

Report to the Board on the September 2007 General Assembly and Mission of the Association Partnership (GAMAP) and General Assembly Planning Committee (GAPC) Meetings

This report integrates the GAMAP and GAPC meetings. Much of what was discussed at the GAMAP meeting was affirmed and expanded upon at the GAPC meeting.

GAMAP met September 11, 2007. Participants were Bill Sinkford, UUA President; Gini Courter, UUA Moderator; Beth McGregor, Tim Murphy; and Ginger Brown (by phone for part of the meeting), GA Planning Committee; Jan Sneegas, Director, General Assembly and Conference Services (GACS); and Rev. Burton Carley, Pat Solomon, and Eva Marx, Board of Trustees. The following items were discussed at GAMAP and subsequently discussed and, where appropriate, agreed to by the GAPC.

Budget Issues. Although the unusually high number of GA registrants in Portland generated a sizable surplus, future GAs might experience deficits when held in less attractive settings. Funds in excess of the one-third allocated to the GAPC by the Board in its recent vote might be required if registration does not offset fixed costs. A mismatch between GAPC and Board budget cycles may present a barrier to effective decision making about the disposition of these funds and other budgetary planning. Tim Brennan, in his meeting with the GAPC, clarified the implications of the Board vote regarding GA surplus.

The subsidy for congregation presidents attending the 2008 GA as delegates will be 25% of registration. This is the last year for this subsidy. Future incentives for leadership attendance might include support for congregational leaders whose congregational budgets include support for GA attendance.

Follow-up on Open Space. Open Space at the 2007 GA received mixed reviews from both the GA feedback session and post-GA evaluations. Instead of repeating Open Space, GA 2008 will include facilitated small group discussions among lay and professional congregation leaders to inform the Board of Trustees' ends (goals) development for our Association of Congregations. These discussions are scheduled during a three-hour period on Thursday afternoon. Some programming scheduled for other times will be offered to those not attending the discussions. This will make it possible for those participating in the discussions to attend those programs at another time and others to attend programs whose timing might conflict with another program they wish to attend.

Right Relationships. Response to the introduction of a Right Relationships Team was universally positive. The process will be institutionalized. The President and the Moderator will consult with the 2007 team leader to identify a leader for 2008. GAMAP asked the GAPC to include \$5,000 in the GA budget to support the team. The GAPC will suggest to the Right Relations Team that they consider offering a GA workshop on developing Right Relations Teams at the congregational level.

Worship and music leaders for the 2008 GA will be invited to attend an orientation regarding cultural appropriation and related issues similar to the meeting that 2007 worship and music leaders attended last spring. GAMAP asked the GAPC to allocate \$3,500 to support worship leaders' travel to a January meeting.

GA theme. The theme suggested by GAMAP for the 2009 GA is “Call and Response” to reflect how we respond to a call to ministry. (According to Wikipedia, “call and response” in music is a succession of two distinct phrases usually played by different musicians, where the second phrase is heard as a direct commentary on or response to the first. In Sub-Saharan African cultures, call and response is a pattern of democratic participation in public gatherings in the discussion of civic affairs, in religious rituals, as well as in vocal and instrumental musical expression and has been transmitted in this country over the centuries in various forms of cultural expression.) The GAPC suggested that “General Assembly: A Meeting of Congregations” become the annual major “branding” theme with sub-themes added if desired.

Public Witness. The Office of Advocacy and Witness has requested two hours of unopposed time for a public event featuring “Supporting and Celebrating BGLT Families” in a location where the Fort Lauderdale community can be involved. The event will be scheduled during Friday evening rush hour in a public place. The GAPC is exploring logistics. This success of this experiment will need to be evaluated before the decision is made for similar scheduling at future GAs,

Worship. To affirm our identity as a religious people gathering for religious purposes, more opportunities for plenary worship are being incorporated into the program.

