sitting in such a squashed space. I'm nervous about attracting attention and appearing too demanding. I'm angry that I can't take a bathroom break and count on finding the space I need still open when I get back. I'm leaping up the ladder of inference to conclude that this woman has a big sense of entitlement.

- * What do I want right now?

--I want to be able to come back into the room and back into the space I was using.

- * What am I doing right now to prevent myself from getting what I want?

--I'm preventing myself from saying, "Excuse me, but I need to park my scooter in this space. Could you please move your chair?"

I'd describe the mental model I was using as "As a person with a disability, you're gonna get jerked around." I'm not saying I have no reason to suspect that may be true; anyone who attended General Assembly in Cleveland and paid attention to accessibility for people with disabilities knows I have very good reason for thinking I'm gonna get jerked around. The bigger question, however, is whether I'm well-served by using this mental model. Who is ultimately harmed by it? I am, by showing that I have a chip on my shoulder. I am, when my blood pressure skyrockets when things go wrong.

An alternative mental model might be, "As a person with a disability, you're gonna need to make your needs clearly known." This is as true as the other mental model, but it has different consequences for me. If I approach a situation understanding that I need to make sure someone else understands what my needs are, I'll focus on good communications rather than on feeling aggrieved. I'll be more willing to look around for assistance if the first person I try isn't able to be of assistance. I'll waste less psychic energy flailing around being a victim.

Here are some other things I've observed in UU circles recently. I'd like to find out what mental models you think apply. Write down the conclusions you draw, if any, from these observations. You might want to be in contact with a colleague, or another member of the professional staff of your congregation, to ask them what conclusions they've drawn about the same observations. I think you'd find it interesting to compare your answers with someone else's. Here are the observations:

A. Last year's UUA Directory had about half as many pages as this year's.

B. According to the new UUA Directory, church school members increased by .89% between 1998 and 2001. In the same period, certified members in the United States increased by 2.96%.

C. The only photographs in the new Directory are of the UUA board, president and moderator.

D. In the section titled "Professional Religious Leaders" in the new UUA Directory, only ordained clergy are listed.

E. On the cover of *Assessing Our Leadership*, the

following are listed:

--UU Ministers Association

--UUA Department of Congregational District & Extension Services

--UUA Department of Ministry

--Liberal Religious Educators Association

OK -- in each of these examples, something I can observe gets explained in certain ways that reinforce certain things and block others. Here are some of the conclusions I drew from these observations:

A. Last year someone made the decision to omit all the independent affiliate organizations from the UUA Directory. I know this, because I work for The Mountain Retreat & Learning Centers, Inc., which is one of those independent affiliates. We immediately called the UUA to express our disapproval, and this year someone made the decision to put back in all the things they left out last year.

B. We don't have common understandings of how to report the numbers of children and youth who participate in our religious education programs. Do we report the number who register? The number who attend regularly? The total number who show up for special events like a Hallowe'en party or a Solstice celebration? And since there's no financial implication to reporting numbers of children and youth, as there is with adult members, it's also possible that the person who fills out the form may not have any idea of how many children and youth are in religious education programs. I doubt that many directors or ministers of religious education take the time to meet with this person every year in late January before the form is submitted. Did you do this last year? Do you plan to do it this year?

C. Photos are expensive to reproduce. The UUA may have decided to save some money by limiting the number of photos in the directory.

D. We don't have common understandings of the term "professional religious leader," and the Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association has been the most effective professional organization at having its members recognized in the directory.

E. The leaders of the Liberal Religious Educators Association have decided to devote time, energy and attention to working closely with the UUA and the UU Ministers Association to have their voices heard with regard to assessment processes.

How were the conclusions you drew similar to mine? How were they different? What do you think might account for the similarities and differences?

There are key practices in working with mental models:

1. Slowing down our mental processes so as not to leap up the ladder of inference
2. Being in dialogue with others who are affected by decisions that will be made on the basis of what's observed
3. Being willing to disclose our attitudes and beliefs as sources for our actions

In the case of the listings in the "Professional Religious Leadership" section of the UUA Directory, who are some of the other groups with whom religious educators should be in dialogue?

- * Department of Ministry
- * UUMA
- * UUMN
- * AUUA
- * Ordained clergy in all three tracks of ministry
- * UUA Publications Department
- * Seminaries
- * Other continuing education providers such as The Mountain Learning Center for Leadership

One of the things Senge cautions against is rushing to correct things that have gone awry as a result of flawed mental models. In the case of the bananas at breakfast, for example, if people had been in dialogue about the bananas, they might have decided that to be fair, unless everyone got a banana, no one should have one. They might have turned their backs on bananas for the rest of the workshop. They would have overlooked the possibility of auctioning off bananas, or asking who needed the potassium in the bananas because of taking diuretics, or whether people would be just as happy with half a banana at breakfast so the limited supply could go further, or whether the point of the exercise, which was to demonstrate inequity and deprivation in the larger world, required that they go along with the limited availability of bananas. A sudden rush of precipitate action is likely to construct a different mental model which simply produces a different area of misperception.

Dialogue is the key skill connected with unpacking mental models. You're opening the door to

dialogue when you ask,

- * What leads you to conclude that?
- * Does everyone here agree on what that data is?
- * Could you please go through the steps of your reasoning process for me?
- * I think I heard you say. . . Is that correct?
- * How does this relate to your other concerns?
- * I see it this way. Do you have a different perception?

