

“Grounded in the living tradition of our free faith, yet charged with acting independently, the Commission on Appraisal's mission is to provoke deep reflection, energizing and revitalizing Unitarian Universalism.” This is our current Mission Statement, formally adopted in 2002. Historically, the Commission on Appraisal was established in the original Bylaws of the Unitarian Universalist Association in 1961, to create an ongoing internal review process within the UUA. Its broad charge is to “review any function or activity of the Association which in its judgment will benefit from an independent review and report its conclusions to a regular General Assembly.”

As a Standing Committee, the Commission's nine members are elected by delegates to the General Assembly, three elected every two years, and it is funded from the UUA budget. The President of the Association, nominally an *ex officio* member of the Commission, takes no active role in its deliberations. The Members, elected to six-year terms, are traditionally denominationally active and institutionally committed individuals, taking seriously their responsibilities and attempting to be as objective and judicious as possible in both observations and recommendations. Concluding their terms of service this year are Joyce Gilbert, Earl Holt and Janice Marie Johnson

The recent practice of the Commission has been to deliver a major report every four years, and at this year's General Assembly we will formally present a new Report, entitled *Engaging Our Theological Diversity*, the culmination of nearly four years of intensive work. Earlier years of the study took us around the country, where we met with various gatherings of theologians, ministers, denominational leaders and lay people in a variety of settings, from General Assembly, to a District Meeting, to retreat centers, to a number of our churches. Formal focus groups with various constituencies have been held. More than a third of the member Societies (an impressive return for which we are most grateful) responded to our survey of Worship Practices, the results of which are summarized in our Report. This topic of study provoked widespread interest and discussion, including many sermons and other related writings, all of which we have read with interest, along with correspondence and other communications.

This year we have met exclusively in Boston, focusing on the challenging task of compiling the results of our extended data gathering and preparing our written Report. Our budget allows for three meetings each year, besides General Assembly. The Commission has no research or support staff, so we are entirely dependent upon the capacities and energy of our own membership. While all on the Commission have worked hard, we mutually recognize and acknowledge the extraordinary contributions of James Casebolt, Ph.D., our Project Manager. Jim's training and experience as a social scientist was an invaluable asset, exceeded only by the tireless energy and enthusiasm with which he led our work. Following the maxim that no good deed goes unpunished, we have elected him to chair the Commission for the next two years.

We wish also to express thanks to the staff of Skinner House Books, and in particular to our editor, Mary Benard, for invaluable assistance in the final preparation and publication of the written Report, which will be available for sale at General Assembly and after that through the UUA Bookstore. An individual copy will be mailed to each congregation.

In all this has been exciting, and exhausting, work, and we look forward to your response to our written report. But we do not feel that this is the end of the journey, rather the beginning. Among our major recommendations, we are calling the Association at all levels, from that of individual to the General Assembly itself, to extend the vitally important conversation which we have begun. We urge you to read the Report and bring it back to your congregation, your District, your friends.

Looking ahead, over the next few months we will choose the topic for our next area of study, and we are anxious to receive your suggestions and recommendations. For further information including the best way to communicate with the Commission, please go to our web-site at uua.org/coa

We are grateful for the opportunity to serve the Association and hope that our efforts will contribute to our covenanted purpose, to provoke deep reflection on issues of importance to the Association, in the interests of energizing and revitalizing Unitarian Universalism.

Respectfully submitted,

Earl K. Holt III, Chair; Joyce T. Gilbert, Vice Chair; Janice Marie Johnson, Secretary; James Casebolt, Project Manager; Orlanda Brugnola; Mark Hamilton; Linda Weaver Horton; Manish Mishra; Tom Owen-Towle