

We say that General Assembly is a Meeting of Congregations. That way of thinking about GA is a way of focusing all of us: Board, Planning Committee and Administration. As a meeting of congregations, the General Assembly brings the "owners" of the Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations together.

In this frame General Assembly is a meeting of congregational delegates, ordained and lay. The implied understanding includes the following ideas.

- A) The delegates have come to General Assembly to confer and engage in the governance of the Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations
- B) The delegates have also come to be learn about the services of the UUA staff, to share best practices, to learn skills as congregational leaders.
- C) Our focus on General Assembly as a meeting of congregations guides the planning committee and the administration is programming.

But Unitarian Universalism is also a movement. It is both an Association of Congregations and movement of religious liberals seeking to make real a new vision of religious community. Many Unitarian Universalists find that "new vision of religious community" within the present "brick and mortar" congregations. Many Unitarian Universalists do not. Many others find much that is meaningful in their congregations but also seek other connections with Unitarian Universalists in the wider movement, this enhances their lives as religious liberals and strengthens their attachment to their congregation.

A) Many Unitarian Universalist ministers, religious educators and lay leaders developed their "identity" as a Unitarian Universalist through the Unitarian Universalist youth movement (LRY and YRUU) These were extra congregational connections, but those connections more often than not enhanced their connection to Unitarian Universalism as a movement.

B) There are many other examples of "extra congregational" connections that enhance and deepen Unitarian Universalist identity.

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1. The growing network of legislative ministries.
2. The special focus social justice organizations (Peace in the Middle East, UUs for Immigrant Justice,) and ethical life style organizations (Simplicity and Vegetarian support groups.)
3. The organizations that respond give support to Identity Groups (UU women, GBLTQ, differing ability, People of Color and generations (Young Adults, Youth.)

Therefore, at present Unitarian Universalists depend on General Assembly as a venue for "Gathering" The General Assembly provides an opportunity for organizations and/or identity groups to gather. Large numbers of members of these organizations and identity groups are going to be at General Assembly as 1) delegates 2) staff 3) program providers, as 4) members of UUA committees and 5) UU Ministers or Theological Students and other Religious Professionals who come for professional reasons.

So besides coming to GA to "do governance" or to participate the programming, many Unitarian Universalists come to General Assembly to connect with other Unitarian Universalists who share

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common professional concerns, shared identity, or social justice vision.

- A) Again, organizations and identity groups that are important to Unitarian Universalism as a movement find GA a convenient opportunity to gather and do "business."
- B. More than one thousand Unitarian Universalists consider these gatherings to be an important part of to Unitarian Universalist practice, and one of the reasons they come to General Assembly returning again and again.
- C. General Assembly is bigger because of the large numbers of people who come to GA for various "gathering" opportunities. It becomes possible to expand programming because of attendance is augmented.
- D. The larger number of programs makes General Assembly more attractive, and maximizes the number of individuals who might be attracted to various networking opportunities.

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- E) Any plans to General Assembly as a venue for governance must be made with the reality that General Assembly has become an essential venue for gathering.

Can we seek other ways to gather? Can we create support for cross congregational connections for Unitarian Universalists that do not depend on General Assembly?

General Assembly as it presently constituted is an expensive and hit and miss way of gathering, as well as being a dysfunctional way of governing.

- A. We could have a General Assembly every year, but the Governance Assembly would be follow the main principles of the 5th Principle Recommendations and meet every other year.
- B) We could have a Gathering General Assembly every other year in conjunction with a Governance GA and Regional Gatherings every other year.
- C)
- D) We could make the ability of identity groups to gather a priority. and provide the necessary financing to make such gatherings possible.

Conclusion.

To move in this direction would involve accepting that Unitarian Universalism is both an Association of Congregations, and a movement, and we are committed to being an intergenerational multicultural movement. To live into this commitment would involve funding youth, young adult and People of Color gatherings on a regular basis. Such gatherings deepen Unitarian Universalist Identity and commitment on the part of the participants, and enable the Association to support leadership development in a way that is not experienced as tokenism and manipulative.

It also follows that if Unitarian Universalism is enriched by being both a movement and an Association of Congregations that cross congregational connections of social activists, religious identity groups, advocacy groups, gatherings of sub specialities of religious professionals and other networks, ad hoc consultations and UU institutions should be supported in their efforts to enrich the diversity and dynamism of our Association.