

Report to the Board on the April 2009 General Assembly Planning Committee (GAPC) Meeting

The GAPC met April 2-5, 2009 in Salt Lake City, the site of the 2009 General Assembly.

Attendance. As of early April registration for GA was somewhat lower than it was for Fort Worth at this time of year but not as low as it was last year at this time. Projecting registration before the end of April is difficult because many people register later in the month to avoid the May 1 fee increase. The GAPC budget has been cut by \$150,000; there could still be a shortfall if registration falls below 3,600 full-time registrants. Trustees can be helpful by promoting GA attendance in their districts through personal invitations, newsletters, annual meetings, and other communication strategies. The full program can be viewed online at the GAPC website and, of course, with a presidential election in the works, this will be an exciting year to be at GA.

Greening 2009. Meeting Strategies, Inc., the company that manages greening at GA, is working with Salt Lake City hotels, encouraging them to excel by comparing their efforts with those of their competitors. The back cover of the GA program will focus on greening. GA volunteers will be trained to answer recycling questions. Efforts to reduce paper distribution continue—orders of service will be printed only for the Service of the Living Tradition and the Sunday morning worship service. Candidates and others are being asked to limit handouts. Programs are being mailed only to those who request them and once again registrants have the option of paying toward carbon offset.

Meeting with the Moderator. The Moderator met with the GAPC via phone. She was attending a meeting of legislative ministries who suggested having opportunities to meet by congressional districts at GA. There was a discussion of adjusting the timing of the end of Plenary #3 to leave adequate time for attendees to get to the Public Witness event scheduled after the plenary. It was suggested that UUA leadership lead the way to the Public Witness site. The theme will be Stand on the Side of Love with Immigrant Families. The region's Catholic bishop will participate in this interfaith event.

Youth. The GAPC had a productive, collaborative meeting with Youth Caucus staff. The youth requested a safe space during UU University (UUU) for those youth who choose not to participate. The youth and the GAPC agreed to send observers to each UUU track and will partner to share their findings. The youth also expressed concern about what they had been hearing about the possibility of fewer GAs, which they described as one of the few opportunities for UU youth, young adults, young people of color, and LGBTQ youth to gather and to meet with others like themselves. "How else," they asked, "can those who are not in the majority, especially in their home congregations, find support?" They asked how time can be made for all voices to be respected and heard and not tokenized. They asked how the 2008 Youth and Young Adult Resolutions requesting accountability from congregations, districts, and the association would be honored at GA and what the reporting mechanism would be. They asked how adults could be encouraged to participate into youth programming. They recognize that efforts are being made to

integrate youth and young adults into the UUA structure but do not just want to be “folded in”; they want a role in creating the structure—to be co-creators.

In its debrief the GAPC discussed how they could help to market youth programming as programming for everyone—youth, young adults, and adults working together.

Evening activities. Allies for Racial Equity (ARE) is sponsoring films on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday nights. On Friday night there will be a “Prom For All,” which will welcome the local LGBT community. There will be no charge for admission but evidence of GA registration or a ticket will be required for admission. Tickets will be distributed by local congregations, community organizations, and Interweave.

Ware Lecture 2010. President Sinkford will consult with the presidential candidates before inviting a speaker for the 2010 Ware Lecture. The GAPC plans to work with the new president to identify a speaker for 2011.

UU University. In a conference call with Harlan Limpert, agreement was reached that the GA evaluation would include general questions about participants’ response to track programming. UU University organizers will send out a more detailed evaluation to participants at a later date. In early April, registration for the track programming was 28% for the theological track and ranged from 11% – 17% for the other five of the tracks. Of the 917 registrants who expressed a preference, 43% have not opted for a track.

Collection during plenary. At its January 2009 meeting the Board of Trustees voted to request that the General Assembly Planning Committee authorize a collection in plenary at General Assembly 2009 to support the Association’s work on marriage equality, with half the funds raised going to support advocacy work and half designated to the President’s Freedom to Marry Fund for grants to congregations and districts in support of marriage equality. The administration asked the GAPC to substitute a collection in plenary at General Assembly 2009 for the Bill Sinkford Fund to support the development of ministers of color. The GAPC referred the request to the Board of Trustees.