These invitations are particularly important if you and the other person are stuck. Then you might think of saying,

- * What do we agree on?
- * What do we sense is true, even though we can't demonstrate it?
- * What would have to happen before you could consider an alternative?
- * It feels to me as if we're at an impasse. Have you got any ideas that will help us clarify our thinking?

Two other exercises are particularly helpful in unpacking mental models. One is to make up a set of index cards with all the stakeholders for a particular decision on them. Put a number on each card and put them up on the wall. Then write the numbers on separate pieces of paper and throw them into a basket. Each person draws a number out of the basket, and speaks to the issue from that stakeholder's perspective, completing this phrase: "From my perspective as [stakeholder], the critical elements in the situation are. . ." If people are stuck, they can consider these questions:

- * What's my time frame here? How long have I been looking at this issue?
- * When will this become a nonissue for me?
- * What do I expect will happen here?
- * What do I hope will happen?
- * Who expects me to deal with this? What do they want me to do?
- * What else is mixed in with this issue for me?
- * What do I know about this issue that no one else knows?
- * On what data is my understanding of this issue based?

Another mantra that's useful for dealing with mental models came into the UUA system

through African-American consultant UT Saunders. UT has worked extensively with the board, committees and staff, and he says, "No inquiry without advocacy." That means that I can't hide my opinions behind questions, hoping to find out how you feel about something so I can agree with you. Instead, UT recommends that you tell the other person how you feel or think about something, then ask him/her for an opinion. For people concerned about finding out how the prevailing winds are blowing, this is a powerful discipline.

Time to find someone to talk to again. A professional colleague would be an especially good choice for this exercise, since it centers around something of importance to all LREDA members. Each of you could share your conclusions about

the observation I'm providing. This might also be an interesting dialogue to conduct as part of a LREDA chapter meeting.

The observation I'd like you to work with is this: LREDA membership has expanded from around 40 members in the 1970s to over 500 members today.

In the next section, we're going to take a look at some of the systems factors that are reinforcing or blocking the movement toward increasing recognition of religious educators as professional congregational leaders. Later, we'll touch on team learning and shared vision, but since you're working right now with this material as an individual rather than as part of an ongoing team or group, those will receive less emphasis.

Systems Thinking

In my opinion, systems thinking is the central practice of organizational life. Peter Senge described it as the fifth discipline, the one on which his other disciplines rested, and I agree with him.

All of us who are deeply involved in Unitarian Universalism need to understand theology, or "God talk," and all of us need to acquire systems thinking, based on the Greek word *sunistanai*, "to cause to stand together." Systems thinking points us in the direction not only of things, but also of the spaces and relationships between things, until we come to understand how we all co-create the congregations in which we work and worship.

Once you've acquired systems thinking, certain things go out the window:

- * the ability to sit quietly and listen to a board member say, "If we'd only get rid of Ted and get a minister who can preach worth a damn, our problems will be solved."

- * a willingness to hear the board member say to Annie, who's come to talk about how much she dislikes Ted's sermons, "I know just what you mean. We've all tried to work with him, but it's just no good. Surely he can see it's time he moved on."

- * the desire to wall yourself off in the RE wing while the Finance Committee and the treasurer deal with the deficit budget.

- * an unwillingness to deal with Barbara, who "went off" again in the congregational meeting,

the way she always does. It's a particular shame that she took out after that nice young couple who were thinking of working with the senior high youth, but after all, everyone here knows that's just her way. If they're going to be members, they'd better get used to it.

Systems thinking does all those in, and more. It involves not the organizational chart that hangs in the administrator's office, but the patterns of interrelationships among the elements that make up congregational life. It helps us to analyze the price tags attached to any decision, as well as the extent to which we're willing to pay that price. It keeps us from thinking that, if we were only clever enough, we'd be able to come up with the one perfect answer to a problem. It reminds us that cause and effect may be quite distant in time and space, so that if a response isn't forthcoming immediately, we're still on the lookout for it.

Systems thinking makes us wary of the "quick fix," the "solution of the month," and "one minute" answers to anything. It also helps us deal with the fact that once changes are made, things are likely to get worse before they get better, so persistence and perseverance are disciplines we can encourage one another to practice.

From the old linear perspective, a tree is a solid, three dimensional object that has xylem and phloem to get nutrients up from the soil to the leaves and sugar back down again. It has flat or needle-shaped devices which open to admit

carbon dioxide and emit oxygen, and in some cases the devices, which we call leaves, fall off during the time of the year that sunlight is in short supply. It supports those leaves by developing a sturdy trunk which divides again and again into branches and twigs. Its roots extend as far under the surface of the soil as the leaves and branches do above. A tree. Ours to cut down and saw up into lumber, force into odd shapes, harvest edible fruits from, or leave alone to flourish.

From a systems perspective, a tree is something else entirely. It's an embodied example of the processes of energy transfer from the nearest star to its third orbiting body. It's a method of using adenosine triphosphate and chloroplasts to break apart one common molecule found in air and generate another, while producing a substance that will allow the tree to increase in size infinitely. It is an embodiment of solar energy in a system that includes self-replicating molecules.

