

Board of Trustees

MEETING MINUTES: January 9-10, 2026

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, Gail Forsyth Vail, Mary Heafy, Kimberly Quinn Johnson (Co-Moderator), Emily Koriath, John B. Newhall, Adam Robersmith, John Simmonds, Oscar Sinclair, Vanessa Rush Southern, David Stewart (Co-Financial Advisor), Justine Sullivan, Sam Trumbore (Financial Secretary), Bill Young (Co-Moderator)

ADDITIONAL PARTICIPANTS: Carey McDonald (Recording Secretary & Executive Vice President), Dave Valentine (Vice President for Finance and Investments), Stephanie Carey Maron (Governance Manager), Betty Clark (Executive Assistant to the Executive Vice President and Vice President of Programs and Ministry), Nancy McDonald Ladd (Director of Communications), Danielle Di Bona (Board chaplains), Kierstin Homblette Allen (Meet the Moment Project Manager), Larry Ladd

Observers –Cathy Seggel, Amy Kent, Jacqueline Russell, David Jackoway, Meg Richardson, Traci Davis, Halcyon Westall, Natalie Briscoe, Janette Lallier, Melissa Carvill Ziemer, Kathy Burek, Julian and Burby McDonald



FRIDAY, JANUARY 9, 2026

OPEN SESSION

Co-Moderator Bill Young opened the meeting at 12:06 pm ET, Chaplain Danielle Di Bona shared opening words, and Board members took turns reading their covenant aloud.

Staff Reports

Climate Justice Recommendations

President Betancourt provided an update on climate justice initiatives, drawing a comparison to the integration of anti-racist and counter-oppressive work across the Association. She discussed staff benchmarking goals, the importance of theological grounding through upcoming resources, and the potential for fundraising to support climate justice work. Betancourt emphasized the need for high-level communication and collaboration with congregations, while also addressing questions about an

abolitionist lens in climate justice work. The staff expressed excitement about the initiatives and the importance of sustainable practices over the next 25 years.

Financial Report

The Board focused on updates regarding the audit process, forecast adjustments, and the three-year financial sustainability plan. The audit was completed in December with no material issues, and the UUA is implementing new processes for the next audit cycle. The retirement incentive program was successful, resulting in a net reduction of 4-5 positions. The forecast is trending more favorably with a projected \$400,000 loss compared to the \$2.3 million loss budgeted earlier, largely due to increased bequest giving and lower compensation costs. The UUA is carefully managing liquidity needs and building a rolling quarterly view to better track cash flow and restrictions. There is increased interest from potential tenants in leasing the fifth and sixth floor of 24 Farnsworth St., though the market recovery is still slower than before.

Meet the Moment Update

Executive Vice President Carey McDonald re-introduced Rev. Kierstin Homblette Allen as Project Manager of Meet the Moment. Rev. Homblette Allen shared the results of the Meet the Moment autumn assessment period, which revealed valuable insights about media engagement and the need for more data-driven decision-making. Director of Communications, Rev. Nancy McDonald-Ladd, shared that their communications team has made a strategic shift in content approach. The UUA is moving forward with a three-year sustainability plan and has adjusted their budget timeline to allow for more strategy planning, with plans to announce new commitments related to climate justice and outreach in the coming year. President Betancourt emphasized that this cultural shift towards transparency and data-driven decision-making is a democratic values issue, and the staff is working to make more room for diverse voices in the decision-making process.

Homblette Allen provided an update on the Meet the Moment program, highlighting its progress and impact over the past 18 months. She discussed the program's phases, resources, and the success of wave cohorts in engaging Unitarian Universalists across the movement. She shared statistics on the use of program resources and stories of how they are being applied in various contexts. She also emphasized the program's ability to generate deep conversations about the current moment and help inform UUA staff and congregations on priorities and strategies.

Staff discussed their new approach to developing initiatives through wave cohorts, emphasizing a more collaborative process with stakeholders. McDonald-Ladd highlighted the success of recent cohorts, including one focused on outreach and narrative, which will launch in the spring. Homblette Allen announced upcoming cohorts and a transition to a rolling start model, allowing for more flexibility. The team will also work to feature Meet the Moment at the upcoming General Assembly, offering both virtual and in-person wave cohorts.