Visuals. This year a variety of slide shows will enhance pre-plenary times. Topics these slides will feature include a celebration of Bill Sinkford’s tenure and his trip to Africa, track programming-related questions and answers, election information with questions and answers, candidates’ pictures, the service project, and, following the Service of the Living Tradition, a memorial slide show.

Service Project. The GAPC met with the director of this year’s service project, the Utah Pride Center (a.k.a., The Gay & Lesbian Community Center of Utah) (<http://utahpridecenter.org/>). This non-profit organization, which will receive the collection from Sunday morning worship service, provides advocacy, programs, services, special events, and a safe meeting space for the LGBTQ community in Utah. The 2009 GA service project will support cultural competency training for caregivers and service providers working with out-of-home and homeless LGBTQ youth in the child welfare system. A 2008 survey found that 50% of Utah’s homeless youth identified as LGTBG

and 75% reported having been in out-of-home placement. Utah's support of Proposition 8 in California and the legislative denial in the 2009 session of all bills to promote civil rights for gays and lesbians demonstrate a culture that is unsupportive of gays and lesbians. Our support during the 2009 GA will send a message to LGBTQ youth and adults in Utah that religious people can and will embrace and validate them.

Fifth Principle Task Force. The GAPC responded to a request from the Fifth Principle Task Force to provide feedback on a draft of the proposal the task force will bring to the Board of Trustees. The GAPC also commented on the Board's values and strategic goals.

Site selection. Louisville, Kentucky, the proposed site for GA 2013, is described in the board packet and requires board approval. The GAPC has been invited to meet in Providence, Rhode Island in September 2009 to consider the city as a potential site for 2014. With a proposal for biennial GAs under consideration and the board's move toward policy governance, the GAPC is unclear about how far to proceed with site selection.

Election. Beth McGregor and Paul Rickter have been communicating about preparations for the election scheduled for GA. A ballot scanning machine test was successful. Voters will need to be registered manually, which will require staffing multiple stations.

Recording. At the 2009 GA Content Management Corporation (CMC) will audio record all workshops except for UU University and Plenary Hall events. Attendees will be able to purchase MP3 downloads in addition to CDs. A complete set of GA workshops will be \$295, down from \$1,599! Audio recordings will also be offered in DVD format, which holds more on a disc. The price for these is available only for pre-GA orders. Presenters have all been asked to grant permission to CMC to record their speeches for eventual sale and distribution on behalf of the UUA. Presenters may request a complimentary audiocassette or CD of their presentation. The UUA has also reserved the right to video and audiotape the Ware lecture, which may be made available via the World Wide Web, and sold to attendees and others.

Board role at GA. The Board room will be 150 D&E in the Convention Center. The GAPC would appreciate Board members acting as observers at the track programming sessions and providing feedback to the GAPC. They also hope that some Board members will plan to attend and be visible at the Friday night "Prom For All." Board members can be a non-anxious presence at the election and post-election worship, and are invited to once again welcome Ware Lecture attendees on Saturday night. The GAPC also requested that two Board members volunteer to assist with escorting dignitaries out of plenary-type sessions to avoid the chaos that accompanied Van Jones' exit in 2008.

Emerging issues. Budgetary issues loom large. Much depends on the 2009 registration; the GAPC would prefer not to increase registration fees in 2010 but cannot sustain another deficit year. Possible cost-cutting measures include not meeting in January, discontinuing program subsidies, and restructuring volunteer activities. A celebration of the Margaret Fuller Bicentennial will be incorporated into the 2010 GA. The 2011 GA, which marks the 50th anniversary of the UUA, will be held in Charlotte, an area that does not have special geographic appeal and will require intensive marketing and strong programming. The GAPC is seeking to strengthen its relationship with host districts by communicating more effectively with local clergy and lay leadership and drawing more heavily on local talent for marketing and music. Finally, and importantly, the GAPC is unclear about the presidential candidates' vision for relating to the GAPC, including whether the General Assembly Mission and Partnership (GAMAP), a collaboration of board, GAPC, and administration, will continue.

Respectfully submitted,
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Trustee, Ballou Channing District