It isn't that one of these descriptions of a tree is correct and the other incorrect. They're both right. The systems description, however, focuses on process, and the other focuses on content. We've all been schooled in the "task" or "content" of a tree, but few of us outside the field of quantum physics were taught systems thinking as we grew up.

My purpose this morning is to help you acquire some of the vocabulary and habits of thought that accompany systems thinking. In particular, I want to be sure you can all interpret a systems diagram called a causal loop, with which I'd like to explore some of the great questions of what it might mean to consider ourselves as professional religious educators.

Some of these skills relate back to material we've already covered. Systems thinkers pay a good deal of attention to events. They count things: children in classrooms, dollars in the budget, adults in the worship service, number of fire extinguishers. They also look for patterns of behavior, for ways in which events that seemingly have little or no connection with one another are in fact deeply connected. And they practice awareness of the here and now, which is related to the exploration of the mental models that affect how we make decisions. They do these things simultaneously, or they pay equal amounts of attention over time to each, so that nothing is neglected or forgotten.

If you have read *The Fifth Discipline* as a religious

educator, you were forced to translate a lot of business-type language to the life of a congregation. You may have been reminded of the work many of us have to do when we read books published by Abingdon or Alban Institute; if we're not Christians, the mental models don't apply to us. We don't publish enough on our own to understand what we need to know about congregational life, so we just sigh and translate. I've done some of the translating from business models into congregational models, and want to see how true they ring for you.

In creating the causal loop diagrams for these materials, I started with some dynamics for religious educators that I think are pretty universal. You'll have to assess how close I've come to the realities of your everyday life.

In the first systems diagram (see Appendix E), you'll see that the goal for the religious education program is to increase the number of children and youth in RE. This goal is shown at the "12 o'clock" position in the causal loop diagram. Follow the arrows clockwise around the diagram to see what happens in the system as changes occur.

Because of the hard work of the DRE and religious education committee, people are quite pleased with the quality of the religious education program at First UU Congregation. Word has spread that First UU has one of the best RE programs in town. As a result, many more families with children and youth are joining the congregation, which results in an increase in the number of volunteers available for the RE program. With the increase in volunteers, the DRE can increase the number of classes filled with happy children and youth internalizing what it means to be a Unitarian Universalist. As a result, they tell their friends, and there are more children and youth in the RE program.

This is an example of what systems thinkers call a reinforcing loop (R). Things go from good to better, and the result for the congregation is the growth that we're all supposed to want. In moving around the causal loop diagram, you'll find that one thing builds on another, additively. Each action taken by the congregation reinforces the positive changes that occurred earlier, so that the direction of change is positive.

Now I'm sure that some of you are rolling your eyes, snickering, and signaling in other ways that this picture is a bit rosy. There are in fact some factors that balance unbridled growth, and

they're shown in the second systems diagram. The goal is the same as the first one: to increase the number of children and youth in the RE program. In this balancing loop (B), however, the goal is shown outside the circle, near the "3 o'clock" position in the diagram, with an arrow indicating the influence of the goal on the outcomes shown in the circle.

Again, the DRE and religious education committee have worked hard to create a high quality program, and as a result families are joining the congregation. Unfortunately, these families, unlike those in the reinforcing loop (R) diagram, are over committed and lead incredibly busy lives. They've got time to volunteer in the RE program like they've got time for one of those happy family breakfasts we see in TV ads all the time: NOT! As a result, the increase in the number of children and youth without an increase in adults volunteering for the RE program results in crowded classrooms where individual attention is a luxury. Satisfaction levels with the program diminish, and when children and youth are unhappy with what's going on in RE, their families drift away from the congregation, so overall membership levels drop.

This is an example of what systems thinkers call a balancing loop. The goal is clear, but things move in the opposite direction from what planners originally intended. In a reinforcing loop, things move in a positive, or additive, direction. In a balancing loop, things move in the opposite direction, so the net result may be 180° from the planned goal.

You all know that there's an element of truth in both these diagrams, and people who work in the field of systems thinking would in fact combine them, so the links between the reinforcing and balancing loops would be clearer. In addition, these things don't happen overnight. There can be a considerable amount of time between the planning and the execution of the best-laid plans, and it takes time, energy and resources for word to get out that your RE program is really stellar. If you're really successful, there's also likely to be an initial drop in satisfaction levels, as RE classes become more crowded before you have a chance to recruit and train additional volunteers. Those new families are likely to cost the church in terms of resources and money before there's an increase in the pledge base. Then there's the little matter of where you'd put additional classes even if you did have volunteers to staff them.

Systems thinking keeps you from believing that if you could just do a fantastic job of letting people know how great your RE program is, overall membership in the congregation would increase. It reminds people that even if all those new families did join the church, they might or might not increase the financial resources of the congregation over time. It also keeps people from thinking that if you were doing your job better, you'd be able to find all those volunteers, administer the program, spend time reviewing curricula, offer pastoral counseling sessions to all the families who need them, deal with disruptive behaviors in the RE classes, meet the affiliation needs of junior and senior high youth, provide outreach for campus ministries and young adult programs, and oversee a fantastic adult RE program. Doesn't it make you tired just thinking about it?

