

MEMORANDUM

TO: UUA Board of Trustees
FROM: UUA Administration (Montgomery)
RE: An Economically Accessible General Assembly
DATE: April 12, 2013

On March 28, 2013, the Board's Fifth Principle Task Force Ad Hoc Group asked the administration to provide a design that assures that no delegate or potential delegate be unable to go to General Assembly because of financial limitations.

Historical Context

In 2001 the Planning Committee passed a resolution asking the Board of Trustees of the UUA to determine "what can be done either to reduce the cost of attending General Assembly or to give economic assistance toward this cost?"

In 2002, Moderator Diane Olson appointed a Moderator's Task Force on Economic Accessibility to General Assembly, chaired by June Gillespie. The only report of this task force commented on the importance of GA, expenses connected to GA, scholarships, the possibility of shorter or less frequent GAs, and the negotiations then in process for building a fund for scholarships. "What can be done about the expense?" the report asked and answered this question by saying, "Not a lot." There seems to not have been a final report from that task force.

In 2007, the Board formed the Fifth Principle Task Force and appointed members to it in 2008. It was chaired by Denny Davidoff. A final report was made in January 2010. That report was subtitled, "Reformulating our General Assembly: Status Quo is Not an Option" and is available online. It recommended:

- That General Assemblies be held biennially in odd years
- That the content of GA be governance focused
- That GAs be held in 2 to 5 days over a weekend in August
- That a smaller number of authorized delegates with delegate teams be fully or partially subsidized by the UUA
- That settled ministers be part of congregational teams
- That delegates be certified by their congregation to serve in an accountable relationship
- That some delegates be selected by regions
- That non-delegate observers pay a registration fee
- That the Board of Trustees and associate members not be accorded representative delegates.

Much discussion ensued, including a General Assembly forum, but no formal action was taken.

Last year, Moderator Gini Courter appointed an ad hoc group, chaired by Joan Lund, to review the report of the Fifth Principle Task Force and make recommendations and on April 28 of this year, they asked the administration to respond with the request shown above in bold.

Current Efforts Toward an Economically Accessible General Assembly

It seems important to note that considerable efforts are already taken to make General Assembly more affordable. Relevant tactics include:

- Meetings are held in a different part of the country each year, allowing congregants from a variety of geographic regions the opportunity to attend with reduced or no transportation costs.
- The GA volunteer program provides full-time registration for 24 hours of service during General Assembly (approximately 125 persons, registration cost of \$335).
- There is a scholarship program based on matching grants from congregations; up to \$250 is available toward expenses per recipient (approximately \$25,000).
- Support for Youth Caucus in Planning Committee budget (\$18,000)
- There is an option to contribute to scholarships for youth on the GA registration form (\$6000 to \$8000 is donated each year).
- Staff expenses connected to General Assembly are several hundred thousand dollars annually.
- The Planning Committee budget supports young adult caucus scholarships (\$4000).
- A home hospitality program is offered by local congregations in cities where GA is held.
- Off-site delegate participation, live streaming of events, and social media create an interactive experience for remote attendees.

Proposed Future Efforts Toward an Economically Accessible General Assembly

The ad hoc group's request was that the administration provide not a finished product but ideas and plans to initiate a fruitful discussion of these matters. Thus, we suggest that more serious consideration and exploration be given to the following two avenues:

- **VIRTUALIZATION OF GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

Over the last three years, off-site participation has grown from 20 in the first year to 80 last year, with a likely 150 delegates participating in 2013. We expect that these delegate numbers will continue to increase and could easily reach 1000 over time. There is a new and booming movement toward virtual large meetings that can include much of what our current GA has: exhibit space, workshops, programs, special events, social networking, and plenary sessions. We need to seriously explore these opportunities.

- **GENERAL ASSEMBLY SCHOLARSHIPS**

Working in collaboration with our congregations, it seems possible to increase the number of scholarships to delegates, perhaps returning to the time when particular emphasis was put on attendance for congregational presidents and certainly for those who are economically disadvantaged.