

Report to the Board on the January 2008 General Assembly Planning Committee (GAPC) Meeting

The GAPC met January 10-13, 2008 in Salt Lake City, the site of the 2009 General Assembly (GA). The meeting began with an update from Moderator Gini Courier. Topics discussed with Gini included issues related to the Fort Lauderdale meeting site, Appreciative Inquiry, preparation of GA 2008 worship leaders, and leadership of the Right Relations Team. Also, as a result of the conversation with Gini, the GAPC decided to postpone revising its mission statement until after the Board of Trustees has framed its global ends. On Friday, two ministers from the area and their church administrators joined the GAPC for lunch. Lew Phinney, Mountain Desert District coordinator for GA 2009, joined the GAPC on Friday and Saturday. President Bill Sinkford spoke with the GAPC via conference call on Saturday.

GA 2008 Meeting Site. The GAPC voted to recommend to the Board of Trustees that GA 2008 be held in Fort Lauderdale, Florida as planned. The GAPC acknowledged the seriousness of concerns about civil liberties and potential for racial profiling, noting that the situation is symptomatic of our times and less than ideal. The GAPC discussed various scenarios and agreed that, although Fort Lauderdale may not be an ideal location, a variety of factors support remaining with this site. UUA bylaws do not permit the cancellation of GA. Finding another site would require site visits and the likelihood of identifying an alternative city that could accommodate our meeting at this late date is questionable. Obtaining the use of a convention center in another venue at no cost as is the case in Fort Lauderdale is unlikely. Moreover, costs associated with cancellation would be high, e.g., minimum cancellation costs for Fort Lauderdale hotels would be \$800,000, hotel room costs at an alternative site would be considerably higher. The costs of moving to another city would result in an estimated \$200 increase in GA registration fees. In addition, the recruiting and organization of a volunteer committee requires at least a year's lead time. Fort Lauderdale has positive features, including greater economic accessibility than other recent GA sites, diversity, and a gay-friendly community. Fort Lauderdale's reliance on tourism requires hospitality to diverse populations. The Broward County Sheriff's department is working in partnership with the UUA to make our experience in Fort Lauderdale a positive one and welcomes the presence of UU chaplains or other support at security checkpoints. All sheriff department staff has undergone diversity training.

The GAPC also voted to hold all plenary hall events for GA 2008 at the convention hall as planned and not to provide a second venue. Providing a satellite venue would require not only significant funding for rental, transportation, and communication feed but also substantial additional human resources, including volunteers, staff, presence of board members, and others to provide opportunity for equal participation.

The GAPC in partnership with other UU decision makers will address concerns about the GA 2008 location through programming and chaplaincy. Programming will address the erosion of civil liberties and the treatment of our undocumented neighbors. The Moderator will recruit a team leader to facilitate opportunities for reflection using

appreciative inquiry following each of these sessions. The GAPC will identify a lead chaplain to recruit, train, schedule, and be available to a team of welcoming “ambassadors.” The ambassadors will be stationed at security checkpoints to both greet attendees as they enter the gates and call for intervention if difficulties arise. Candidates for the ambassador role must have conflict management skills and be physically able to tolerate standing outside in the Florida summer heat. Trustees with these qualifications may wish to volunteer to assist with this task. A communications plan with clear lines of authority will be developed.

The GAPC will enhance the Frequently Asked Questions on its website with facts about Fort Lauderdale and its amenities. Following the meeting of the Board of Trustees, the GAPC will modify the current FAQs to incorporate questions and comments that emerge.

GA Themes. The GAPC voted to institute uniform branding for GA, i.e., General Assembly: A Meeting of Congregations, rather than identify an annual theme.

