

## Strengthening Governance Working Group Notes

In preparation for the conversation at the October 2014 Board meeting, the Strengthening Governance Working Group has developed several proposals to provide a basis for discussion. We decided to think with two different categorical frames:

1. What we would do to ensure a robust democracy if we started entirely over imagining our bylaws don't exist?
2. Could we think of one or two smaller things that could be done to improve our democracy within existing structure?

### Starting Over:

What if the congregations directly represented themselves? This would be a parallel of the change from districts electing UUA Trustees. As it was decided that it was inappropriate to keep the districts stapled to the Board through the use of individual bodies, what if there were no need to attach congregations to the UUA through Individual bodies? Wouldn't a group to group relationship be better? Congregations could have some processes for deciding together on their stance, and then communicating those out. Voting on business could be entirely away from GA, electronic, and perhaps after GA.

What if used a Senate model rather than Congress model? I.e., all congregations get one delegate no matter the size. Reduces number of delegate, increases delegate responsibility and ownership. A more moderate version of the direct representation idea above.

Radically restructure governance roles—see below on Commission on Governance 1993 report.

### More Readily Doable Things:

Limit numbers of delegates in whatever way possible; compress business to smallest amount of time possible—eventually aim for two days

Establish scholarship fund, especially available to underrepresented identities. We have a proposal that we will share at the October 2014 meeting. Would include programs for those folks for preparation and information, as well as support during and after the GA for processing (especially important for folks attending first GA from underrepresented identities).

Don't have to meet every year for business; many denominations don't – Presbyterians yearly gathering business every three years

We love the idea of Synods! We need an early one on Polity itself. Synods= large gatherings where lay person and clergy alike would gather to debate and determine theologically based positions on important issues of the day, both internal and external. A note about the oddity of our contemporary polity: Until 1925, the American Unitarian Association had both an administrative body, the AUA, and an ecclesiastical body (in that it involved representatives from churches), the National Conference, and then the General Conference. In 1925, President Samuel Eliot arranged for the AUA to take over the functions of the General Conference. The result was the eventual dominance of the business of the association over the more theological and issues based conversations. Most other Protestant

denominations saw a combining of the administrative and legislative bodies, too, although in all of them it was the legislative body that assumed the control of the administrative. Likely happened this way because of Eliot's unique power and effectiveness.

Combining the above, do a cycle of Year One: Synod; Year Two: Business GA; Year Three, Justice Assembly; Year Four, Business GA. The idea is that the energies and challenges from the Synods and Justice Assemblies could inform the business.

Encourage and empower Regional Gatherings for the non-business reasons for gathering.

Some helpful background conversation:

Rehearsed some history: current GA spectacle of democracy rather than real thing; current GA control and lack of spontaneity started with concerns about the "microphone grabbing" behaviors during the Empowerment Controversy. Changes in Moderator role: Joe Fisher model of detached fairness, even deliberately limited contact with Board socially to stay neutral; that changed very recently

Many of us like many of the recommendations in the 1993 Commission on Governance report. Quick summary: Moderator position dissolved; Elected President leads GA and serves ceremonial/development functions (not CEO); Board elects its own Chair; Board selects Executive Director. Main finding was need for more authority for the board, these changes meant to do that. Also recommended smaller board, expressed concerns about districts choosing board members, recommended presidential nominating committee. Main change in relationship to GA would be to end Moderator/President divides of time and attention at GA. Group agrees to make the report available to the board, stressing that the executive summary and the history sections are very helpful to our thinking about governance.