

Report to the UUA Board on the Open Space process at GA 2007

At General Assembly in Portland, all participants, delegates and non-delegates, had the opportunity to participate in an Open Space process. According to organizational development specialists Barbara Benedict Bunker and Billie Alban, Open Space [Technology] is one of a series of large-group interventions in which a critical mass of people participates in:

- Understanding the need for change
- Analyzing the current reality and deciding what needs to change
- Generating ideas about how to change existing processes
- Implementing and supporting change and making it work¹

In the case of General Assembly, the critical change was to present an opportunity and a structured process by which participants could let the UUA Board know what they thought the Board should pay attention to in order to strengthen our faith community. As the Board continues its exploration of policy governance, they requested input from GA attendees about the Ends statements they are creating. When UUA committees, commissions and task groups have requested input from delegates, member congregations and attendees, the results have been mixed. Sometimes a significant number of responses have been provided, and sometimes very few responses have come in. The use of Open Space [Technology] made use of the fact that more than 5,500 people registered for General Assembly in Portland, and were in one place at one time when they could take advantage of a process by which they could let Board members know what they thought.

Publicity about Open Space [Technology] was sent to all member congregations and GA attendees, and publicized in the UU World. Links were created so that UU bloggers could discuss the Open Space process during GA. A letter of invitation to participate in OST was issued by Moderator Gini Courter and project director Dr. Helen Bishop.

Facilitators were recruited by contacting such groups as the UU Ministers Association, the Society for Community Ministries, the Liberal Religious Educators Association, the UU Musicians Network, the Association of UU Administrators, DRUUMM, Allies for Racial Equity, the Church of the Larger Fellowship, the Partner Church Council, Interweave, C*UUYAN, the UU Christian Fellowship, the

¹ Bunker, Barbara Benedict, and Alban, Billie (1997). Large Group Interventions: Engaging the Whole System for Rapid Change. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. ISBN 0-78790-324-8. xvi.

UU Peace Fellowship, UU Ministry for Earth, and UUA district and headquarter staff. With the support of the GA Planning Committee, twenty-four facilitators were trained before GA, and a database manager was recruited to manage the flow of data from OST sessions to plenary sessions.

After the GA space was opened during plenary by Dr. Bishop, more than 1,100 people attended the first OST sessions, in which people were invited to volunteer to facilitate breakout sessions on issues they cared about. A total of 120 sessions were coordinated and publicized; 978 people attended one or more of these sessions, resulting in suggestions about programs and issues that GA attendees wanted to bring to the attention of the UUA Board. These suggestions are included in this packet.

In a second round of convergence sessions, the trained facilitators led participants in a process of creating statements related to the mission of our faith community, rather than to programs and issues. These statements were made available to everyone attending GA, and all participants had the opportunity to make statements of support during a plenary session. Finally, GA delegates used a multi-voting process to prioritize these statements. Each delegate had a total of five votes to cast on a Scantron sheet, and assistance in completing the Scantron form was available to anyone requesting it. The ballots were scanned in Boston, and the prioritized results are included at the end of this report.

For the first time, participants at a General Assembly were able to let the UUA Board know directly how they thought the Board's work affected the mission of the Association. By their participation, they also signaled their willingness to take part in a process with which most were not familiar, to provide guidance to the Board, and to learn first-hand about a strategic planning process that could be of use to their congregations, districts, and organizations.

As one person noted on his/her GA evaluation, the real value of the use of OST lies in the attention the Board pays to the results. We hope both the process and the prioritized outcomes will be of significant interest to the hard-working members of the UUA Board.

Respectfully submitted,
Dr. Helen Bishop
Project director for Open Space [Technology]

| Statement | Votes | % |
|--|-------|------|
| Statement #12, "Support, integrate, and retain youth and young adults to keep our congregations vibrant and growing." | 773 | 12.4 |
| Statement #11, "Build and grow anti-oppressive anti-racist faith community that embraces and is accountable to marginalized people." | 625 | 10.0 |
| Statement #8, "To move from domination to a new paradigm of partnership and sustainable Earth community." | 420 | 6.8 |
| Statement #22, "To create an engaging, vibrant community of all ages that will grow and thrive to transform the self, the faith, and the world." | 372 | 6.0 |
| Statement #13, "Change our relationship with the Earth from one of exploitation to one of sustainability." | 369 | 5.9 |
| Statement #20, "Empowering us to act courageously, transforming the world into a just, peaceful, non-oppressive community." | 310 | 5.0 |
| Statement #14, "We promote, teach, and practice right relations as essential and fundamental to our faith." | 275 | 4.4 |
| Statement #4, "Endow liberal religious scholarship, enabling globally relevant spirit and justice centered lay and professional ministries." | 238 | 3.8 |
| Statement #30, "To grow inclusive communities of faith which transform people's lives and the larger world." | 231 | 3.7 |
| Statement #1, "To promote and support spiritual transformation of individuals and communities so as to serve justice." | 227 | 3.6 |
| Statement #24, "To enable congregations to live lives of meaning and purpose through experiencing the sacred, spiritual practice and service." | 215 | 3.5 |
| Statement #16, "Covenant to deepen our spiritual practice, explicitly connecting our faith with action." | 193 | 3.1 |
| Statement #19, "As UUs we must now lead the turn from our current Empire Culture to Earth Community." | 190 | 3.1 |
| Statement #17, "Create a culture of peace and justice to support and sustain the web of life." | 172 | 2.8 |

| Statement | Votes | % |
|--|-------|-----|
| Statement #9, "Connecting to the sacred, weave multi-cultural/intergenerational partnership, transforming the earth community through love and justice." | 165 | 2.7 |
| Statement #5, "UUs proclaim a call for fearless commitment to love, truth-seeking, peace and justice." | 161 | 2.6 |
| Statement #29, "To create an inclusive and multicultural spiritual community that acts to transform lives through loving relationships." | 142 | 2.3 |
| Statement #7, "To promote UU values and engage the world to hasten the transformation to Earth community." | 136 | 2.2 |
| Statement #28, "Infuse congregations with a spirit of love, hope, and justice, transforming lives to form beloved community." | 131 | 2.1 |
| Statement #23, "The denomination must support, empower, hear, and minister to and with its children and youth." | 131 | 2.1 |
| Statement #10, "To foster networks of spiritual growth among UUs through congregational life and non-congregational organizations." | 129 | 2.1 |
| Statement #26, "Thoughtfully and openly connect all in interdependent community through transformative vision of peace, justice, compassion." | 113 | 1.8 |
| Statement #2, "To imagine and realize a just global earth community of all beings." | 102 | 1.6 |
| Statement #27, "To effect change, we must affirm and recognize individuals of divergent experiences by listening respectfully." | 90 | 1.4 |
| Statement #18, "Our religious communities become truly intergenerational as faith development is recognized as a lifelong task." | 77 | 1.2 |
| Statement #6, "Our commitment as a spiritual community is to provide pathways to personal transformation." | 62 | 1.0 |
| Statement #21, "Transforming the world through courageous love, cooperative action, and humble power." | 53 | 0.9 |

| Statement | Votes | % |
|--|-------|-----|
| Statement #3, "To bring unity out of the many with mind-fullness and respect by actively promoting compassionate communication." | 50 | 0.8 |
| Statement #15, "Recognize that youth are the lifeblood to the continuing vitality of our faith and community." | 50 | 0.8 |
| Statement #25, "We will transform lives and communities by practicing listening and being open to what's now." | 19 | 0.3 |