



Re-Visioning CUUPS

by Mary Gelfand, President

I became a Unitarian Universalist in 1988, the same year that CUUPS was officially recognized as an independent affiliate of the Unitarian Universalist Association. By that time, a group of pagans had been meeting at my local church for a couple of years. Indeed, the first service I ever attended at First UU of New Orleans was a Samhain service, run by the CUUPS group. So, I never knew Unitarian Universalism in the pre-CUUPS era, and have never been involved in a congregation where I was reluctant to reveal my spiritual path. I suspect that many of you have also become UUs in the last 15 years. I feel it would be valuable, therefore, to share with you a thumbnail sketch of the history of our illustrious group, before going on to consider the future of CUUPS.

The organization we know as CUUPS, the Covenant of Unitarian Universalist Pagans, grew out of the Women and Religion Resolution passed by the UUA General Assembly in 1977. This was in response to a growing feminist awareness that much of the imagery of women in this liberal denomination was actually rather illiberal, a heritage of previously unexamined patriarchal norms. The Women and Religion Resolution mandated an examination of those norms. At this point, no one had put "UU" and "Pagan" together as a serious conjunction. This liturgical reform was undertaken by groups consisting largely of liberal Christians and religious Humanists.

The earliest known organized UU Pagan worship was at the UU Continental Feminist Theology Convocation, held in East Lansing, Michigan in 1980. This event was sponsored by the Continental Women and Religion Committee, a group formed to address the 1977 resolution. At this Convocation, the first Water Communion, now a standard ingathering service in many UU churches, was celebrated.

The first known UU Pagan organizing effort was at the 1985 General Assembly in Atlanta. UUs interested in Goddess, Paganism or ancient religions gathered and envisioned the organization which became The Covenant of Unitarian Universalist Pagans. In 1987, a statement of purpose and by-laws were adopted. These were presented to General Assembly in 1988 and CUUPS became an official independent affiliate of the UUA.

In 1993, UU Paganism achieved a major accomplishment with the inclusion of significant earth-centered and Goddess imaged content in the denomination's new hymnal, "Singing the Living Tradition."

In 1995, after a lengthy campaign at successive General Assemblies, earth-centered religion became one of the formally recognized sources of our living tradition with the adoption of the Sixth Source: "Spiritual teachings of earth-centered traditions which celebrate the sacred circle of life and instruct us to live in harmony with the rhythms of nature."

CUUPS was incorporated as a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization in Ohio in 1997. As a side note, we are incorporated, and must maintain a mail box, in Ohio because Ohio allows us to keep our membership lists confidential. Our by-laws were revised in 1998, making necessary modifications in our governing structure. In 1999 we published our first edition of Sacred Cosmos, our scholarly journal dedicated to earth-centered spiritual traditions.

Today there are official CUUPS chapters in over 80 UU churches across the country, and at least ten more in formation. There are over 500 individual members throughout the denomination. This very brief history of CUUPS was originally written by David Burwasser and edited by Jerrie Hildebrand. Their longer and more lyrical version of our history is available on the CUUPS website, under history.

For an organization which has only been around for 17 years, CUUPS has accomplished a great deal. From the Sixth Source to the wonderful songs and readings in the hymnal, we have made our mark on the UUA. We have challenged our fellow UUs to see spirituality in a different way, and though we may not have achieved universal acceptance we would like, we have at least moved a few steps closer. During the last 10 years, the nature of CUUPS has also changed. Originally an organization largely made up of individual members, the majority of CUUPS members are now involved in small pagan groups at their local churches.

During the last 18 months, CUUPS has been engaged in a process of exploring what happens next. Having achieved most of our original goals, the organization needed to either conclude that it no longer served a purpose as an independent affiliate of the UUA, or to determine where to place its energies for the next 10 years. Some would argue that the mere existence of the Sixth Source means that we have outlived our usefulness. If earth-centered spiritual traditions are formally recognized as a source of our living tradition, what need is there for an organization to continue to promote awareness and acceptance of that tradition within the UUA? Others argue that we have just laid the necessary groundwork for our tasks, and that it is now time to turn attention to a different set of problems and issues.

Re-Visioning is the process the board set up to help us determine our future path. Our goal was to collect information from as many individual members and chapters as possible in answering this question. Thus we conducted a workshop at the Boston General Assembly on the future of CUUPS. Individual membership questionnaires were mailed in August with the ballots, and chapter questionnaires were mailed in October with the Convocation announcements. Questionnaires were also made available on the CUUPS website. Discussions Re-Visioning the future of CUUPS were also conducted at our recent Convocation.

Having processed all the questionnaires (to date, over 120 from individuals and over 10 from chapters), I can say with some certainty that the membership does not feel that this organization has outlived its usefulness. Although many individuals and chapters report great acceptance and integration within their home congregations, the majority do not. Indeed, if there is a single burning issue that I distilled from the questionnaires, it is: "How can we increase acceptance and understanding in our home congregations?"

We had some wonderful discussions at Convo, and I have enjoyed reading the questionnaires. From them, and from the discussions at GA last year and at our recent Convo, we have put together a preliminary list of goals and tasks I believe CUUPS needs to undertake. These are presented in outline form below.