- *Opening worship.* The opening will be a celebratory and worshipful gathering. Total time for the banner parade and the opening plenary will be limited to 30 minutes with the plenary occurring immediately after the banner parade instead of at the end of the program. The GAPC is exploring the possibility of offering “Sources,” a cantata with music by Jason Shelton and lyrics by Kendyl Gibbons that acknowledges and lifts up the seven sources of our tradition while at the same time being in keeping with the 2007 GA theme of Common Threads.
- *Service of the Living Tradition.* Victoria Safford, Senior Minister, White Bear Unitarian Universalist Church, Mahtomedi, MN, will preach. A member of the GAPC will speak with the Office of Ministry and Professional Leadership about ways to respond to requests for greater visibility for those receiving fellowship and other issues that emerged in the post-GA evaluation.
- *Friday evening worship.* A Friday evening worship to which all GA attendees will be invited will incorporate youth worship, the bridging ceremony, young adult worship, and Soulful Sundown.
- *Sunday worship.* The Sunday “seeker” worship service will return to its traditional Sunday morning slot and will be designed to model exemplary worship. Rev. Marlin Lavanhar, Senior Minister at All Souls Unitarian Church,

Tulsa, OK will be the worship leader. The closing, which will end at 7 pm, will take the form of celebratory worship.

Banner parade. The GAPC is exploring the creation of a virtual banner parade for future GAs where photographs of congregations and their banners could be displayed on a screen.

Ware Lecture. As of this writing, the speaker identified by Bill Sinkford had not yet responded. If no response is received by October 15, Bill will seek an alternative candidate. The Ware Lecture will begin at 8:30 pm, Saturday.

Envisioning the future of our meeting of congregations. Suggestions for doing GA differently are emerging from multiple sources. The separation between pre-GA functions such as Center Days, UU University, other leadership meetings, and GA is becoming increasingly artificial in terms of content and logistics. Moreover, strategies such as electronic communications could enable our congregations to participate in the democratic process without having to travel to a single central meeting site. The Committee on Committees will be asked to help identify a task force to imagine the possibilities.

Security at Fort Lauderdale. Concern was expressed about access to the convention center, especially for youth. The Fort Lauderdale convention center is located at the northern end of Port Everglades, the world's second largest cruise port. Security checkpoints exist at all entrances. Anyone entering the convention center will be required to present government-issued photo identification. Nametags will not constitute adequate identification. Minors, i.e., anyone under the age of 18, may use student identification. Minors without identification, who present no obvious threat, will be admitted on a case-by-case basis, and, according to the Port Authority, "Admittance will not be unreasonably withheld." The GAPC discussed with Youth Office representatives concerns about how our youth might be treated and difficulties that they might encounter. There was agreement that communication in advance of GA with law enforcement authorities regarding security issues is critical. The GA Office will ask Fort Lauderdale staff how other organizations with youth participation at the Fort Lauderdale convention center have addressed security issues.

The GAPC met in Boston September 12 -16. Guests included:

Gini Courter, UUA Moderator
Bill Sinkford, UUA President (by phone)
Beth Norton, President, UU Musicians' Network (UUMN)
Tim Brennan, UUA Treasurer
Jen Lotze, Second Year HUUPER (Hardcore UU Person Energized and Ready!)
India McKnight, First Year HUUPER
Jesse Jaeger and Derek Jackson, UUA Youth Office
Don Plante, Stacy Dixon, and Lorna Gilbert, GACS staff
John Hurley, UUA Director of Communications
Nancy DiGiovanni, Andrew Tripp, and Erik Kesting, UUA Office of Young Adult and Campus Ministry

The GAPC meeting began with a two-part retreat. In the morning the Rev. Keith Kron, UUA Identity-Based Ministries, led a workshop entitled "Lenses and Blind Spots, World Views and Ruts: Using the Enneagram for Greater Understanding of How We and Others Work." Paula Cole Jones, anti-racism consultant for the UUA, facilitated the afternoon portion of the retreat.

Pre-GA events. The relationship between pre-GA events and GA was a recurrent theme not only at GAMAP but also in conversations between the GAPC and Beth Norton, Bill Sinkford, and Gini Courter. Issues included compensation of musicians who are involved at GA but are also asked to assist with pre-GA functions; volunteer staffing; responsibility for accommodating accessibility needs such as access to scooters; and timing conflicts such as the one between the Berry Street Lecture and district gatherings.

Youth. Jesse Jaeger observed that, thanks to the development of partnerships within the UUA, youth programming in 2007 was the best ever. However, youth participation as a percentage of GA attendance is decreasing, some of which Jesse attributed to schools ending later in response to requirements of No Child Left Behind legislation.

