

Commission on Appraisal Response to the UUA Board

January, 2015

We understand that the Board is considering Bylaws changes to reshape or eliminate the Commission on Appraisal. We understand this to be part of a larger effort to consolidate the many overlapping and sometimes conflicting lines of authority that have been established by the General Assembly, including entities such as the Board, Presidency, Commission on Appraisal, and Commission on Social Witness, as well as other bodies created in response to GA resolutions.

The Commission on Appraisal meets a need for independent review of congregational and Associational life that will be even more necessary with any consolidation of authority within the Association. If the Commission on Appraisal is eliminated by the General Assembly, we believe that there will still be a need for independent review and assessment of the Association as an institution. We understand that the Policy Governance model calls for this evaluative function to be held by the Board, but we are not convinced that critical oversight of governance is possible from within the chief governing body. In particular, we need the ability to have deep and sometimes critical conversations that are not influenced by fear of speaking truth to power.

Because the Commission on Appraisal was established by the General Assembly, it is appropriate that changes should be considered by the same body. However, we must also state that for at least six years, the actions of the Board and Staff have made the work of the Commission more difficult, creating a hostile work environment for volunteers that is in violation of policy 2.3 on treatment of staff (including volunteers). Midstream budget changes without a clear rationale or any relation to our mission, requests that we prioritize meeting in Boston when our budget does not support it, and refusal to provide clear explanations of processes has resulted in conditions that are inequitable, disrespectful, and unclear. Members of our Commission are unable to interact with delegates at General Assembly, to meet together on Commission business, or to operate independently without placing a financial burden on members.

Our current project – examining the impact of class on our congregations and Association - is timely and necessary. Class assumptions permeate much of our life, from implications for stewardship and leadership development to institutional structures. But the current environment makes it difficult if not impossible to do the work required for this project.

It is not clear what might replace the Commission. Our understanding is that a decision will be made at the Board's January meeting about whether to recommend eliminating the Commission, or replacing it with some other entity that will perform a similar function. It seems unlikely that an effective replacement for the Commission can be found in the planned time frame. So far, the thoughts we have heard on this subject – greater use of consultants or an

ombudsman office – seem likely to reinforce the trend towards a more corporate, professional class-dominated organizational structure that works from upper and middle class assumptions. This is exactly the type of management decision-making that a class-conscious movement would seek to avoid. The Commission's current project aims to create and elevate this type of awareness.

We recognize the desire to make more thoughtful use of resources in a time when resources are limited, but we doubt that the changes currently under consideration will be less expensive or more effective than an elected and independent Commission. In addition, a reliance on consultants or an ombudsman office means that the topics of study will not be chosen, undertaken, and offered by *members* of congregations. The Commission as it is constituted at present – lay leaders and ministers who represent the diversity of Unitarian Universalists (including diversity of theology, age, race, gender, religious background, ethnicity, and immigrant status) – means that the topics chosen and the work undertaken are grounded in congregational life.

We would prefer to see a Commission that is smaller, independent of Board and operational agendas, with a secure funding source that is not dependent on the operational or governance priorities of the moment. It would be helpful to work more closely with Board, Staff, and GA to identify topics and create reports; but ultimately the Commission should have the power to select topics and make recommendations independently of governance and operational bodies. The power to place items on the GA agenda provides a means to bring needed change to the attention of our constituency, and that election by the General Assembly provides clear accountability.

We recommend that the Board introduce Bylaws language to reduce the size of the Commission on Appraisal to six members, as we have previously suggested, and that the Board restore funding as needed to enable us to complete the work we have been charged to do by General Assembly.

The work of the Commission on Appraisal should continue.

Respectfully Submitted,
The UUA Commission on Appraisal
The Rev. Dr. Nana Kratochvil, Chair
The Rev. John Cullinan, Vice Chair
The Rev. Erica Baron, Secretary
Megan Dowdell, Treasurer
John Hawkins, Project Manager
The Rev. Lynne Garner, Chaplain
The Rev. Nathan (Nato) Hollister
The Rev. Myriam Renaud
The Rev. Xolani Kacela, Ph.D.

Reports from the Commission on Appraisal

The Commission on Appraisal has in its history recommended institutional changes, provided much needed insight and depth on critical elements of our faith, and built fuller relationships with our members. The following list of past commission reports includes a few specific recommendations from the COA that have led to concrete changes in bylaws, governance, and staffing. (This is not a complete list of concrete recommendations made by the Commission!)

2013: *Who's In Charge Here? The Complex Relationship Between Ministry and Authority*

2009: *Proposed Revision of Article II of the UUA Bylaws*

Language on inclusion was adopted in 2014.

2005: *Engaging Our Theological Diversity*

Recommended that the UUA devote a GA to theology and that a collection of worship materials be consistently available.

2001: *Belonging: The Meaning of Membership*

1992: *Leadership: Our Professional Ministry: Structure, Support and Renewal*

Recommended: creation of RSCCs; increase in the size of the MFC and ability to meet in 2 panels; higher bar to pass the MFC; and creation of a staff role (Transitions Director).

1997: *Interdependence: Renewing Congregational Polity*

1989: *The Quality of Religious Life in Unitarian Universalist Congregations*

1983: *Empowerment: One Denomination's Quest for Racial Justice*

Recommended formation of a committee to work on anti-racism.

1981: *Lay Leadership*

1978: *A Brief Look at the History of Extension: In the American Unitarian Association, the Universalist Church of America, and the Unitarian Universalist Association*

1977: *Denominational Fund Raising in the Unitarian Universalist Association*

1977: *The Representative Nature of General Assembly*

1975: *The Unitarian Universalist Merger: 1961-1975*

1974: *Report to the General Assembly* (Black Empowerment, Sexism in the Ministry, Gay Concerns, Election Procedures, Merger Review)

1972: *Report to the General Assembly* (Black Self-Determination, Rights and Opportunities for Women, Center City Churches, Health of UU movement)

1970: *Effectiveness of the General Assembly*

1969: *Report to the General Assembly* (Fund Raising and Finance, Nominations and Elections)

1968: *Study of District Organization Plan*

1965: *Report to the General Assembly* (Health of the Association, Districts, Ministry, Activities, Communications)

1964: *Report of Survey of Churches and Fellowships*

1936: *Unitarians Face a New Age* [for the American Unitarian Association]