

## A Summary History of the Unitarian Universalist Association Bylaws Renewal December 2020 to June 2024.

### December 2020 - June 2021

Board members: Barbara de Leeuw convener, Rev. Greg Boyd, Kathy Burek, Rev. Suzanne Fast, Lucia Santini Fields, Rev. Patrick McLaughlin, Rev Tom Schade, Bill Young, Carey McDonald, Executive Vice President, President Rev. Dr. Susan Frederick Gray (*ex officio*)

The group (nicknamed “Deep Divers\*”) began by reviewing the basic elements typically found in not-for-profit bylaws. We then envisioned the religious and social impact of a future Unitarian Universalist Association with adaptive, flexible bylaws as its foundation.

These early discussions wandered through current stress points in the bylaws, unintelligible language, constraining requirements, and outdated procedures better located in other documents.

As part of our background preparation, the group read and discussed these reports:

Commission on Governance, which addressed in detail the respective roles of the UUA President and Moderator. [https://www.uua.org/files/documents/boardtrustees/1993\\_report\\_comm\\_governance.pdf](https://www.uua.org/files/documents/boardtrustees/1993_report_comm_governance.pdf)

Fifth Principle Task Force Report (2009), which addressed issues relating to General Assembly. [https://www.uua.org/files/documents/boardtrustees/5thprinciple/0912\\_report.pdf](https://www.uua.org/files/documents/boardtrustees/5thprinciple/0912_report.pdf)

Strengthening Governance Working Groups notes (2014) Encouraged a more representative and multicultural delegate body and to strengthen the preparedness and accountability of the General Assembly delegates.

[https://www.uua.org/files/documents/boardtrustees/governancewg/141018\\_strengthening\\_report.pdf](https://www.uua.org/files/documents/boardtrustees/governancewg/141018_strengthening_report.pdf)

Report of the Task Force on Reimagining Covenant (2017), which addressed the role of covenant among UU congregations and made recommendations relating to topic-focused “General Conferences.”

[https://www.uua.org/files/pdf/r/renew\\_cov\\_tf\\_rpt\\_102017.pdf](https://www.uua.org/files/pdf/r/renew_cov_tf_rpt_102017.pdf)

Report of the Presidential Search Committee (2018) which addressed issues related the presidency and made recommendations.

<https://www.uua.org/files/pdf/p/pressearchcmte18.pdf>.

Widening the Circle of Concern, by the Commission on Institutional Change (2020). The COIC report described several ways in which UUA governance could be changed to be more inclusive

<https://www.uua.org/uuagovernance/committees/cic/widening>

These were some of the common themes:

- very challenging bylaws
- Restructure roles of the President and Moderator
- Dedicated Presidential Search Committee
- Evaluate number and kinds of UUA & Board committees and work groups.

- UUA Membership and requirements

**For General Assembly 2021** the group focused on very detailed changes to the nominating process and timeline for president and moderator including petitioning candidates. The timeline for president to take office. The length and process for campaigning for president and moderator. These were passed overwhelmingly by General Assembly 2021.

#### Notes

\*Deep Divers” were those who loved diving deeply into bylaws work versus the “snorkelers” who were very interested but had other UUA priorities.

”C” bylaws” are governed by a different subsection, (b and c) of Article XV - Amendment, in the UUA bylaws. A “C” bylaw” requires that any proposal to amend, appeal or add a new section must be preceded by the letter C and follow a very detailed multi-step process for decision making. i.e. Article II Principles and Purposes, in the bylaws, has a required fifteen-year review, separate commissioning, charge and a detailed multi-step decision making process that is in Article XV Amendment.

#### **July 2021- June 2022**

Board members: Barbara de Leeuw convener, Kathy Burek, Rev. Suzanne Fast, Lucia Santini Fields, Rev Tom Schade, Gianni Fogliano, staff, President Rev. Dr. Susan Frederick Gray (*ex officio*).

During this period the Deep Divers group completed a detailed review of every article, section, and line of the bylaws with detailed notes about current challenges and possible solutions. Our reviews always included an anti-racist, anti-oppressive, fully inclusive lens.

The UUA Board of Trustees engaged in philosophical bylaw related discussions and the BL team noted responses, concerns, and new ideas.