Strategy and Planning Working Group – Update and Discussion

The Strategy and Planning Working Group, led by EVP McDonald, presented their progress and next steps to the Board. They discussed the need to clarify the UUA's mission, purposes, and goals, as well as how the Board can better engage with constituents. The group proposed developing interpretations of each purpose element



and integrating this with budget approval processes. They also emphasized the importance of clear communication about the UUA's work and how it connects to Board responsibilities. The Board members expressed support for this approach, noting its potential to improve clarity and engagement with congregations.

Mission Alignment Framework

The Board discussed a new framework for organizing and communicating the UUA's mission and priorities, which includes mapping programs to purposes and allowing leaders to narratively articulate their interpretations of these purposes. They emphasized the importance of this framework for aligning projects with mission, and giving volunteers a sense of belonging and connection to the UUA's values. President Betancourt shared her thoughts on the need for theological depth in strategy planning and messaging, highlighting the importance of weaving UU values and beliefs into their work and being accountable to both current and historical UUs.

UUA Strategic Narrative Development

The Board focused on developing a strategic narrative framework for the UUA, with McDonald Ladd emphasizing the need to move beyond individual stories to create interconnected constellations of meaning that can be easily interpreted and shared. The discussion covered the development of measurable impact goals at various levels, with the goal of presenting some interpretations at the October 2026 board meeting. Key questions were raised about the balance between Board and Administration roles, the frequency of review cycles, and how to incorporate stakeholder input, with Board member Adam Robersmith highlighting the importance of establishing a clear sense of identity and trajectory for the UUA independent of presidential leadership transitions.

UUA Governance Structure Review

The Board discussed governance processes and the role of the Board in interpreting and setting goals for the UUA. EVP McDonald explained that while the Board should have a role in approving interpretations of mission areas, goals might require a different approach. The group agreed that the governance structure should be integrated with how work is organized and evaluated, rather than feeling like an additional layer. Board member Barbara de Leeuw suggested revisiting the fixed schedule for reviewing purposes and proposed the idea of a "fishbowl conversation" for Board members to observe and engage in discussions.

UUA Presidential Leadership Models

The Board discussed the role and requirements of the UUA president, exploring whether the position should be limited to ordained ministers and considering alternative models like co-leadership or lay leadership. They debated the balance between presidential charisma and organizational needs, with concerns raised about the current search process and the need for a more democratic leadership model. The group agreed to bring these discussions to the bylaws renewal team, acknowledging the need to update leadership structures and review presidential term limits.

Policy Re Bylaws Renewal Team Membership / Terms

Governance Manager Stephanie Carey Maron presented a proposal for the Bylaws Renewal Team's membership composition and term limits. The proposal included 12



appointed members serving 3-year terms with a maximum of two consecutive terms, as well as roles without term limits for board members, a moderator, the executive vice president, and the governance manager. This aims to ensure continuity, balance, and renewal of governance expertise. A Project Oversight Team, composed of former team members, would provide institutional knowledge and mentorship. The Board was invited to provide feedback on the proposal.

The Board discussed the structure and size of the Bylaws Renewal Team, with concerns raised about the proposed 12-member size being too large for effective decision-making, and a large number of volunteers to recruit. Several suggestions were made to either reduce the size or implement a more flexible structure, with a preference for a smaller core group of 7-9 members plus ex officio members. The Board also discussed the need for careful consideration of team composition, term limits, and leadership roles, with Team member, Larry Ladd, emphasizing the importance of maintaining a productive group dynamic and avoiding excessive turnover.

Chaplain Di Bona provided closing words and the meeting ended for the day at 5:47 pm.

SATURDAY, JANUARY 10, 2026

EXECUTIVE SESSION

The Board began its meeting in Executive Session at 12:04 pm ET for the purpose of discussing sensitive business.

John Simmonds moved, Barbara de Leeuw seconded, and the Board unanimously approved the nomination of the recipient of the 2026 Award for Distinguished Service to the Cause of Unitarian Universalism. More detailed information will be shared publicly in early March 2026.

