

MINUTES
Commission on Appraisal Meeting
October 9 – 12

Present: Nana' Kratochvil, Erica Baron, John Cullinan, Megan Dowdell, Lynne Garner, John Hawkins, Nato Hollister, Xolani Kacela, Myriam Renaud

Thursday, Oct. 9

The Commission arrived in Chicago, ate dinner together, and had an opening worship and check-in time.

Friday, Oct. 10

MORNING SESSION

Who is NOT Among Us?

The Commission discussed groups of people who are not represented or are under-represented on the Commission, including:

- Lay people under-represented
- People of color are under-represented
- Youth/young folks
- Folks with less education
- Non-UUs

We reiterated a commitment to finding ways to hear and incorporate the voices of those who are under-represented among us.

Covenant work

The Commission reviewed our Handbook, Covenant, and expectations of each other to incorporate Xolani Kacela, new member, and for everyone's review.

Review project plan

The Commission reviewed our plan for the rest of the study.

Plans for January exercise/meeting/interaction with people

The Commission decided before this meeting that in lieu of the usual January face to face meeting, we would ask each Commissioner to have an interaction with a local congregation or group on some aspect of Class/Classism with some deliverable back to the Commission.

There is a lot of leeway in this project to tailor it to a specific congregation/opportunity. Commissioners discussed sermons, workshops, storytelling opportunities, observation/description of communities that are creating new forms that are more inclusive, etc.

Observations

The Commission heard process observation on the morning's session.

The Commission heard an ARAO observation on the morning's session:

1. *Did the Commission's deliberations recognize and respect the identities and cultures of the Commission members themselves?* I didn't hear a lot about this today
2. *Did the discussion during the session reflect the Commission's commitment to anti-racism and anti-oppression?* Yes, the whole study is about this, in the realm of class. I'm hoping that work this afternoon will help bring anti-racism back into the frame.
3. *Were the perspectives and information from accountability groups (POC or oppressed groups) taken into consideration?* When we had them yes, and I'm glad to see conversation about how to make these relationships ongoing and accountable.
4. *Were probing questions asked about the impact of the Commission's deliberations on under-represented and oppressed persons in our Association and in the larger society?* Yes, a few. Again, mostly about class
5. *Did Commission members share responsibility for raising anti-racism/anti-oppression concerns, or did the "watchdog" role fall to only a few or one?* I didn't see a watchdog. This seems to be a shared responsibility.
6. *Did discussion of issues indicate that Commission members are conscious of the systemic power of oppression?* This morning's conversation was about the COA itself to a large extent. We are a system, but I am not really seeing the larger systems in active conversation this morning.
7. *Were there moments during the session that involved a difference of cultural styles or approaches? If so, did someone adapt? Who and how?* I didn't notice that. If you did, please let us know.
8. *Did any recommendations made during the session have the potential of moving the UUA closer to being an anti-racist/anti-oppressive institution?* No specific recommendations were made in this session. The whole project hopefully will have this effect.

Additions:

One commissioner noted that lot of non-concrete language is circulating, which lends itself to confusion may be a cultural style.

AFTERNOON SESSION

Intersectionality Training

Megan Selby of LEAF, an organization in Chicago, joined us for some training on intersectionality.

The guiding question for our time together was: What would it look like within Unitarian Universalism if we were to center the experiences of poor and working class people?

In our first round of discussion, we considered areas of social justice focus for UUs. We considered questions such as: How are poor and working class people impacted by this issue? How does this differ - if it does - from how middle and owning class people are impacted by this issue? Where and how do we see UUs being engaged in this issue?

Then we looked at some scenarios of interactions in UU congregations that have some class implications. We considered questions such as: Who is in our congregation in terms of class? In what ways are UUs congregations welcoming to poor/working-class people? In what ways are UU congregations welcoming to middle/owning-class people? How would congregations change if they centered the experiences of poor and working class people? What would it mean if our theology and worship life were centered on poor and working class people? When have you seen UU congregations struggle with how to support/welcome/connect with poor and working class people?

Observations:

The Commission heard a process observation.

