



The Commission on Appraisal Unitarian Universalist Association

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ANNUAL REPORT TO THE UUA GENERAL ASSEMBLY June 2011

Launching Our Study of Ministry and Authority at GA 2010

The Commission made full use of the opportunities provided by GA 2010 to launch our new study: *Who's in Charge Here? – The Complex Relationship between Ministry and Authority*. During the UUMA's Ministry Days, I co-facilitated a Collegial Conversation with Rev. Harlan Limpert, Vice President for Ministries and Congregational Support. I described the Commission's study of the sources of ministerial authority, how it is exercised in congregations, the perceived differences in congregational life between ministry and leadership, and the complex relationship between ministry and authority as a source of stress in congregations. I described our intent to produce a report in 2013 that will serve as a resource to assist clergy and laity in congregations to better understand and navigate the complex relationship between ministry and authority.

During GA 2010 Commissioners conducted face-to-face interviews with a number of UU leaders, chosen because of their particular experience related to the subject of our study:

Rev. Joy Atkinson, Chair of the Interim Ministry Guild Steering Committee
Rev. Janne Eller-Isaacs, co-designer of a model Worship Associates program
Rev. Ian Evison, Central Midwest District Executive
Rev. Douglas Gallager, UUA Trustee, Heartland District
Rev. James Hobart, UUA Nominating Committee
Rev. Keith Kron, incoming Ministerial Transitions Director
Rev. Sarah Lammert, incoming Director of Ministries and Faith Development
Mr. Bob Miess, Ministerial Settlement Representative, Pacific Central District

Rev. Dr. Lisa Presley, Heartland District Executive
Rev. Don Southworth, Acting Executive Director, UUMA
Rev. Dr. John Weston, outgoing Ministerial Transitions Director

At our GA hearing, we invited participants into small-group discussion of several questions about who makes various kinds of decisions in congregations, and upon what authority. The reports back to the entire gathering from these small groups assisted us in developing questions for focus groups – our major method of study throughout this past year.

A Year of Focus Groups

We launched our focus group process at a meeting at the UU Church of Bloomington, Indiana, on October 3. To prepare for it, we educated ourselves about focus groups in theory and practice, and we refined a set of questions to be asked of every focus group. We also created a Focus Group Moderator’s Guide, which we put into practice at the Bloomington meeting. It enabled us to enlist the help of others who would then go on with our training and coaching to lead focus groups on our behalf around the country.

By the end of GA 2011, the following questions will have been asked of nearly 240 people in about 40 focus groups, including groups in every region of the country.

1. Who are you? What congregation are you from? How long have you been there? What drew you there?
2. We call some things but not all that happen in congregations “ministry.” What goes on in your congregation that you would call “ministry”? Who does these things?
3. Two parts:
 - a. By what authority do you think professional clergy do their ministry and make decisions about it in the congregations they serve?
 - b. What gives lay people the authority to make decisions that affect ministry in their congregations?
4. In your congregational experience, to what extent do differences of opinion about ministry and authority contribute to congregational stresses and strains?
5. What ideas do you have about how to make improvements in this area?
6. Based on your congregational experience, what else would you want the Commission to investigate and think about as we pursue our study of the relationship between ministry and authority?

Every focus group session is being recorded, and every recording is being transcribed. The transcriptions are being coded so that the Commission will be able in a systematic way to identify themes and patterns that emerge from the responses to the focus group questions.

Other Elements of Our Study

Moderated List-servs

Rev. Erica Baron, the Project Manager of this study, has moderated two separate list-servs this year, one for interim ministers and the other for ministerial settlement representatives. The questions she has put to these groups have varied from the focus group questions in order to tap the particular expertise of these two groups.

Commissioners' Reading List

The Commissioners have committed to educating ourselves through individual members reading a wide range of books and articles related to the subject of our study and by each of us writing reports for the others on some materials.

Consciousness-Raising about Potential Bias and about Multiculturalism

The Commissioners have undertaken a social location exercise based on Shulamit Reinharz' *Observing the Observer: Understanding Our Selves in Field Research*; accordingly, each of us is sharing with the others in writing the results of our analysis of our social location as individual persons, as researchers, and as Commissioners in the particular situation of being engaged in a study of ministry and authority. We undertake this exercise to make explicit what propensities for bias each of us may have as a result of our own social location and thus to make more likely our overcoming any such biases in our study. We do this in the same spirit that we bring to having one of us serve as process observer and one as anti-racism/anti-oppression (ARAO) observer at each session of our meetings. This spring we have added to our ARAO observer's guide the following question: "Multiculturalism: Did discussion of issues and recommendations made during the session nourish connections between peoples and/or honor the stories of hope and possibility among generations?"

Plans for the 2011-2012 Year's Work

Shift from Focus Groups to Case Studies

We decided preliminarily a year ago that after a year of focus groups, the following year would be devoted to in-depth case studies of a selected few congregations. When we meet during GA 2011, a major topic of discussion will be the choice of sites for case studies during the coming year. We will use a "park bench" format during our GA hearing to engage participants in a clarifying exercise that we expect to assist us in choosing case study sites. We will also be engaging in another round of face-to-face interviews during GA.

Doing Business with a Limited Budget

When the UUA Board's Finance Committee recommended to the Board only \$14,000 funding for the Commission for Fiscal Year 2012, I wrote to the Board outlining the Commission's needs related to completion of our current study. Project Manager Erica Baron and Vice Chair (and former Treasurer) Jacqui C. Williams attended the April Board meeting to engage with both the Finance Committee and the entire Board on the matter of the Commission's funding. The outcome of these efforts was the budgeted amount of \$25,000 for Fiscal Year 2012. In addition, the Board is now prepared to consider some changes in budgeting process, including guidelines for all committees that would be equitable to all and also the possibility of multi-year or whole-project funding for the Commission in the future.

This year we have had a task force at work on ways for the Commission to make still more use of electronic communication. We met only twice in person this year – the Bloomington, Indiana, meeting in October and a meeting in early March at the First UU Society of Albany, New York. Otherwise we have met this year by telephone and extensive email.

Transition in Commission Membership and Leadership

Three Commissioners complete our six-year terms this June: Mr. Michael Ohlrogge, Ms. Jacqui C. Williams, and I. The three who are running unopposed at this year's GA election to fill the three vacated seats are: Rev. John Cullinan, Rev. Lynne Garner, and Rev. Mitra Rahnema. This spring the current Commissioners conducted our biennial election to leadership positions on the Commission. For the next two years, positions will be held as follows:

Chair	Ms. Megan Dowdell
Vice Chair	Mr. Pete Fontneau
Secretary	Ms. Beverly Harrison
Treasurer	Mr. Don Mohr
Chaplain	Rev. Nana' Kratochvil
Project Manager	Rev. Erica Baron

Respectfully submitted,

Rev. Barbara Child
Chair, UUA Commission on Appraisal
May 18, 2011