

General Assembly Site Team Recommendation for 2017 General Assembly

A site visit for GA 2017, was conducted by Debra Boyd (Planning Committee Co-Vice Chair), Jan Sneegas (Director, General Assembly and Conference Services), and Don Plante (GA Program Planner). We received proposals from Austin, Texas, New Orleans, Louisiana, and Nashville, Tennessee. **The Site Team recommends the 2017 General Assembly be held in New Orleans, Louisiana.**

We prioritized economic accessibility based on the Association and the Planning Committee's commitment to diversity and increasing engagement in the democratic process. Room rates are critical, as our delegates pay their own lodging. The proposal from Nashville was not competitive. Austin has many positive attributes, but low hotel rates are not among them. New Orleans presented the best opportunity to attend for delegates and attendees from a wider variety of means.

And while we have held GA three times in Texas (Fort Worth, 1994, 2005, and Dallas in 1972), we have never met in Louisiana.

New Orleans, Louisiana

New Orleans is a major United States port on the Gulf Coast and the largest city and metropolitan area in the state of Louisiana. Steeped in a history of influences from Europe, the Caribbean, and Africa, it is one of America's most culturally and historically-rich destinations. It is a city known for its music, food, architecture, and festivals. The average high temperature in June is 89 degrees and the average low is 71.

New Orleans is also known as a place of re-birth following the devastation of Katrina in 2005. Many Unitarian Universalists have contributed time and funds in the effort to rebuild both the city and the congregations in the area. With the strengthening of the Center for Ethical Living and Social Justice through additional funding by Veatch and currently housed in the First Unitarian Universalist Congregation, we believe that we will be able to integrate an exploration of our impact in the city and provide UUs from all over the nation an opportunity to see the results of their prior actions. In addition, the Center may be able to help with economically accessible housing during General Assembly.

By going to New Orleans, we can both celebrate our successes and recommit to the relationships that have been forged with this community.

Travel

The Louis Armstrong International Airport is located in Kenner, 11 miles northwest of downtown New Orleans. Air service is provided by the major carriers (US Airways, United, Delta, Continental, American etc.) as well as Jet Blue, and Southwest Airlines. A cab ride costs \$33.00 from the airport to the Central Business District for one person and \$14.00 (per passenger) for three or more passengers.

Convention Center

The Ernest N. Morial Convention Center is enormous. We would be occupying roughly a third of the Center. The Center is one of the most technologically powerful convention centers in the country. Louisiana is a right to work state. Sustainability is not currently a primary concern of the center, however, US Green Building Council is holding their annual meeting in there in 2014. Estimated rental is on the order of \$99,000. The New Orleans Convention and Visitors Bureau has arranged a \$9.00 per room night rebate with participating hotels to offset convention center rental to between \$40,000 and \$50,000.

Housing

There are abundant rooms available in the convention area (our peak is usually between 1500 and 1700). **The city is guaranteeing room rates for 2017 ranging from \$149** (Springhill Suites) **to \$164** at the Marriott Hotel, directly across the street from the Convention Center. Rates include Passkey fees (housing booking software).

We toured the following hotels:

- Hilton New Orleans Riverside – Our largest block (400 rooms) and a possible site for the UUMA Professional Days.
- Marriott Convention Center
- Hampton Inn & Suites
- Embassy Suites New Orleans Convention
- Residence Inn by Marriott
- Hilton Garden Inn
- Hyatt Place Convention Center
- Wyndham Riverfront New Orleans

Accessibility

The area is relatively flat. Elevators in the convention center are small as is typical, holding only two or three scooters at a time. Lifts and ramping are available for staging in the convention center. Historical areas of the city could present challenges (e.g., the French Quarter).

Food

While New Orleans is known for Cajun and Creole cuisine, and for that matter, some of the best food in the world, it does not seem to be particularly accommodating for vegetarian and vegan diets. There are lots of restaurants within walking distance of the Center. The French Quarter is about a ten minute walk.

UU Support

We met with ministers Rev. Paul R. Beedle, Rev. Jim VanderWeele, Rev. Melanie Morel-Ensminger and Rev. Deanna Vandiver. Bart Frost, Planning Committee Chair and resident of New Orleans was also present. While small in number (roughly 250 congregants), they seem eager to have General Assembly in New Orleans.

Summary

Advantages of New Orleans

- Economically accessible with reasonable hotel rates
- Close airport with a variety of transportation options including economic carriers
- Large convention center
- Professional staff at the Convention and Visitors Bureau
- Adequate number of hotel rooms within walking distance
- Culturally diverse
- First time meeting in Louisiana
- Environmental impact and education of New Orleans by our presence

Disadvantages of New Orleans

- Seriously limited vegan and vegetarian options
- Small number of congregations and congregants to support GA
- Convention center that has not been addressing environmental concerns
- High number of rooms that will be available outside our block may make it difficult for us to fulfill our contracts
- The hotel with our largest block will be farther away from the convention center