BL team invited approximately 100 UU’s who were former presidents, moderators, leaders of diverse affinity or caucus groups and others who relied on the bylaws in their work into conversations. We asked about their experiences with the bylaws and their suggestions. Most shared difficulty understanding and complying with the bylaws. There were other common themes including the *lack of*: role clarity, accountability to our values, flexibility, support for increasing meaningful GA participation and removing systemic barriers to full democratic participation in governance.

**For General Assembly 2022** two business resolutions were brought before the body:

**Business Resolution 1 - Renewing UUA Bylaws for Theologically Grounded and Mission-Focused Governance.** This is an excerpt:

“We need bylaws that provide role clarity, accountability to our values, and flexibility that allows for innovation and meaningful participation so we can unleash the leadership gifts of our people and the impact and values of our Association in the wider world. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the reality that many of our bylaw-codified volunteer positions require unreasonable time expectations. Our structure is rooted in outdated models of volunteer labor that don’t represent the reality of many people’s lives today, nor the diversity in leadership we need for our Association.

- These values and goals should guide the new bylaws framework:
- Reflect our theological commitment to liberation and inclusion.
- Reflect our long-established institutional experience with a free and responsible search for truth and meaning, religious pluralism, congregational polity, and other aspects of the democratic process.
- Provide accountability to our long-standing anti-racist and anti-oppressive commitments.
- Create flexibility, allowing for innovation and experimentation.
- Provide clarity of role and authority among leaders and groups that support diverse leadership.
- Enhance meaningful participation in governance by UU congregations, delegates, stakeholders.
- Address foundational areas of governance required in bylaws, leaving details of policy and procedures to documents that can be revised between General Assemblies.
- Written in plain language to be understandable and clear.”

The Business Resolution required the Bylaws team be expanded to include non-board members. The Business Resolution with amendment passed GA 2022 overwhelmingly.

Business Resolution 2 - General Assembly Planning Committee. This is an excerpt from the resolution:

“BASED ON THE FOREGOING, NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED: The GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2022 hereby suspends [until further notice] the membership and activities required by the bylaws of the General Assembly Planning Committee, for a period of up to three years, while new GA planning structures are tested, revised, and adopted. This action empowers the current leadership and collaborative efforts of the UUA volunteers and staff who are responsible for GA activities, events, and programs to fulfill these functions. It creates the [flexibility] opportunity to explore and develop more inclusive and innovative GA planning structures for the future.

The Business Resolution 2 passed overwhelmingly by the GA 2022.

### July 2022 - June 2023

Board members: Kathy Burek, Barbara de Leeuw, convener, Rev. Dr. Susan Frederick Gray, President.  
Non board members: Rev. Ariel Aaronson Eves, Larry Ladd, Rev. Tom Schade, Rev. Connie Simon, Brent Lewis, staff.

The newly expanded Bylaws Renewal Team (formerly Deep Divers) spent most of the year re-reading every article of the bylaws, discerning the original intent, framing new questions for larger discussion, and articulating a new expression of content. The General Assembly 2022 Business Resolution required the streamlined plain language bylaws to:

- Support the UUA’s Mission of collaboration, adaptability, and innovation in service of member congregations.
- Facilitate and sustain our shared UUA Vision of a covenanting, Beloved Community that is equitable, inclusive, diverse and in which all can thrive.
- Utilize a multi-year process of adopting the renewed by-laws, at a pace that allows full and thoughtful participation throughout the association.

The “Purpose and Principles”, (UUA bylaw Article 2) was the only bylaw discussed during the plenary business of GA 2023. Article II members are a separate Commission and have a separate charge.

**July 2023-March 2024**

Non board members: Kathy Burek, Rev. Ariel Aaronson-Eves, Larry Ladd, Rev. Tom Schade, Rev. Connie Simon, Board member Barbara de Leeuw, convener, Stephanie Maron, Governance Manager and Brent Lewis, staff.

The Bylaws Renewal Team was on an unexpected hiatus until March 2024.

Stephanie Maron joined the team in March 2024 as Governance Manager. The Bylaws Renewal Team will update the Board of Trustees in April 2024 on last year’s progress with preliminary conceptual drafts of bylaw language and big questions for ongoing discussions about roles and accountability of the General Assembly (article 4), Officers of the Association (article 8), Committees of the Association, (article 5), Committees of the Board (article 7) and expansion of membership (article 3).

The team will invite and engage members of the larger UU community in bylaw discussions and feedback beginning fall of 2024 through 2025. We will share a conceptual draft at General Assembly 2025.