In my opinion, systems thinking is something that all congregational leaders and staff, lay and professional, should acquire. That's one reason why I stress systems thinking in every class, workshop or seminar I develop. I use experiential methods and simulations to help people understand how quickly they fall into roles in organizations, how their family systems impact on which roles they're drawn to, and how necessary it is to consider the impact of a proposed change on the entire system of the congregation, both internal and external. I feel so strongly about this that in my role as Director of The Mountain's Learning Center for Leadership, I've produced a new quarterly newsletter, *Leadership Matters*, available in English and Spanish, designed to help congregations become learning communities.

As a long-time member of LREDA, I'm interested in helping all of you acquire systems thinking for two reasons. For one thing, the five disciplines that Peter Senge outlined are key to serving in a professional capacity. Whatever the governance or structure of your congregation, its leaders must be able to work together as a team. The ordained minister, religious education director, music director, administrator and board president have to understand how the system operates. They can't afford to blame one another or work from a position of self-interest if the congregation is to thrive.

In addition, however, members of LREDA need these same skills in order to guide this great organization in the right direction. When I first became aware of the existence of LREDA, its membership was open only to ministers of religious

education and credentialed religious educators, a category that had already been eliminated by the UUA, so its numbers were dropping every year. LREDA consisted of a small group of incredibly powerful women and men who shaped religious education for our Association. At a critical juncture, however, LREDA members decided to change that. They voted to open membership to people who had completed five Renaissance modules and were employed as religious educators. They opted to increase the size of membership and deal with the confusion and chaos over purpose that was sure to follow, as it did.

Now LREDA has reached another critical juncture. LREDA members are being asked to consider what it might mean to be regarded as "professional," with all that might mean for the field of religious education. For one thing, it may mean a return to credentialing. Those of you who know about polarities are familiar with this sort of thing -- polarities refer to things that will be revisited over and over, as long as an organization exists. In our congregations, things like "joys and concerns" or "announcements in the worship service" are examples of polarities: whatever decision you reach today, you'll be visiting it again some time in the next twenty years, guaranteed. A decision about whether or not to hire members as staff is another example of a polarity -- they're sort of like infinity, as an organization cycles through the advantages and disadvantages of any particular decision.

The reason I brought up polarities with regard to LREDA is that the question of what it means to be a professional religious educator is not new. As most of you know, the UUA used to credential religious educators, whose names were included in the section of the Directory called "Professional Religious Leaders." To the best of my knowledge, there is still one person living who was credentialed by the UUA, so LREDA has maintained that particular membership category.

Now here we are back again, engaged in the ongoing story of what it means to work as a UU religious educator. I'm by no means an historian, so if I'm mixing things up in the story I'm going to tell, I count on someone to correct me. After I've related the story, I'm going to go through another set of systems diagrams designed to uncover some other complexities of the path we're on at the moment.

In the olden days, as children's stories begin,

people in the United States and Canada went to church in droves. Unitarians, who rejected the concept of a trinitarian God, were clustered on the east coast, while Universalists, who believed in universal salvation, were more widespread, particularly in rural farming communities. Both denominations were on the liberal end of Protestant Christianity. Both denominations had procedures by which people were called to ordination and settlement in their congregations. Ordained clergy were mostly, but not exclusively, men; both denominations did have women who were called to ministry, but few enough of them that we remember their names, like Olympia Brown, or the regions where they served, like the Iowa Sisterhood.

Religious education was the province of women, who volunteered to teach children the tenets of these faith communities. Of course, if a church were sizable, the person who was paid to administer the Christian education program might be a man, but the volunteers in the classrooms working directly with children were women. Men served on the board and took care of finance and buildings and grounds. Some of you may be part of congregations that can still remember the very first time a woman served on the board, or worked on the finance committee. These patterns continued right up to 1961, when these two small, liberal, Christian denominations voted to merge.

Again, there were exceptions to what I'm describing. Women like Sophia Lyon Fahs could experience a call to ministry late in life, and devote their ministry to the field of religious education, but most of the people serving congregations as clergy were men. For the most part, these men were mentored by other men, who offered scholarships and financial assistance to those prepared to go to seminary and enter the field of professional ministry. In those days, men graduated from seminary with degrees of Master or Doctor of Divinity without student loans or financial burdens. And in those days, clergy were regarded as professionals along with attorneys, school principals and physicians, and were paid commensurately with professional status.

As the role of women in public life changed during the 1960s, so did the role of women in UU congregations. Several things were going on at the same time, which of course fits right in with systems thinking: women were elected to serve as trustees; women began to work with money; women began considering the field of ministry.

In religious education, things didn't change so rapidly; most of the people involved in RE were still women, as they are today.

Gender, of course, is not the only thing that changed during this period. In the 1960s, African American Unitarian Universalists, who had been part of both denominations since their arrival in this country, sought to address their own particular interests by asking the Association for funding. The long and short of this part of the story is that the Association rejected the proposal and many African Americans left the Association as a result. Today, as we look around this room, we notice that most of us appear to have European ancestors. Since we've done some work on mental models, I will refrain from drawing unwarranted conclusions about that. Nonetheless, issues of racial justice have occupied this system from the beginning.