The Commission heard an ARAO Observation (paraphrased):

As was observed earlier, the topic itself is specifically from the place of wanting to engage with the ARAOMC lens. This session was a good example of how we are learning to engage with the issues as they get more difficult. I would like to see us challenge ourselves to really lean into some of the discomfort as we grow together into a loving community where we can be really uncomfortable together. Compassion is important. I noticed that people were asking questions to clarify where people were coming from rather than jumping on people about what they thought someone said. I'm encouraging a model of calling each other back in as opposed to calling each other out, and it was good to do this today.

Commissioners completed a brief writing assignment overnight.

Saturday, Oct. 11

MORNING SESSION

Budget and UUA Board Conversation

Megan Dowdell and Nana Kratochvil took us through the conversations about our budget for the current year. We have time on the UUA Board agenda next week to continue this conversation. As of this meeting, the proposal for our budget in the current year is \$20,000.

The Commission discussed the fact that some commissioners have not turned in expense reports/requests for reimbursement. We reaffirmed that it is vitally important that all expenses be submitted for reimbursement to make sure that the Board and Staff have an accurate picture of what it costs for the Commission to do its work. In addition, a culture of not submitting expenses eventually leads to service on the Commission being impossible for those of limited means.

Based on our current understanding of our budget, we think we can afford one more fact to face meeting and some presence at GA.

The Commission then finalized plans for our (remote) conversation with the Board during their meeting, including things we want to communicate and ask.

Where are we and what have we learned?

We considered the learning from our GA 2014 workshop, other conversations and events at GA, our reading, and our conversations in this meeting so far.

Drawing out Themes:

Storytelling as a method

Inclusion and Liberation - sometimes together and sometimes in tension with each other

Theology of liberation

Challenges of reaching all of our membership where they are on the class spectrum

Concern for loving the middle-class and owning-class as well as the poor and working-class

Some willingness/longing to be aspirational and to dream

Addressing or understanding structural components of class

Some desire to focus on congregations and the Association, some desire to look at the broader society

Themes from our reading (this is a list of ideas, not a list of consensus opinions)

The strengths of different class cultures should not be lost in deconstructing the system of class privilege (Leondar-Wright)

Separating the people from the problem; class is not a static identity: Can we love people without loving the fact that they are rich?

Looking for a definition of various classes

Wanting our report to be mildly alienating; the things we propose should be difficult and challenging; R. Niebuhr: "sublime madness"

Interested in levels of religiosity along the spectrum. We need to look at the reality that the rising generation is not coming to UUism for their liberation. Where are they going and what is being offered? What need is being filled that we can't see?

Intersecting oppressions and linked struggles

We don't want anyone to be broke

African American liberation theology was grounded in Luke 4:18-19: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

A recognition that we don't fit neatly into boxes. Class is an artificial abstraction laid over people's lives as well as a real description of conditions. I'm not sure how to reconcile these two.

GA 2015

We discussed plans for COA work at GA 2015. We want to work in conversation and collaboration with UUs for Class Consciousness, and possibly with the Commission on Social Witness in their programming around escalating inequality. A subgroup of Commissioners will work on this in more detail.

Observations

The Commission heard a process observation.

The Commission heard an ARAO observation (paraphrased):
ARAOMC (JH):

I found myself conscious of using my own privilege and speaking out which I've given myself permission to do more than I should. I appreciate those who have called me back to other perspectives. I think that we've spoken our own truths effectively. I feel we have represented ourselves and recognized each other's contributions. I think we have reflected a commitment to anti-oppression. Anti-racism has not been as central as anti-oppression, although it's been part of the context of our discussion. We have tried to consider perspectives and information from accountability groups, but there might be more we can do there. This is hard when the Commission itself is still not as diverse as we might be. Yes, we asked probing questions! Yes, we shared responsibility for raising ARAO concerns, though maybe not all of us took that on. Yes, we had some notion that we are conscious of systemic oppression. I am not sure if anyone adapted culturally. Yes, we are working in a direction that will help move the association toward anti-racism/anti-oppression.

Additions: One Commissioner noted their own adaptation in answering a big-picture/abstract question that was posed in the overnight assignment. That Commissioner noted their happiness at realizing they could actually do this! Another Commissioner noted their increasing use of a more blunt speaking style, part of which is in reaction to a sense that our Commission culture is reticent, thoughtful of each other feelings, and middle-class uncomfortable with directness.

