

Board of Trustees

MEETING MINUTES: September 13-14, 2024

Pursuant to notice duly given, this meeting of the Board of Trustees of the Unitarian Universalist Association was held via Zoom conferencing.

MEMBERS PRESENT: Sofía Betancourt (President), Chris Chepel (Co-Financial Advisor), Barbara de Leeuw, Charles Du Mond (Co-Moderator), Suzanne Fast, Emily Koriath, Sherman Logan, John B. Newhall, Meg Riley (Co-Moderator), Adam Robersmith, John Simmonds, David Stewart (Co-Financial Advisor), Justine Sullivan, Sam Trumbore (Financial Secretary), Bill Young (Secretary)

ADDITIONAL PARTICIPANTS: Carey McDonald (Recording Secretary & Executive Vice President), Ashley Horan (Vice President of Programs and Ministries), Stephanie Carey Maron (Governance Manager), Betty Clark (Executive Assistant to the Executive Vice President and Vice President of Programs and Ministry), Danielle Di Bona and Chris Buice (chaplains), Connie Simon
Observers – Meg Richardson, Linda Rand



FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 13, 2024

Co-Moderator Charles Du Mond opened the meeting at 2:04 pm ET, and Board members took turns reading their covenant aloud.

Consent Agenda

The consent agenda, which included the following documents, was unanimously approved:

- August 2024 board meeting minutes
- General Assembly 2024 minutes

Bylaws Renewal Team Report

Larry Ladd, a member of the Bylaws Renewal Team (BRT), shared a presentation about the past and present work of the BRT, which aims to identify key stressors and improvement opportunities within the governance system.

Larry emphasized the importance of having a diverse group of board members and the need to simplify the governance structure. He highlighted the importance of clear decision-making roles within the organization, and proposed simplifying the governance structure by separating bylaws, rules, and committee charters. He also suggested three options for the Board to decide on the scope of governance changes.

The BRT considered revisiting the need for a Financial Advisor role and discussed the potential changes to their operations, including the possibility of a package of changes over several years versus a one-time effort. The group agreed that they hadn't yet decided on how radical the changes should be and that they needed to

consider their appetite for change before deciding on implementation. President Sofía Betancourt expressed concerns about the timing and approach to the bylaw work, emphasizing the need for community buy-in and ownership. Suzanne Fast echoed these sentiments, emphasizing the importance of big change work and the need for a comprehensive approach.

The Board discussed the BRT's focus on the whole package and the importance of buy-in from the members. EVP McDonald emphasized the need to consider the UUA Board's appetite for risk and their experience as leaders. Carey also spoke about the timeline and considerations for bylaw changes, and the challenges faced during the Article II process. They suggested the need for a different process towards consensus and emphasized the importance of aligning existing work to address issues caused by Article II. Carey also proposed a strategic approach to bylaw changes, suggesting that they be introduced in a series over years, allowing for trust-building and deep discussions on each portion. They noted that the three types of work required are the core work (discussion and decision-making about each element of the bylaws), the mechanical work (drafting, editing, development resourcing, developing communications strategies), and the work of evaluating and building consensus amongst our people. The BRT agreed on the need for a holistic approach and a longer timeline to effectively tackle the issues. They also discussed the challenges of change and resistance, and the potential for resistance from those who feel threatened by change. The conversation ended with the Board acknowledging the need to make decisions about the team structure and communication plan moving forward.



President's / Staff Report

- Moderator Search
- Recruitment of Leaders
- How are we engaging with data in new ways?
- Shared Values conversation
- Shift from operational to longer focused strategy
- Bylaws/governance changes/work

President Betancourt expressed her gratitude towards the Board for its work and acknowledged the importance of its role in her ministry. She emphasized the significance of the Board as her main accountability body and shared her pride in serving as its president. Sofia also mentioned that she is still finding her place in this ministry and believes that the first year is about listening. Sofia discussed the challenges of her role as the UUA President, particularly in relation to the bylaw work and the *Widening the Circle of Concern* report from the Commission on Institutional Change. She emphasized the importance of asking hard questions about the role's existence and leaving room for potential changes in authority and leadership over an arc of years.

President Betancourt discussed the restructuring of the UUA staff at the executive level and the importance of shared leadership and authority. She highlighted the impact of the new Vice President of Programs and Ministries and the ongoing search for a Vice President of Finance and Investment. She emphasized the significance of the Board's involvement in these appointments and the need for diverse voices in the public sphere. She discussed the effectiveness of the current leadership structure and the need for further assessment, noting the newness of the structure and the ongoing learning process therein. She also mentioned the restructuring in the UUA's Communications Department with the hiring of a Director

of Communications and Public Ministry, expressing her gratitude and emphasizing the importance of effective communication within the organization. She highlighted the need for a shift in how the UUA communicates with the public and its stakeholders. She encouraged the Board to support the new approach to communication, acknowledging that this may require some trust given past experiences.

