Gathering for Purpose

I. Executive Summary

At General Assembly 2014, the UUA Board presented a *GA Talks* session on the Board's work to transform how Unitarian Universalist gather and govern at General Assembly and within the Association. In that session, members of the Transforming Governance Group shared values and principles that the Board believes essential to that work. The Group also held a workshop at General Assembly 2014 on the same topic.

On July 3, 2014, the UUA Board posted an online survey to gain further feedback on the Values and Principles shared at General Assembly:

UUA Board of Trustees
Gathering for Purpose: Draft Values and Principles
June 2014

Inclusion

i. We envision gatherings for Unitarian Universalism that are more inclusive than what we experience with General Assembly today.

ii. We envision governance than incorporates a wider range of multicultural   . decision- making practices.

iii. We are committed to addressing the barriers of cost and time and physical accessibility that create obstacles to inclusion.

iv. We envision the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) and the congregations working together to make this happen as part of our counter-oppressive commitments.

Governance

i. We need ways for congregations to provide governance direction to the UUA. This may or may not be accomplished through large physical gatherings of Unitarian Universalists.

ii. We envision a model where we leverage 21st century technology to enable broad-based participation in the governance work of our Association.

iii. We envision a governance environment where the participants are ever more informed, accountable and prepared.

Why We Gather

i. We gather for many purposes. We can imagine even more, including gatherings where congregations come together and explore the theological and cultural direction for Unitarian Universalism.

ii. We recognize that many groups, particularly identity based groups, are reliant on and empowered by large gatherings. We are committed to honoring these connections.

Gathering for Purpose

Commitment

i.   We are prepared to change our bylaws, our processes, and our customs as needed to fulfill this vision.

ii. We commit to making space for many voices.

As of August 31, 2014, feedback to the draft Values and Principles was provided, by online survey, by 215 Unitarian Universalists. (Demographic information is in Section VI). Respondents answered:

• whether they agreed that the Values and Principles reflected Unitarian Universalist values;

• whether one of the Values and Principles in each category resonated with them more than others;

• what additional values and principles should be expressed; and

• reasons for disagreeing that a Value or Principle reflected Unitarian Universalist values.

Findings

1. Overall response to the proposed Values and Principles was generally positive. Respondents strongly or somewhat agreed with the Values and Principles as follows:

Inclusion: 91%
Governance: 94%
Gathering for Purpose: 89%
Commitment: 92%

2. The Value and Principle that most clearly resonated with respondents was:

We are committed to addressing the barriers of cost and time and physical accessibility that create barriers to inclusion.

3. Respondents suggested the following as additional values or principles:

a. Inclusion. Values or principles expressing: a commitment to include youth and young adults, a commitment to include all member congregations, a willingness to address additional barriers to inclusion, and a recognition that a "more inclusive" General Assembly requires not only more diverse participation but also more welcoming and engaging experiences.

b. Governance. Values or principles expressing: the importance of: the democratic process, engagement by the UUA with congregations, and creating a strong sense of mission and vision for Unitarian Universalism.

c. <u>Why We Gather</u>. Values or principles expressing: the reasons why we gather, the importance of gathering for connection and inspiration, and the need for regional gatherings.

d. <u>Commitment</u>. Values or principles expressing: a clear commitment to spending financial resources to realize the Values and Principles, commitment to welcoming youth/young adults to GA , and the meaning of "creating space for many voices."

5. <u>Reasons for Disagreement with Values and Principles:</u>

a. <u>Inclusion.</u> A lack of clarity around the meaning of "multicultural decision making processes", as well as concern that they may conflict with democratic processes; concern that the term "counter-oppressive" is not clearly defined and is not a positive statement.

b. <u>Governance.</u> Over-reliance on technology could marginalize some people; a *stronger* statement on embracing technology is needed, uncertainty that the General Assembly needs to provide "theological and cultural direction;" the expectations of "informed, accountable and prepared" delegates is unrealistic.

c. <u>Why We Gather.</u> The phrase "many purposes" is too vague to be meaningful; a focus on identity groups will lead to marginalization of others.

d. <u>Commitment.</u> The phrase "creating space for many voices" is too vague; the Values and Principles don't value current practice and culture; caution is needed in changing bylaws and culture; lack of clarity that change is needed.