AFTERNOON SESSION

Leadership transition

The Commission discussed the leadership roles on the Commission itself, in recognition that there will be a leadership transition in June. We considered the roles we need to fill and individual Commissioners who are continuing past June were asked to consider which role(s) they might be able and willing to take on.

Group Exercise

The Commission broke into 3 subgroups to consider some of our emerging topics in more depth. The subgroups were: theologies, the role of the 1%, and storytelling as a method.

Future Dates

The Commission set dates for future meetings and conference calls:

2014:

November 18: 7/6/5/4 pm - Call (1hr 15min)

2015:

January 15: 7/6/5/4 pm - Call (1hr 15min)

February 12: 7/6/5/4 pm - Call (2 hrs)

March 19: 7/6/5/4 pm - call (1hr 15min)

April 16-19 Meeting in Person

May 14: 7/6/5/4 pm - call (1hr 15min)
June 22-24: GA in Portland, OR
October 15-18: Meeting in Person

2016:

January 14-17: Meeting in Person, if budge allows
April 14-17: Meeting in Person

Observations

The Commission heard a process observation.

The Commission heard an ARAO observation (paraphrased):

1. *Did the Commission's deliberations recognize and respect the identities and cultures of the Commission members themselves? Yes.*
2. *Did the discussion during the session reflect the Commission's commitment to anti-racism and anti-oppression? Yes, in the anti-oppression regarding class, not much about anti-racism. There was a note that we are saying this a lot, and we should notice this and seek to correct it.*
3. *Were the perspectives and information from accountability groups (POC or oppressed groups) taken into consideration? Yes*
4. *Were probing questions asked about the impact of the Commission's deliberations on under-represented and oppressed persons in our Association and in the larger society? Yes*
5. *Did Commission members share responsibility for raising anti-racism/anti-oppression concerns, or did the "watchdog" role fall to only a few or one? Responsibility was shared.*
6. *Did discussion of issues indicate that Commission members are conscious of the systemic power of oppression? Yes.*
7. *Were there moments during the session that involved a difference of cultural styles or approaches? If so, did someone adapt? Who and how? One of the subgroups had some confusion over different uses of the word "critique," which perhaps reflected different cultural frames. The difference was discussed and came to a good conclusion.*
8. *Did any recommendations made during the session have the potential of moving the UUA closer to being an anti-racist/anti-oppressive institution? Yes.*

Additions? Women of color who have been on the forefront of class work and theology could be lifted up more, and could be a place where we start the theology conversation, rather than a later addition.

Sunday, October 12

MORNING SESSION

Absent: Nato Hollister, Xolani Kacela

Official business meeting opened.

Minutes

The Commission approved the following minutes:

Conference Calls:

November 2013

December 2013

March 6, 2014

May 2014

September 15, 2014

Meetings:

October 2013

January 2014

April 2014

Presentation of Slate from COA Internal Nominating Team

The internal nominating team, which consists of the outgoing members of the Commission, nominates the following people for leadership positions starting after GA 2015. We will vote on this slate at the April meeting.

Chair: John Hawkins

Vice-Chair: Xolani Kacela

Project Manager: John Cullinan

Treasurer: Nato Hollister

Chaplain: Lynne Garner

Secretary: No candidate as no one was willing to serve. We plan to ask the Nominating Committee to keep this in mind and talk to incoming Commissioners about stepping up as Secretary

Clarity about Work Post-Meeting

The Commission reviewed the task list, and answered questions and requests for support.

Observations

The Commission heard a process observation.

The Commission heard an ARAO observation (paraphrased):

Today's conversation was much more internally focused. It is necessary to discuss our own business and logistics. This doesn't exclude ARAO lens, but it makes it harder. Sometimes we think too much in terms of our own sense of oppression as a committee rather than other systemic oppression. There was a reminder in our discussion of the need for more diverse commission.

Additions? One Commissioner noted that we have a male-heavy slate of leadership proposed. That will impact the Commission moving forward, but there is also excitement about people stepping into new roles. Another Commissioner notices that there is a tendency to have the (sole) person of color as the Vice-Chair. We want to make sure that the paths to Chair and Project Manager roles are open to POC when appropriate. Another

Commissioner noted that they are using the term "Accountability groups" as a short-hand, and not getting more specific. There is room for improvement here.

The Commission meeting adjourned after closing worship.