OPEN SESSION

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

Observers – Jacqueline Russell, Evin Carvill Ziemer, Larry Ladd, David Jackoway, Traci Davis, Meg Richardson, Janette Lallier

Co-Moderator Kimberly Quinn Johnson opened the public portion of the meeting at 4:31 pm ET.

General Assembly (GA) 2026

Draft Business Agenda

The meeting focused on the draft business agenda for the 2026 General Assembly (GA), presented by Carey Maron. Co-Moderator Bill Young noted that the agenda is subject to change based on any business resolutions or bylaw amendments submitted by the February 1st deadline, which could require additional time for completion. The



group also discussed the possibility of receiving and incorporating new submissions into the agenda, with the potential need to adjust timing accordingly.

GA Report Format Updates

Carey Maron confirmed that the President's and Co-Moderators' reports would be pre-recorded and available on-demand, with an option for a condensed "teaser" version during the live session. She also shared the potential need for additional time in business sessions and clarified that awards would be part of the business agenda in the final general session. A budget meeting will also be held during the days of the business sessions.

GA 2026 Preparations and Timeline

Important dates for this year's GA include February 1st for submitting business resolutions and bylaw amendments, March 1st for posting the tentative business agenda, May 4th for opening delegate credentialing, and May 15th for posting the final business agenda. The team will conduct mini assemblies from May 26th to 29th and update the agenda on June 8th with the final text of business items.

ModSquad Participation, Webinar, and Pre-GA Business Planning Discussion

The ModSquad (led by Co-Moderators Young and Johnson, and including Governance Manager Carey Maron, EVP McDonald, and Parliamentarian and Legal Counsel Adrienne Walker), manages the business of GA before and during the event. This governance team meets several times before GA to review business resolutions, bylaw amendments, and rules of procedure, leads the "What to Expect at GA 2026" webinar, and guides the mini assemblies. Carey Maron invited people to reach out to her about involvement with the ModSquad, emphasizing that participation can be in any comfortable form. Board members asked about the logistics of being at a microphone online, and Carey Maron clarified that all business sessions will be conducted online via Zoom, with the UUA ITS team managing the process. Co-Moderator Young raised the topic of Board members' attendance at GA, noting that business sessions will be online, and the following weekend will involve both an online presence and a production site in Louisville as well as satellite sites around the country.

Carey Maron invited people to volunteer to serve on the ModSquad, and Board members Oscar Sinclair, Mary Heafy, Emily Koriath, and Chris Chepel volunteered.

Ingathering Service Planning

Co-Moderator Kimberly Johnson invited Board members to assist in creating the 30-minute "in-gathering" worship service before the first General Session, and Board members Adam Robersmith, Emily Koriath, and Gail Forsyth-Vail, and President Betancourt volunteered to create this event.

GA 2026 Satellite Sites and Location of Trustees During the Programmatic Portion of GA

The Board discussed the GA 2026 satellite sites, with five confirmed locations so far: Birmingham, AL; Boston, MA; Montclair, NJ; Rochester, NY; and Westport, CT. It was clarified that the business sessions will be entirely online, while the programmatic



portion will have a studio site and satellite locations, with Board members potentially scattered across these sites to enhance connectivity.

Youth Trustees

The Board discussed the challenges of recruiting and supporting youth trustees, noting that it has been difficult to fill the two youth positions on the Board of Trustees due to various barriers including unclear expectations, time commitments, and the March deadline for nominations. The Board decided to pause efforts to elect youth trustees at GA 2026 and instead focus on recruiting for election at GA 2027, allowing time to develop necessary supports and resources. They noted that if candidates did emerge for the 2026-27 year, they could be appointed. They plan to work with the Lifespan Faith Engagement staff team to create frameworks for recruitment and support, with a focus on making the experience enriching and manageable for youth leaders. The Board also discussed the importance of ensuring youth voices are central in the leadership of the faith, and the need to navigate safety guidelines for mentoring youth.

Chaplain Di Bona shared closing words and Co-Moderator Johnson closed the meeting at 5:25 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

/s/ Carey McDonald
Recording Secretary