Further detail on the responses are included in Sections II through V. Demographics are included in Section VI.

II. Responses to Agreement with Draft Values and Principles.   **Respondents stated whether or not they agreed that the Draft Values and Principles reflect Unitarian Universalist values:**

Values and Principles of Inclusion:

Strongly Disagree:	6.60%	14 answers
Somewhat Disagree:	2.83%	6 answers
Agree:	34.91%	74 answers
Strongly Agree:	55.66%	118 answers
		212 answered, 3 skipped

Average Rating (Scale of 1-4): 3.40

Values and Principles of Governance:

Strongly Disagree:	2.01%	4 answers
Somewhat Disagree:	3.52%	7 answers
Somewhat Agree:	35.68%	71 answers
Strongly Agree:	58.79%	117 answers
		199 answered, 16 skipped

Average Rating (Scale of 1-4) 3.51

Values and Principles of Why We Gather:

Strongly Disagree:	4.62%	9 answers
Somewhat Disagree:	6.15%	12 answers
Somewhat Agree:	32.82%	64 answers
Strongly Agree:	56.41%	110 answers
		195 answered, 20 skipped

Average Rating (Scale of 1-4) 3.41

Values and Principles of Commitment:

Strongly Disagree:	3.11%	6 answers
Somewhat Disagree	5.18%	10 answers
Somewhat Agree:	23.32%	45 answers
Strongly Agree:	68.39%	132 answers
		193 answered, 22 skipped

Average Rating (Scale of 1-4) 3.57

Gathering for Purpose

The following are the number of respondents who disagreed, by age category:

	15-18	19-25	25-35	35-55	+55
Inclusion:	N/A	1	1	4	12
Governance:	N/A	0	0	2	8
Why We Gather	N/A	0	1	8	10
Commitment:	N/A	0	2	6	6

Gathering for Purpose

III. Which of These Values Resonate More Than Others?

Respondents were asked, in each of the 4 categories, if a value or principle resonated with them more than others.   In boldface are those that received at least a 10% greater response than other values and principles in the category.

Inclusion: (198 answered, 17 skipped)

- 61.11%   **We are committed to addressing the barriers of cost and time and physical accessibility that create obstacles to inclusion.**

- 15.15%   We envision the UUA and the congregations working together to make this happen as a part of our counter-oppressive commitments.

- 14.14%   We envision gatherings for Unitarian Universalists that are more inclusive than what we experience with General Assembly today.

- 9.60%   We envision governance that incorporates a wider range of multicultural decision-making practices.

Governance: (182 answered, 33 skipped)

- 45.05%   **We envision a governance environment where the participants are ever more informed, accountable , and prepared.**

- 30.22%   We envision a model where we leverage 21st technology to enable broad-based participation in the governance work of our Association.

- 24.73%   We need ways for congregations to provide governance direction to the UUA. This may or may not be accomplished through large physical gatherings of Unitarian Universalist.

Why We Gather (135 answered, 80 skipped)

- 55.56%   **We gather for many purposes. We can imagine even more, including gatherings where congregations come together and explore the theological and cultural direction for Unitarian Universalism.**

- 44.44%   We recognize that many groups, particularly identity-based groups, are reliant on and empowered by large gatherings. We are committed to honoring those connections.

Gathering for Purpose

Commitment: (135 answered, 80 skipped)

- 51.85%   We are prepared to change our bylaws, our processes, and our customs as needed to fulfill this vision.

- 48.15%   We commit to creating space for many voices.

IV. What Additional Values and Principles Should be Reflected in Future Models of General Assembly?

Respondents were asked to suggest additional values or principles:

Inclusion:

a. <u>Youth and Young Adults/Age Diversity.</u> 6 respondents felt a commitment to age diversity, especially to including youth and young adults should be added:

- *"...a commitment to attracting and valuing young people's experience and opinions is important to the continued existence of UUism and, I believe, would aid in considering multicultural perspectives and the perspectives of historically less privileged groups in a relevant way"*

- *"...Growth happens when it's not just the older generation making decisions and getting buy in from the youth ensures more involvement as they age.*

- *"...I hope inclusion reaches out to more young adults...to be more family-friendly inclusive...it seems there could have been more GA programs for families with children."*