In terms of professional ministry, over time, things also changed in terms of how people got into seminary and earned their M.Div. or D.Min. degrees. The UUA stopped providing full scholarships to people considering ministry, who then had to come up with some other way to pay for their graduate degrees. Over 30 years or so, it became more and more common for people to take out loans to pay for seminary, and to graduate with a substantial debt load that had to be repaid. Over time, the UUA responded by establishing the Office of Church Staff Finance, whose director, the Rev. Ralph Mero, made a presentation to us yesterday. Guidelines for fair compensation were established, and volunteer compensation consultants were trained to interact with congregations in search, bringing them up to date on issues of fair compensation. During the same period, the UUA decided that there should be three separate tracks of ministry: parish, religious education, and community based. The Department of Ministry established requirements in addition to an M.Div. or D.Min., such as a report from a career assessment center, completion of clinical pastoral education or CPE, internships, and letters of recommendation. The UU Ministers Association, or UUMA, established policies whereby students preparing for ministry could attend local chapter meetings and events scheduled prior to General Assembly once they were "in candidacy," a status ordinarily reached after the first year of seminary.

Overall responsibility for gate keeping was held by the Ministerial Fellowship Committee, or MFC, whose members reviewed packets prepared by

each candidate. Prospective ministers were given ratings ranging from "1" to "5," and were required to earn a "1" or a "2" before they could enter the search process. Once they were called by a congregation, they entered into a status known as "preliminary fellowship" and underwent annual evaluations which were submitted to the Department of Ministry. Only after a minister had served for three years and obtained positive evaluations could s/he obtain final fellowship, after which s/he could be removed from ministry only by the most egregious conduct.

So far, I've described organizational support offered by UUA headquarters staff, but I don't want to leave out the field staff who offer support to member congregations from offices closer to the majority of UU churches. Districts were created at merger, mostly following the lines of Universalist conventions or Unitarian conferences, and they were originally staffed by ordained clergy who served as Inter District Representatives, or IDRs. These men traveled extensively, covering huge geographic areas, to put a face on Unitarian Universalism for the average UU in the pew.

Today, following some mergers, there are 21 districts, two fewer than there were two years ago, and several districts are impacted by the decision of the Canadian Unitarian Council to separate formally from the UUA. Districts range in size from 9 congregations in Western Canada to 71 in Central Midwest, my old stomping grounds. All 21 districts have part- or full-time district executives, and 10 also have part- or full-time program consultants whose job descriptions involve programming for young adults, youth, and children's religious education. Each member of the field staff is jointly employed by the UUA and the district. Each district has its own board of trustees, and collects dues separate from contributions to the UUA's Annual Program Fund. Some districts are further subdivided into area councils or clusters.

Back to professional ministry. To help ministers remain current in their field, the UUMA established a committee called CENTER, whose responsibilities were to plan presentations for ministers offered on Wednesday and Thursday prior to General Assembly. In addition, every ten years ordained clergy can attend a Convocation, which will be offered next in the spring of 2002. UU clergy are not required to undergo any form of continuing education once they achieve final fellowship.

The path for religious educators has been less clear-cut. Of course, people could undergo seminary training to become clergy, and could then specialize in ministries for children and youth, which is how Sophia Lyon Fahs gained her credentials. Starting in the 1980s, the UUA Department of Religious Education also developed a series of intensive training events which became known as "REnaissance modules," which covered everything from the philosophy of religious education to teacher training to curriculum. The Renaissance program called for people to earn a pin once they had completed five of these modules.

Once the Department of Ministry had opted for three tracks of ministry, people could also obtain the status of Minister of Religious Education. Essentially, MREs completed all the requirements for parish ministry, with additional coursework related to religious education. Originally, this degree was offered through an Independent Study Program, or ISP, which involved people completing academic coursework by mail, meeting with advisors periodically. Of course, clinical pastoral education and internships still involved residential courses.

Eventually, the MRE program became established at Meadville/Lombard Theological School in Chicago, home of the Fahs RE library. Coursework was offered during three weeks in January as week long intensives, and the ISP became known as the Modified Residency Program, or MRP. At one point, Meadville/Lombard offered two options for religious educators, one a program involving preparation for ministry and leading to an MRE, and one a program involving academic study of religious education and leading to an M.A.

LREDA members, in the meantime, began considering what it might mean for religious educators to be acknowledged -- by themselves, by congregations, by ordained clergy, and by other staff -- as professionals. Here are some of the realities which are also part of this conversation:

- * The move in congregational size is that the number of small or midsize UU congregations is increasing, while the number of large UU congregations is decreasing. Average congregational size has fallen in the last 40 years.

- * An increase in the number of people expressing interest in Unitarian Universalism movement in the 1960s led to the establishment of UU fellowships, designed to be lay-led without professional minis-

try. Many of these congregations are still in existence today.

- * The number of people in seminary preparing for UU ministry is at an all-time high.

- * The number of pulpits coming open in any given year is fairly static.

- * The majority of paid positions in the field of religious education are part-time, without benefits.

- * LREDA has made a long-term commitment to the work of becoming an antiracist organization that also supports justice with regard to age, gender, affectional orientation, physical and mental abilities.

What other factors do you know of that are part of this discussion? Make some notes in your journal, or engage in dialogue with a colleague about this. Again, this question might be raised at a LREDA chapter meeting, with feedback from the session going to the LREDA board.