Young Adults. The Young Adults and Campus Ministries Office and the GAPC are forging a strong relationship and had a lively discussion about plans for the future. The Office is looking at ways for young adults to become more integral to and visible at GA. Nancy DiGiovanni spoke about how important strengthening our institutional structures that minister to both youth and young adults is to the growth of our movement. According to Nancy, each year the number of graduating high school seniors in our congregations equals 10 times the net annual gain in membership reported by UU congregations. Youth and young adult representatives expressed excitement about the possibilities of the Friday night worship.

Economic accessibility. Hotel room rates in Fort Lauderdale will range from \$89 - \$149. Jan Sneegas reported that hotel rates are increasing by about 8% per year with very high costs anticipated for Charlotte in 2011.

Greening. In keeping with the GAPC's continuing efforts to promote greening, orders of service for pre-plenary worship will appear in the program book and will not be distributed at GA. In addition, the GAPC voted to give registrants the option of not receiving a mailed program by indicating that they do not wish to have a program mailed in a check-off box near the carbon offset check-off on the registration form.

Registration. The GAPC voted an increase of \$5.00 in registration fees for GA 2008. All non-registration fees will remain at 2007 levels.

GA 2010. The GAPC asked whether the Board of Trustees would be interested in sponsoring an intergenerational event in 2010, perhaps considering the use of some of the accrued GA income for an intergenerational meal.

Children's Programming. The GAPC is exploring the possibility of offering junior high programming at Young Fun to prepare 12-14 year-olds for participation in Youth Caucus. Current Young Fun programming is unstructured. Kids are given options for activities from which they select what they want to do. The GAPC plans to examine current programming and develop a strategic plan for more structured programming that includes age-appropriate UU content.

The GA Children's Choir will perform in Minneapolis GA 2010 in keeping with the intergenerational theme. The GAPC will explore with Young Fun and Children's Choir planners the possibility of joint housing arrangements.

Workshop slots. The Board will have a total of six slots: the budget hearing and one slot for each working group. The Congregation Presidents workshop with Bill and Gini is scheduled for Friday morning (Workshop #3). Congregation Presidents networking is scheduled for late Saturday afternoon (Workshop #8). Each Independent Affiliate approved by the Board of Trustees by November 1, 2007 will be eligible for one workshop slot. The GAPC has increased the number of GAPC-sponsored slots to 35 to accommodate requests anticipated from former Independent Affiliates. Districts will have 2 slots each plus an ingathering. The GAPC has gathered data on attendance at 2007 GA workshops and suggests that the UUA Leadership Council, when assigning staff slots, consult these data to identify attendees' interests.

Because short workshop time blocks (1¼-hour) do not offer enough time for effective in-depth training and skill-building, the GA 2008 grid will include an option for two successive workshop time slots on some days. One of those times will be concurrent with the small group leadership discussions scheduled for Thursday afternoon.

Accessibility. All choral music in plenary will be captioned in 2008. Accessibility issues related to housing and GA events continue to be of concern. The GAPC would like the Board's help with examining and developing policies for providing accessibility services at GA. The GAPC suggested conducting a survey and/or conversations with people who have used accessibility services at past GAs better to understand their perspective on met and unmet needs. The GAPC wondered whether the Journey Toward Wholeness Transformation Committee, which is now integrating accessibility, might be able to assist with this effort.

Communications. John Hurley provided an overview of his office and offered suggestions for strengthening GAPC communications with GAPC constituencies, especially in relation to issues such as changes in programming or security at Fort Lauderdale. He suggested publishing information on the website rather than as an e-mail attachment so that language can be reframed in case of changes or need for clarification.

Responsive Resolution. A 2007 Responsive Resolution asked that the GAPC discuss including time during the opening of the 2008 GA for delegates and attendees to work together to gain insight, skills, and experience with (1) our own individual assumptions when encountering new people, and (2) engaging in compassionate response and witness

when we fall short of our aspirations to expand our capacity to be allies to our fellow Association members and our larger community. Since the worship focus at opening cannot allow time for such actions, the GAPC identified alternative venues such as including some of this work in the GA orientation, soliciting workshop leaders to offer a program addressing the Responsive Resolution, and continuing to reflect on ways to incorporate the spirit of the resolution throughout the 2008 GA.

GA 09 District Coordinator. The GAPC voted to appoint Lewis Phinney of Colorado Springs, CO as the GA District Coordinator for 2009 as recommended by the Mountain Desert District Board.

Submitted by Eva Marx, Board Liaison, September 18, 2007