- *"...we revere the experience of those who have been involved for many years, but look to the emerging leaders to guide the movement today."*

b. <u>More Intentional Inclusion of All Member Congregations.</u> Several respondents remarked inclusion needs to intentionally include more member congregations:

- *"...please pay more attention to small congregations...With the emphasis on congregations having technology to participate in the Association, little places are being overlooked."*

- *"We need a statement of commitment to making GA a truly representative and truly democratic body, that truly reflects the positions of EVERY one of our congregations. Our current quorum requirements are laughable, and the decisions made at GA do not reflect the needs of congregations that are not represented there."*

- *"The democratic process works best when most (over half) of our members participate. It is hard to do that but that should be our goal."*

- *"...We envision congregations and individual UUs practicing these principles of inclusive governance in their groups and endeavors...something that brings this down to the individual level, not just something we should come to expect from the UUA."*

- *"We envision actively engaging congregational leaders, both lay and professional, in our physical gatherings and our dialogues held by other means."*

- *"...I believe the UUA would broaden our effectiveness...with more outreach/workshops with congregations throughout the year regarding issues to be voted on at GA."*

3. Additional Barriers to Inclusion. Respondents noted we must address additional barriers to inclusion.

- *"When you list just 3...you limit the value of the commitment. How about inequality of technology..disabilities...cultural assumptions? "*

- *"There could be language barriers"*

4. Inclusion is More than the Ability to Attend or Participate.

- *"I think it is very necessary to examine the way that whiteness and wealth functions within Unitarian Universalism - even when we do have more diverse attendance at events, who feels welcome, what are the experiences of the POC, poor people, disabled people, queer people, etc. who are able to come? How can we make those experiences better (by letting us make decisions and have our own spaces!)? etc."*

- *"...there are plenty of UU's that wouldn't be interested in going to GA even if it were free and right next door. How can it be a gathering that actually speaks to the hopes and dreams or at least a plurality of UU's?"*

- *"We are a rather intellectual group...How can we be more inclusive of people who are turned off by huge schedule grids?"*

Governance:

UUA Engagement with Congregations. Respondents suggested values related to further UUA engagement with congregations.

- *"...While I strongly agree that congregations need "to provide governance direction to the UUA" the case can be made that the UUA should provide governance direction to congregations. I know we have congregational polity but some push-back would be engagement and that is better than neglect."*

- *"...I would like to see a goal of national decisions being put into practice more regularly at the local level, and more relevant to the local level."*

- *"We will train congregation leaders in methods to more fully engage all in the congregations in governance."*

- *"The UUA should also actively teach/explain/inform members about the Cambridge Platform, and the power individual congregations hold and should USE!"*

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Congregational Polity:

- *"The UUA will pro-actively consider the Cambridge Platform as a core value in its decision making process."*

 Strengthening the Sense of Vision and Mission of Unitarian Universalism:

- *"...if Unitarian Universalism is to flourish, we need to strengthen the sense of having a vision and a mission as a denomination...to provide meaningful governance direction to the UUA, congregations do need to have a sense of this larger picture...To have the power to direct the UUA without having a sense of the history and current challenges is, I believe, a risky course of action.*

Gathering for Purpose

Gathering as Important to Governance

- *"Currently the delegates do have the opportunity to listen to each other, to meet and work out issues...Having discussions electronically is just not the same."*

- *"We continue to feel it is important to be together in person annually."*

- *"Meeting face to face is important...to see each other much like defendants face their accusers. I think we need to see each other when making major decisions about the direction we take."*

The Importance of the Democratic Process:

- *"Somewhere/somehow ... it needs to say "democracy!"*

Why We Gather:

Name Some of the "Many Purposes."

- *"...perhaps it is helpful to name some of the "many purposes" such as "to learn from one another, to network and socialize, to experience high quality large scale worship, to witness social justice issues," etc."*

- *" I feel the first is not specific enough and may want to speak more toward education and learning."*

Social Justice:

- *"To come together to "stand on the side of love" in support of an issue, group, etc. Standing in the dark with two thousand plus UUs...on behalf of all those detained in the desert outside of Phoenix, was one of the most moving experiences of my life. This was a bone deep experience of being part of a group dedicated to making a positive difference in the world."*

Inspiration/Worship:

- *" I would like to see something about experiencing the joy of just being in the company of thousands of other UUs and learning how THEY do things."*