From a systems perspective, I want to go through three more systems diagrams before we move into some small group work. Below, you'll see a reinforcing loop centered on the goal statement, "We want better ministers." The goal statement is at the "3 o'clock" position in the diagram. The pressure from congregations for better ministers leads to empowerment of the UUA's Department of Ministry, resulting in more requirements from the Ministerial Fellowship Committee, continuing education opportunities from CENTER, and the requirement that all professional clergy undergo a process of supervision by the MFC, called "preliminary fellowship." During this probationary period, people new to ministry are required to undergo annual evaluations by congregations, which submit the evaluation results to the MFC. Only after a minister has received satisfactory evaluations for three years is s/he granted "final fellowship," after which only professional misconduct or malfeasance can result in a minister not being in good standing with the Department of Ministry.

However, the increase in the requirements by the MFC also results in more debt incurred by seminarians, since scholarship funds are quite limited. In response to the increased financial pressures on ministers, the UUA established the Office of Church Staff Finance, currently headed up by the Rev. Ralph Mero, who works tirelessly to increase congregational willingness to compensate professional church staff fairly.

Ralph's work, along with that of hard-working

district compensation consultants, has resulted in higher compensation (salary, housing allowances and benefits packages) for many ministers. The higher level of compensation helps to attract better ministerial candidates, reinforcing the original goal of finding better ministers.

On the same page, I've drawn a balancing loop around the same goal statement, this time shown outside the "3 o'clock" position in the causal loop diagram. Again, the congregational desire for better ministers results in an increase in requirements for candidates planning on meeting with the MFC, and the result outlined here is that more of those candidates receive less than satisfactory ratings from the Committee. People who receive ratings of "3," "4" and "5" either must undertake substantial amounts of work to remedy deficiencies, or are not eligible for professional standing with the UUA.

Their colleagues hear of their difficulties, and experience heightened stress levels, especially early on in their ministerial careers. As a result, more of these new ministers succumb to stress in a variety of ways, including professional misconduct. In consequence, more of these ministries end with negotiated settlements and people leaving the profession of ministry, a result exactly the opposite of what was intended by people saying, "We want better ministers."

Finally, the last systems diagram illustrates an archetype which Peter Senge and his colleagues describe as "accidental adversaries." This archetype explains how groups of people who ought to be working in partnership with one another end up in opposition. The diagram is an attempt to look at some of the structural reasons why ordained clergy and religious educators may work against each other's interests without meaning to do so.

In this diagram, the goal of higher standards for church professionals is shown at the "3 o'clock" position. As a result, religious educators return to the question of credentialing as a way of signaling their professional competencies. With higher standards in place, directors of religious education can command higher compensation levels, reinforcing the second goal shown at the "9 o'clock" position. Higher compensation levels are also available to ordained clergy, and their increased earnings encourage higher standards. The outside loop in the diagram is reinforcing.

However, the inner loops show balancing forces at work. As DREs become credentialed and ask

for greater compensation, they enter into competition with ordained clergy for the scarce resources of the congregation. Clergy are more likely to believe they deserve the lion's share of what's available, in part because they are being asked to meet higher requirements set by the MFC. This diagram illustrates how more highly-skilled clergy and religious educators may come to regard themselves as competitors rather than allies.

Systems thinkers make these recommendations for an "accidental adversaries" situation:

- * Don't just try to fix your own part of the system. Instead, strengthen your understanding of the other party's fundamental needs, and look for ways you could support one another instead. This may involve helping to remove constraints in the other party's system, as well as strengthening your own.
- * Identify the ways in which proposed changes may have undesirable impacts on others
- * Identify fundamental solutions within the system.
- * Look for, and avoid, "quick fixes" that will undermine the viability of fundamental solutions.
- * Look for ways to communicate effectively with other parts of the system.

With these recommendations in mind, I'd like to encourage you to work with colleagues to look at the question of professionalism for religious educators from a systems perspective. You might want to spend time just discussing issues that have come up for you in this material so far. You might want to unpack some of your mental models as well, if that seems appropriate. This work could be done with nearby colleagues, at LREDA chapter meetings, or using the Internet via the LREDA list.

If you generate insights that you think would be useful to the LREDA board, please use the form at the end of this paper to write them down and send them along to a board member. The LREDA board is very interested in receiving feedback from members about how the question of credentialing should be handled in ways that maximize the benefits to strong, healthy UU congregations and their professional staffs, while minimizing the chances of creating "accidental adversaries."

Shared Vision and Team Learning

I want to touch briefly on Senge's remaining disciplines, which he called shared vision and team learning. I'm not going to spend a great deal of time on these disciplines, because they really need to be practiced with other members of your team. For some of you, that means that you'd need to be in dialogue with the parish and community based ministers who serve with you, as well as the youth advisor, music director, director of volunteer management, administrator, and board leaders. For others, the team would consist of you and members of the religious education committee or council, as well as board members. In any congregation, of any size, using any governance system and structure, you work with others who make up the leadership team. In addition, feedback loops need to be built into the system so that all members of the congregation have a way to make their opinions known.