President Betancourt discussed the challenges faced by congregations during the COVID-19 pandemic and quarantine. She spoke of the exhaustion and personal sacrifices made by religious professionals, national staff, and the Board. She also noted the resilience and communal care exhibited by congregations, which she believes is a positive sign for the future. Sofia expressed her belief in the potential of the "Meet the Moment" initiative to foster new ways of doing this work, and emphasized the importance of communal care and the need to resource and care for people differently. She shared her excitement about the recent in-person gatherings and events, particularly the first major UU the Vote gathering in Philadelphia. She highlighted the enthusiasm and participation of UUs in these events, including the Climate Justice Revival. She mentioned the ongoing work of the Climate Justice working group and roundtable, and expressed gratitude to Financial Advisor David Stewart for his involvement.

President Betancourt discussed the ongoing work on Widening the Pathway to Ministry. She mentioned the involvement of the panel on Theological Education and the need for broad conversations with various stakeholders, including recent seminarians. She emphasized the importance of balancing the need for basic competencies in credentialed ministers with the need for tailored formation processes for experienced individuals. She discussed the shift in the organization's perspective from a governance and decision-making focus to a mission-driven implementation based on shared values. She spoke on the ongoing work of collating resources and updating communication tools to support this transition.

Regarding her top priorities, President Betancourt mentioned the Climate Justice Revival, Widening the Pathway to Ministry, staff restructuring, and listening to the wider community. These may not all be completed in the next year but are primary focus areas. She emphasized shifting to shared leadership, staff self-assessment to prioritize work, and extending budgets and timelines beyond the usual year. She also acknowledged the need to address the topic of reparations, which has been discussed in the climate working group and with a potential business resolution.

Stewardship and Giving

Rev. Lauren Smith, Director of Stewardship and Development, presented to the Board and discussed transitioning databases and the importance of donor relationships. She outlined various donor categories, challenges with legacy gifts, and the need for fundraising campaigns. She shared staff updates, organizational direction involving major gifts, and the complexities of income-generating gifts. She encouraged the Board to donate and participate in donor cultivation.

General Assembly

General Assembly and Conference Services Director, LaTonya Richardson, reported increased attendance but rising costs at General Assembly 2023, with successful online enhancements like cohorts (average of 500 attending each session) and captioning. However, over 50% of business-only delegates did not



donate. There was a proposal to simplify the dual registration system. LaTonya also discussed plans for the multi-platform General Assembly 2025 event in Baltimore, MD.

LaTonya talked about significant growth in business-only delegates at General Assembly 2024. She shared about the opt-out policy for business-only delegates, agreeing to set a minimum contribution threshold and further discuss the matter. LaTonya suggested making the registration fee optional with a recommended amount of \$150. The group discussed the disconnect between costs and perception, and Co-Moderator Meg asked for messaging help with supporting the bylaw which states that the business-only delegates can participate for free with the fact that General Assembly is expensive, and those fees would help cover the costs. The Board proposed focusing on congregations rather than individuals for financial support. LaTonya agreed and mentioned the awareness gap among ministers regarding the financial commitment.

LaTonya then proposed a unified registration model for in-person and online events to increase registration. Suzanne expressed concerns about lack of community consultation and unfulfilled promises from General Assembly 2022, and advocated for a balanced approach and Board responsibility. The Board discussed keeping GA registration fees low while covering costs and addressing equity. LaTonya highlighted budget planning challenges and the need to support first-time participants.

LaTonya recommended that General Assembly 2026 should be intentionally virtual with potential in-person components. She noted the success of congregational watch parties and the many congregations currently preparing for the upcoming Climate Justice Revival.

LaTonya's recommendation for the location of General Assembly 2027 was that it be a West Coast destination (San Jose, CA), and that a contract was in the works, but not ready for this meeting.

The meeting ended at 6:25 pm.

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 14, 2024

ADDITIONAL PARTICIPANTS: Carey McDonald (Recording Secretary & Executive Vice President), Ashley Horan (Vice President of Programs and Ministries), Stephanie Carey Maron (Governance Manager), Betty Clark (Executive Assistant to the Executive Vice President and Vice President of Programs and Ministry), Danielle Di Bona and Chris Buice (chaplains),

Observers – Meg Richardson,

Co-Moderator Charles Du Mond opened the meeting at 11:03 am, and Chaplain Danielle Di Bona shared opening words.

Meet the Moment

Vice President for Programs and Strategy, the Rev. Ashley Horan, shared information on what the Board discussed during its retreat – a new initiative called





"Meet the Moment." This initiative involves important conversations about urgent issues in Unitarian Universalism, such as the articulation of shared values and covenant, the impact of post-pandemic trends on congregational giving and attendance, and the future of ministry. She spoke on the liminal moment the world is in and its implications for Unitarian Universalists, the Board, and UUA staff. She shared the Association's plans for the coming year, focusing on deep and meaningful conversations, agility, and courage. Ashley outlined a shared framework for understanding the current moment and its challenges and opportunities, with a focus on experimentation and ideation. UUA staff and the Board will work on this framework, with a particular emphasis on three questions:

1. What is the shared moment we are in?
2. What are the most urgent and important needs of this moment?
3. What is the moment calling us to do and become?