- *"I'd like something about the worship portion/ inspiration portion of why we gather, not just the theological and cultural direction."*

- *" To me the whole is consistently greater than the sum of its parts, together we can be awesomely creative at figuring out ways of being with each other in love."*

- *"We gather for learning, spiritual growth, faith formation, inspiration and tools for effective social action."*

Gathering for Purpose

<u>Connection:</u>

- *"We gather to form bonds not only with those within our pews but all of the larger community."*

- *"We gather for accountability-to recognize that none of our congregations are an island alone, but that we are made stronger by our connections to each other."*

- *"Large gatherings expose us to broader views within Unitarian Universalism and need to be maintained."*

<u>Need for Regional Gatherings</u>

- *"If there were area-wide or even regional structures for giving flesh to UUA study and action issues, I think local interest in them would increase dramatically. When that proves successful then it should not be hard to drum up interest in multi-congregational explorations of the theological and cultural direction for Unitarian Universalism."*

Commitment:

<u>Financial Commitment:</u>

- *"We commit to funding initiatives that allow us to realize these values and principles of commitment."*

- *"We are prepared to commit the necessary financial resources to fulfill this vision. We are prepared to ask our member congregations to do their part to make the General Assembly a truly representational body, and to provide the necessary structures and support to do so."*

<u>Youth and Young Adults:</u>

- *"We need to be welcoming to everyone, but especially eager to embrace young people who approach with their own ideas and understandings."*

- *"need to evolve with coming generations."*

<u>Address Ambiguity of "Creating Space for Many Voices":</u>

- *"We commit to creating space for many voices" is very broad."*

- *"Again, what do you mean? Space? What is that?"*

- *"Not sure what is meant by creating space for many voices in relation to bylaw changes...you are not even hinting at your vision..."*

V. <u>Why do Respondents Disagree with any of the Values and Principles?</u>

Inclusion:

<u>Lack of Clarity Around "Multicultural Decision-Making Processes."</u>

- *"I have no clue as to what you mean by multicultural decision making practices."*

- *"Not sure what you have in mind by governance that incorporates a wider variety of multicultural decision-making processes...it sounds interesting and I want to understand more."*

<u>Concern that Multicultural Decision Making Conflicts with Democratic Process</u>

- *" Multicultural decision-making practices go beyond my interpretation of the seven principles."*

- *"I ...would hesitate in including something just because it's multicultural if it was anti-democratic. I would have to know what the decision-making practice was before I knew whether or not I was comfortable with its inclusion."*

- *"I fear that replacing the democratic process with a search for consensus places inordinate power in the hands of a small number...who are able to prevent a substantial majority from working its will."*

<u>Concern about the Use of Term "Counter-oppressive".</u>

- *"The term "counter-oppressive" I find to be dissonant to the spirit of the principle. It presumes the judgement and labeling of oppression which may or may not have been actual in the past. Why not say it positively? "We envision the UUA and congregations working together to make this happen as a part of our commitment to inclusion""*

- *"While I strongly agree with the importance of counter-oppressive commitments and of multiculturalism, I am concerned that their use has become overly buzzwordy. I know what I mean when I use those phrases--but how can I tell if that's what is intended by the values & principles statement? Just using the buzzwords without any definition or explanation is problematic."*

<u>Vagueness</u>

- *"These all seem really generic and therefore not very meaningful."*

Governance:

<u>Concern that Reliance on Technology will Marginalize.</u>

- *"I question how inclusive technology can be."*

- *"Our efforts to "go green" and expand inclusion by technology are really just another way to shift cost from the Association to the individual or the Congregation...Our congregation has been further marginalized by these "efforts" and we look with great trepidation at the expansion of them."*

- *"...while some members are moving our church forward with new technology, I know some others feel alienated and marginalized by its increasing presence...technology is expensive for individuals to own and keep online, putting many at risk for being left out."*

- *"...too much reliance on new technologies can become a barrier as well as a help. I would like to see that "leverage" does not become a single way of engaging with people."*

Concern that Technology Overlooks the Need to Be in Community.

- *"I participated as an offsite delegate to GA this year and was glad for the opportunity...HOWEVER, I did not enjoy it nor did I feel engaged in the process. For me, there is no more stimulating, exciting, energizing, fruitful experience than being on site with folks who are committed to doing the work of the association."*

- *"Technology is not the end all be all..being together in covenantal community should be the goal."*

Need for Stronger Statement of Reliance of Technology.