Others of you are thinking of the larger system of UU religious education, which may involve members of the LREDA board, the UUA board, headquarters and field staff members of the UUA, representatives from the UU Ministers Association, the UU Musicians Network, the Association of UU Administrators, and independent affiliates like Meadville/Lombard Theological School, Starr King School for the Ministry, and The Mountain, which offer continuing education resources for religious educators. The conversations in which LREDA is currently engaged, on what it means to be a professional religious educator, cannot be conducted without these other stakeholders in the room.

The question of credentialing involves vision, mission, staff, assessment/evaluation, settlement, compensation, organizational development, and stewardship, along with consideration of impact on other professional church staff, and on congregations as a whole. In addition, LREDA's commitment to anti-racism and anti-oppression requires, in my opinion, that the impact of any proposal include consideration of how people of color would be affected, as well as other people who have experienced oppression within this system.

In any event, I do want to touch on these two disciplines, although we can't really begin to practice them in isolation. In terms of shared vi-

sion, Senge describes these key precepts:

- * Focusing on the enduring purpose of an organization shifts the perspective from reactive to creative.
- * Aspiration and commitment are strengthened by vision, mission, and articulated goals.
- * Members of a strong, healthy organization have a tacit sense of shared purpose.
- * The contents of the vision -- the specifics of how to manifest a sense of enduring purpose -- emerge from coherent processes of reflection and dialogue.
- * Organizations need to explore the same gap between vision and current realities that you did yesterday morning in looking at your personal vision and goals.

The practice of shared vision, then, focuses on the co-creation of shared meaning, or a collective sense of what is important and why. This goes right along with the materials in Congregational Self-Assessment and Assessing Our Leadership, both of which are available through the UUA web site or from the Department of Ministry. These materials emphasize that assessment of who we are, where we're going, why we're headed in that direction, and who is responsible for what, should be woven into the fabric of congregational life. They move away from the idea that "it's time to evaluate the minister," or "this year we're evaluating the DRE." They focus on the concept of shared ministry in the best sense, of continually assessing the ministries of a congregation. Committees on Ministry will play a key role in this process, so that's another group that needs the practices described in The Fifth Discipline. COM members have a tremendous educational role to play in strong, healthy UU congregations, and from their work shared visions will emerge.

Team learning involves all the practices we've been exploring here, conducted in such a way that the team overall has more knowledge than any individual member. Most of the analogies for team learning come from the world of sports, where skilled individuals work with great coaches to "enter the zone," as Michael Jordan used to say. He was referring to something that happens occasionally in sports, where players know each other's minds, hearts and practices so well that

they seem to function as a single entity. At its best, when the Chicago Bulls were described as a "Dream Team," that's the way they played. You didn't have to worry that some hotshot would hang onto the ball to the detriment of the team -- it was as if there were one entity on the court in white jerseys with red numerals, and that entity had ten arms and ten legs, all moving in sync to get that ball in the basket.

The same thing happened in women's soccer under the captaincy of Brandi Chastain, and in ice hockey the year the US Olympic team took the gold medal that had been widely predicted to go to the Russians. It isn't that any individual on these teams isn't replaceable; if someone goes out with an injury, the system has enough excess capacity to fill in the space, and the newcomer is integrated into the flow. I've seen this kind of thing happen in congregational life, too, where all the congregation's leaders acquired the skills and practices needed to work like this. Team learning implies that it isn't what you know, or what any individual knows -- it's what the team knows and understands that counts.

Please bear in mind that I'm not talking about information, with which we are flooded on a daily basis. Information has to be managed like any other resource, and most of us are doing the best we can to cope with the deluge of information that hits us every day through email, snail mail, phone calls, conversations, newsletters, bulletins, books, videos, radio, and all the equipment that goes along with them. I'm talking about knowledge, in the sense of recognizing the nature of something. We use information to tell us how many adults attended the 11:00 am service last Sunday; we use knowledge to discern why there were three times more people in our sanctuaries on September 16, 2001 as there were on September 9.

It's knowledge that informs team learning. Individuals acquire information, and bring it to the team, where meaning, vision and purpose are distilled from it. Think of information as grapes, and knowledge as a bottle of fine French bea-jolais, if you will.

I think the implication of shared vision and team learning is that no matter what you know as an individual, it's what the team makes of it that counts. I think the implications of Peter Senge's work are critical for how UU congregations function in order to fulfill their sense of purpose. Here's a partial list:

- * We work on our own personal visions, and be prepared to cope with the creative tension between that vision and current reality. We need to persevere in the face of obstacles, internal and external, and update our visions periodically.

- * The mental models with which we make assessments and judgments need to be unpacked so that others have access to what we value and how we think and feel.

- * Systems thinking takes away the option of offering an individual either blame or credit. At the same time, it requires that we as religious educators cast aside what I call the "mantle of oppression" that mires us in victimhood.

- * Shared vision and team learning require that everyone involved in the leadership of a UU congregation be in dialogue to distill meaning.

We have the pleasure, privilege and peril of being here in this room at a time of tremendous opportunity and risk. Thanks to much hard, patient work by the LREDA board and members, we are also not only in the room, but at the table at a crucial juncture in the history of the Association, as decisions are being made about departmental structures and service delivery. Unlike other groups that speak for and represent religious professionals, we're already in dialogue with stakeholders and key players. We've gone past questions like "How do we get in the door?" to "How do we achieve equity in the way things happen?"