Support for Public Witness. The GAPC voted to deny a request from the Director for Congregational Advocacy and Witness for \$1,500 to cover costs associated with the public witness event scheduled for Friday, June 27 in Fort Lauderdale across from City Hall. However, the GAPC did vote to provide transportation to and from the site. The event, which is called Valuing All Families—An Interfaith Community Witness, will focus on BGLT and immigrant families, calling for adoption of family-friendly policies. Florida remains the last state to have a complete ban on gay adoption and the upcoming November election will include a ballot initiative to outlaw same sex marriage. In addition, unjust immigration laws continue to separate immigrant parents from their children.

GAPC participation in 2009 elections. The GAPC voted to refrain from endorsing, supporting, or contributing to any candidates for UUA elected office until after the end of the 2008 GA. The chair of the GAPC will remain neutral throughout the election process. Following the 2008 GA, other GAPC members are welcome to participate in UUA election processes. They may endorse and support candidates and make financial contributions. However, they may not wear campaign buttons or engage in electioneering at GA (except for their own election) or when acting in an official capacity for the GAPC.

GA Scholarships and Subsidies. The GAPC expressed concern about the paucity of applications for scholarships to GA and will seek to increase visibility by asking district presidents and district staff to contact congregations to promote this opportunity for support for attendance at GA. In its conversation with President Sinkford, the GAPC asked for suggestions on publicizing the scholarships. Also, since there is no provision for congregation presidents’ subsidy in the 2009 GA budget, the GAPC asked President Sinkford for his thoughts about financial incentives for the participation of congregation leaders.

Site for GA 2012. The GAPC voted to recommend Phoenix as the site for GA 2012. The site offers many attractive features. Green technology and building practices have been incorporated throughout the entire redeveloped area downtown. The new convention center is committed to ensuring accessibility, including hearing devices in all meeting rooms and plenary halls. The center features comprehensive recycling, solar-powered air conditioning, and video signs outside each meeting room to reduce the need for paper signs. Hotels are affordable and have an ample supply of accessible rooms. Countless modifications have been made to redirect the heat from the street and canopies over walkways between hotels and the convention center provide shade for pedestrians.

Guidelines for Accessibility Services at GA. The GAPC voted to provide accessibility services within the convention center and for GA-sponsored events at other venues. Individuals requiring such support at other sites, e.g., airports or hotels, will need to make their own arrangements since these services exceed what the GAPC can realistically offer. A letter regarding this policy will be sent to those who have required services in the past and information will appear in all printed materials. The GAPC will be in contact with the Journey Toward Wholeness Transformation Committee and also requests policy guidance from the Board of Trustees regarding accessibility service provision at national meetings.

Authors' Signing Booth. Beacon Press requested that the GAPC provide an authors' book signing booth in the exhibit hall. The GAPC voted to provide a booth to be shared with the UUA bookstore. Beacon Press and the bookstore will be asked to agree upon usage with time left open for use by other exhibitors' authors, if requested.

Trustees' Requests for Space. At GA 2006 the Board of Trustees staffed a table in the exhibit hall to increase Board visibility. If the Board wishes to reserve a table for GA 2008 or reserve a room in the convention center, the deadline for both requests is January 31.

Greening. Jan Sneegas, Director of General Assembly and Conference Services, has been appointed to the Green Meetings Industries Council board. Our catering service in Portland diverted 70% of refuse from the landfill and Carbon Fund contributions have increased significantly. Greening standards in Fort Lauderdale will be standard, not meeting the excellence experienced in Portland.

AR/AO/MC. GAPC member Denise Hall shared drafts of statements on multiculturalism and counter-oppression to guide the GAPC in its work. The statements will be edited and posted on the GAPC website.

Other items of interest:

- Draft program text, e.g., workshop descriptions, will be sent to contacts for editing in early March. March 15 is the deadline for changes.

- The reduction in the number of independent affiliates resulted in a flood of applications for GAPC-sponsored program slots. The GAPC is examining ways to streamline the process.
- The GAPC is exploring the possibility of integrating UU University into GA.

Respectfully submitted by Eva Marx, Board Liaison, January 14, 2008