Ashley also spoke on the possibility of cohort models for thought leaders and public-facing cohorts on topics like congregational fundraising and ministry with children and youth.

Finance Update and Compensation Equity Review

Executive Vice President Carey McDonald provided a finance update which focused on the hiring of a new CFO with a different focus and the appointment of an acting Director of Finance. He shared that the Office of Church Staff Finances will be moving from Ministries and Faith Development to Finance and will report to the new Vice President for Finance and Investments. Carey also reviewed the successful conclusion of the temporary shelter project, the implementation of a new grade system, and the ongoing transformational healing and trust building process with outside consultants.

Transformational Healing and Trust Building Process

EVP McDonald shared that the staff have been engaged in a transformational healing and trust building process with outside consultants. The consultants completed a staff needs assessment and led the staff in deep dives into that information. They've worked to provide leadership with a series of recommendations about the UUA as a workplace, and leadership is currently processing that information and will likely bring some of the pieces to the Board at a later date, as some of them may rise to the level of policy.

Global Connections and Emerging Ministries

EVP McDonald talked of the transformation of the International Resources Office into Global Connections and Emerging Ministries, with a focus on supporting the Holdeen India Program and global community of Unitarians and Universalists and Free Churches. The team, led by Rev. Alicia Ford, is working on a new paradigm of global engagement, involving hiring a new set of consultants and engaging a new set of programs. Carey also mentioned the shift from a major presence at the United Nations to the UU Service Committee taking the lead on engagement on behalf of their values. The United Nations event, previously the Intergenerational Spring Seminar, is now led by the UU Service Committee with the UUA's support. The new UU Communities Fund has launched its first program, the Cultivators Collaborative Cohort Program, for innovative new UU communities.



Presidential Search Committee Report

The Board received the final report from the Presidential Search Committee and thanked the members for their work.

Board Officer Elections

The Board unanimously voted to make the following Board officer re-appointments:

- Bill Young was re-appointed to the role of Secretary.
- John Newhall was re-appointed to the role of Vice Moderator.
- Sam Trumbore was re-appointed to the role of Financial Secretary.

Board Committee Assignments

The Board reviewed the list of internal board committees and appointed members where there were vacancies.

Communications Working Group

- Meg Riley
- Emily Koriath
- Adam Robersmith

Distinguished Service Award Committee

- Bill Young
- Meg Riley
- Charles Du Mond

Executive Committee

- Charles Du Mond
- Meg Riley
- John Newhall
- Bill Young
- Chris Chepel
- David Stewart

Governance and Policies Working Group

- John Newhall, chair
- Suzanne Fast
- Barbara de Leeuw
- Charles Du Mond
- Sherman Logan
- Justine Sullivan
- Sam Trumbore
- Bill Young
- Stephanie Carey Maron

Values and Resources Working Group

- Sam Trumbore, convener
- Chris Chepel
- Charles Du Mond
- Barbara de Leeuw
- Suzanne Fast
- Sherman Logan

- David Stewart
- Bill Young
- Carey McDonald

Board Committee Liaison Assignments

The Board reviewed the list of board liaisons to Association committees and appointed members to ensure each committee is supported.

Accountability Launch Team	Bill Young
Appointments Committee	Adam Robersmith
Audit and Risk Committee	David Stewart
Bylaws Renewal Team	Barbara de Leeuw John Simmonds
Commission on Appraisal	Sofía Betancourt
Commission on Social Witness	John Newhall
Election Campaign Practices Committee	Bill Young
Investment Committee	David Stewart
GA Advisory Group	Meg Riley Suzanne Fast Amanda Weatherspoon
Ministerial Fellowship Committee	Sherman Logan Justine Sullivan
Moderator Search Committee	John Newhall
Nominating Committee	Adam Robersmith
Religious Education Credentialing Committee	Emily Koriath
Retirement Plan Committee	Chris Chepel
UUA Employee Health Plan Trust	Chris Chepel



Review Plans for the Commission on Social Witness

Vote on Items from the Day Before

The Board voted on the following items which were discussed the day before:

- Sherman Logan moved and Barbara de Leeuw seconded the approval of the General Assembly 2025 Registration Rates. The motion passed with one person opposed.
- Suzanne Fast moved and Justine Sullivan seconded the approval of San Jose, CA as the location of the in-person component of the multi-platform General Assembly 2027. The motion passed unanimously.
- The Board decided to defer the vote on the delegate-only option for GA 2026 until a future meeting.
- The Board decided to defer a final decision on GA 2026 until a future meeting.
- The Board decided to defer the vote to approve the date component of GA 2027 until a future meeting.

Charles closed the open session of the meeting at 2:02 pm.



Respectfully submitted,

/s/ Carey McDonald
Recording Secretary