Here are some of the things on my own "wish list" of how we'll know we're regarded as part of a team of professional religious leaders:

- * Religious educators will be listed along with clergy in the appropriate section of the UUA Directory.

- * If credentialing is offered, we'll include anti-oppression lenses to be sure people of color, people with apparent and hidden disabilities, and others who have experienced oppression in this field are at the decision making table.

- * The Service of the Religious Education Tradition, scheduled for 10:00 am on Sunday morning at General Assembly, attracts thousands of participants who sing "The Garden Song" as professional religious educators process and are recognized for their accomplishments. Religious educators join other GA participants in The Service of the Living Tradition on Sunday afternoon.

- * Religious educators enjoy a wealth of afford-

able, convenient continuing education opportunities to hone their professional skills in church leadership.

- * District field staff join with chapter representatives from the UU Ministers Association and LREDA to establish covenants of collegiality and support.

- * UU congregations will require and pay for professional insurance coverage for any religious professional, involved in parish, religious education or community based ministry, who does pastoral counseling.

- * Districts and the UUA will support a "DRE on loan" program to provide coverage for RE programs during paid sabbaticals and continuing education leave.

- * An increasing number of UU congregations will follow compensation guidelines for all professional staff.

- * Religious educators will be included routinely on the faculties of Leadership Schools, so that congregational leaders will observe a model of teamwork and collegiality in church leadership.

- * The new lapel pin recognizing professional religious educators will be sought and worn with pride

These are the visions I have as I work with Laurel

Amabile and other colleagues, with Starr King School for the Ministry and Meadville/Lombard Theological School, and with ministers and lay leaders to develop and offer continuing education resources for religious educators. The visions keep me going when the way seems hard, or when I meet resistance on the systems level.

If you are also interested in this part of the journey toward professionalism among religious educators, you know it won't all be smooth sailing, that the system will respond with both reinforcing and balancing loops, and that a long road lies ahead for someone who wants to be regarded as professional, and knows -- really knows -- that s/he doesn't want to be ordained. As religious educators, we must be more accountable to the system as a whole, more willing to look at the overall good, more capable of taking on responsibilities beyond an individual RE program.

I would like to encourage you to reflect on these materials, and decide for yourself what actions you're prepared to take to bring your own vision to life. I hope you will share your steps with someone else -- not the whole plan, but just the things you're willing to do in the next month, six months or year. Please consider joining hands with others on this wonderful, exciting, scary journey.

Appendix A: Personal Mastery

Here's the vision, the result in my life that I most deeply desire:

- Who is around you?
- Where are you?
- What does this result look, sound, smell, feel like?

In relation to this vision, answer any of these questions that are relevant.

- What qualities would you possess if you were exactly the kind of person you wanted to be?
- What would you like to own? What would you like to give away?
- Where would you like to live?
- What would you like your body to be like?
- What kinds of relationships would you like to have, at work, with friends, and with family?
- What would you like to learn?
- What's your vision of the society or community you live in?
- If your unique purpose in life were completely fulfilled, what would that purpose be?

Appendix B: List of Values

Achievement	Financial gain	Pleasure
Advancement (career)	Freedom	Power & authority
Adventure	Friendship	Privacy
Affection	Growth	Public service
Arts	Helping others	Purity
Challenging problems	Helping society	Quality of what I do
Change/variety	Honesty	Recognition
Closeness	Independence	Respect from others
Community	Influence on others	Religion
Competence	Inner harmony	Reputation
Competition	Integrity	Responsibility
Cooperation	Intellectual status	Security
Creativity	Involvement	Self-respect
Decisiveness	Job tranquility	Serenity
Democracy	Knowledge	Sophistication
Ecological awareness	Leadership	Stability
Economic security	Location	Status
Effectiveness	Loyalty	Supervising others
Efficiency	Meaningful work	Time
Ethical practice	Merit	Truth
Excellence	Money	Wealth
Excitement	Natural world	Wisdom
Expertise	Openness & honesty	Work under pressure
Fame	Order	Work with others
Family	Personal development	Work alone
Fast-paced work	Physical challenge	

Other:

Other:

Other:

Other:

Other:

Appendix C: Current Reality

Answer any of these questions as it relates to your personal vision. Please be prepared to share your answers with someone else.

- What is my current self-image?
- What do I own now? What's the real state of my tangible possessions?
- Where do I live now? Is this where I long to be?
- What is the state of my health? How fit am I? How do I feel about my body right now?
- How are my relationships going? What's my current state with regard to family, friends and relationships at work?
- How's my career going? How closely does my career path match my vision?
- What's the current reality regarding individual learning, travel, reading, or the other activities I love outside of work?
- What's the current state of the community in which I live? How does that match with my vision?
- What's the current reality of my life in terms of my deepest aspirations and purpose?

Appendix D: Moments of Awareness

What is happening right now?

You can break this down into parts, too:

- What am I doing right now?

- What am I feeling right now?

- What am I thinking right now?

What do I want right now?

What am I doing right now to prevent myself from getting what I want?

Appendix E: Mental Models

Please write any observations or conclusions you draw with regard to this observation:

LREDA membership has expanded from around 40 members in the 1970's to over 500 members today.

Appendix F: Systems Diagrams