I invite and urge all readers to study these goals and tasks and discuss them with your home chapter, if you have one. These will be massaged by the board, and at our annual meeting at this year's General Assembly at Long Beach, CA. We continue to invite comments and suggestions. Please write to me directly at MaryCUUPS@aol.com. A final version of our Re-Visioned Goals and Tasks will be presented to the membership for a vote along with our ballot to elect new board members late this summer.

Once our Re-Visioned Goals and Tasks have the approval of the membership, we will begin the official process of implementing them (although some tasks are already being implemented). At this stage of the process, we will need more volunteers from the membership to help make our goals a reality. If you would like to be involved in taking CUUPS to its next stage of growth and development, please let me know. More specific requests for volunteers, such as, we need some people to field test new RE materials or to gather chapter news for the newsletter, will be posted as needs are identified.

I'd like to thank everyone who involved themselves in this process. I have loved every conversation I've had with people about the future of CUUPS, and have learned a great deal about the nature of this organization and our destiny. Being a witch, I believe that we have the power to make our visions manifest in this world. Please lend your energy to this ongoing effort.

GOALS AND TAKS FOR A RE-VISIONED CUUPS

Planting and Growing Chapters

Review and streamline process by which new groups become chapters

- start-up costs
- mentoring program to pair experienced chapters with newly forming chapters
- packet of printed materials to be sent to groups wanting to form chapters
- fully functioning chapter/membership office
- formal training in leadership
- formal training in ritual development

- well developed databank of best practices for chapters to draw upon, including bylaws, statements of purpose, covenants of conduct, fund-raising ideas, organizational strategies, etc.
- databank of worst practices (things to avoid)
- revise The Well Grounded CUUPS Chapter
- rich and varied range of religious education materials for use in chapters
- develop pamphlet on how to start a chapter

Provide support services to existing chapters

- fully functioning chapter/membership office
- chapter dues to be renewed at Samhain each year
- attractive certificate to chapter each year when dues paid
- formal training in leadership
- formal training in ritual development
- well developed databank of best practices for chapters to draw upon, including bylaws, statements of purpose, covenants of conduct, fund-raising ideas, organizational strategies, etc.
- databank of worst practices (things to avoid)
- revise The Well Grounded CUUPS Chapter
- rich and varied range of religious education materials for use in chapters
- regional networking among chapters, leading to regional events
 - take advantage of existing district events and offer programming
- develop mechanism for mediation of problems related to chapters and congregations and among chapter members, as requested

Vision of a CUUPS chapter in right relationship with its sponsoring congregation --well-integrated and accepted in larger congregation

- individual members of chapter active in larger congregation
- chapter is a resource for church, providing workers for fundraising events, leading worship services, providing teachers and curricula for both adult and children's RE, running events and special projects,
- chapter makes ritual celebrations and worship services welcoming to UUs
- chapter educates congregation through articles in the newsletter, discussion groups, movies nights, classes, etc.
- chapter reaches out to the congregation
- chapter understands and accepts congregational policies regarding use of space, alcohol, child care, etc.
- chapter works in harmony with congregational leadership
- chapter keeps leadership and minister informed of CUUPS plans, esp those that involve outreach to the larger community

Education

Educational materials for adults

- introductory
- Exploring Paganism
- Paganism 101
- deeper work
- book discussion groups with activities (12 Wild Swans, new Higginbotham book, Pagans & Christians, Triumph of the Moon)
- online work with Diana's Grove or Cherry Hill?
- Develop materials appropriate to support the growth of experienced CUUPS members
- materials for solitary pagans (work with Church of the Larger Fellowship)

Educational materials for children & youth

- Children
- Circle Round
- Rainbow Children program
- Hogwarts curriculum
- Develop or locate additional resources
- Youth

strong need for programming here
look at Teen Witch to determine if appropriate
Hogwarts curriculum
Develop or locate additional resources

Ritual Resources, available on website and hopefully in print

- sample Sunday worship services on basic pagan topics
 - sample Sunday worship services connecting pagan beliefs with UU beliefs
 - complete Wheel of the Year and Rites of Passage rituals
 - earth-centered books on meditation and prayer, calls, castings, and invocations
- maybe network with pagan UU clergy on this topic

Communicating with Members and Other UUs

- newsletter!
 - yearly Convo, ideally twice a year, once on each coast
 - regional events, perhaps networking with district activities and SUUSI, etc.
 - speakers bureau
 - CUUPS programs at one meeting in each district yearly
 - update and expand website
 - place article/s in UU World
 - place article on newly Re-Visioned CUUPS in district newsletters and pagan
 - do we want to be issuing press releases on relevant topics, like other pagan
 - Sacred Cosmos?
 - networking with pagan UU ministers and ministerial students
- provide support to them
use them as resource for some of our programs

journals
organizations? Does the UUA

Community & Outreach

- Sacred Cosmos?
- make CUUPS published materials available to larger community
- support chapters in development of community service projects (Earth Day)
- consider do we want to become involved in Pagan Pride Day?
- develop data bank of community service options chapters might pursue
- improve General Assembly (GA) programming, and plan ahead

CUUPS, Inc.

- continue improving membership and chapter registration work
- leadership training for board
- fund-raising!
- develop strong committee structure to accomplish goals
- improve networking with pagan UU ministers
- develop strategies to provide services described above
- develop strategies to increase membership, both chapter and individual
- network with other spiritual subgroups of the UUA
- network with other pagan groups with similar goals around the country