- *"I believe that the governance environment where the participants are ever more informed...can most likely be accomplished by leveraging 21st century technology."*

- *"We have to embrace technology totally and move sharply away from any sort of top-down leadership. It has to come from the bottom up."*

The Expectations for Delegates are Unrealistic.

- *"I'm kind of skeptical about the 'ever more informed, accountable and prepared.' "*

- *"...while it is admirable to strive for all of these values...many of our congregants don't care about national governance."*

Concern about Exploration of Theological and Cultural Direction

- *"I am concerned that the statement "...explore the theological and cultural direction for Unitarian Universalism" might be interpreted to mean that General Assembly would decide the theological and/or cultural direction of the UUA--and then delegate it to the denominational staff. That seems like a horrible idea to me."*

- *"I think that UUism has a culture and a theology, and that those are generally positive, and so it's possible that we don't need to find a direction, and that this option should be part of what we also explore."*

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- *"We've gathered many times to 'explore the theological and cultural direction of UUism,' it's not a possible new purpose that needs to be imagined."*

Why We Gather:

<u>"Many Purposes" is Not Meaningful or Adequate.</u>

- *"The first statement is so vague as to be meaningless...We gather for connection, for worship, for study, for speaking our truth into the world, for witness, for rejuvenation, for strength in numbers!"*

- *"If we can't say why we gather, we're in trouble (and we are.)"*

- *"I am concerned that you do not mention the role of ministers and the UUMA."*

<u>Concern about Focus on Identity Groups</u>

- *"I understand you are trying to be sensitive to identity groups (I am currently among them) but I believe this minimizes how empowering this experience can be for any participant. I think..you forget what it is like for a congregant to come to GA and see the world of Unitarian Universalism is so much bigger than their own, probably small, congregation."*

- *"Concerned that ii may invite the Board into another version of the old affiliates model, wherein identity groups exert undue influence on Board resources and compete with the congregations as quasi-member organizations."*

- *"What are the identity groups?"*

Commitment:

<u>Lack of Clarity on "Creating Space for Many Voices."</u>

- *"Creating spaces for many voices is nebulous and vague...I don't see anything particularly UU about it."*

- *"I am not convinced we need more space to include more voices. Voices yes, but we need a better video system so not everyone needs to be in one space."*

- *"My problem is NOT just "space"...how about time &/or diversity &/or etc?"*

<u>Need to State Value of Current Custom and Practice.</u>

- *"I think our processes and customs have some value, but am open to changing them where there is reason and need to do so. However, the fact that they are our custom and practice should be given some weight toward the decision to retain them, as well."*

- *"Our strength lies in our connections...I don't want us to lose that vital piece."*

Disagreement with Commitment to Change Bylaws

- *"I think "prepared to change bylaws" is jumping the gun. "We commit to changing" is more gradual and realistic."*

- *"Changing bylaws as needed is just business as usual for any organization: I don't see that this is necessarily reflective of any particular UU value or commitment."*

Need for Caution.

- *"Bylaws, processes and customs relate to "culture". It must be approached slowly so that everyone has the time to internalize the change or we risk loss, financially and membership."*

- *"Do not feel we are prepared to do the work of chang[ing] bylaws, processes AND customs. It takes years under the current bylaws to change some of those and I cannot envision customs change being done via a large body."*

VI. Information about Respondents

191 out of 215 respondents answered whether any of the following characteristics were applicable to them:

82.20% (157 respondents)   I have attended a General Assembly.

52.36% (100 respondents)   I have served as a delegate to GA 2014.

43.46% (83 respondents)   I have heard or viewed the conversation concerning the Draft Principles that was presented in the General Session VII at GA 2014.

34.55% (66 respondents)   I have a historically marginalized identity/experience around ability, sexual orientation, gender identity and/or experience, race, and/or ethnicity.

22.51% (43 respondents)   I am a called leader of a congregation.

28.80% (55 respondents)   I am an elected leader of a congregation.

187 out of 215 respondents answered that they belong in the follow age groups:

0%
15-18 years

4.57% (9 respondents)
19-25 years

10.15% (28 respondents)
25-35 years

25.38% (50 respondents)
35-55 years

59.90% (118 respondents)
more than 55 years

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