

The Commission on Appraisal – Thoughts for a Conversation with the UUA Board and Staff

The Commission on Appraisal (COA) is elected by the UUA General Assembly and charged with independently studying issues of importance to our Association.

Although the COA has an independent charge, we do not work in a vacuum; we seek engagement with congregations, with Unitarian Universalists generally, and with UU leadership including the Board and Staff. We look forward to talking with you on October 18, during the Board meeting in Boston. Following are some of the topics we are most interested in discussing, although of course we also welcome any conversation that you would like to have with us. We expect that there is much room for thoughtful discussion around our current project as well as the COA's work in general.

We believe that our work, both generally and on this project, is integral to the Ends of our Association. We are concerned with the health and transforming power of our congregations and our communities, and we believe that we have something to contribute to our mission, to inclusion in our Association, and to our future.

This past spring, we chose "Class" as our next study topic. In the usual way of things, this would mean producing a report for the Assembly by 2017 (but we might want to report sooner or incrementally). We believe this project in particular addresses the Association's Ends in the following ways. We believe issues of class and classism in our congregations block our transformative power. We believe that addressing class and classism is key to building intentionally inclusive congregations and communities, and that we are serving fewer people than we could if we were more inclusive. We believe that a failure to address class compromises the depth of our ability to counter systems of power, privilege, and oppression, including both oppressions of class and other kinds of oppression that have a class component.

We are very much at the beginning of this project, and we would welcome the engagement of the Board and the Staff in this work as we seek a more focused scope for our topic. The Study-Action issue on income equality chosen at this year's General Assembly is clearly related; but we believe that we can work with the Commission on Social Witness and other groups, as well as carving out an area of study of our own that makes a unique contribution. One of our concerns, and a key corollary of our independent charge, is to address an important area of inquiry that is not being addressed elsewhere in the UUA. If there are key issues you have encountered in your work that relate to how class plays out in our Association, we would like to hear from you, especially if those issues are understudied.

We are increasingly convinced that a book, while of value, is a limited way to engage with our congregations and the broader movement. We envision more of an online, interactive platform for the report we are working on now, both in conducting our study and in publishing results. (Although a published volume would also be a good thing.) A more interactive methodology is highly consistent with our Ends, as we seek to engage more closely with UUs of all kinds in learning together. We are in

conversation with UUA staff about how they might support us in this work; we believe that both our study and our methodology amply justify this effort as consistent with our Ends.

We believe that studying class also raises some interesting questions about our congregations and our Association:

- Who are we, really? Who is in the room?
- How does our relationship to money and wealth intersect with our identities and with oppressions of race, gender, orientation, and other marginalizations?
- Are we actually a middle class movement? If so, why?
- Using a class lens, who guides the work of our congregations and our Association?
- What congregations have had notable success with integrating different classes?
- Who do we serve?
- Who benefits from the resources we have at our disposal?
- Is our funding model fair?
- How can the more privileged among us better contribute to our collective liberation?

We also recognize that we as a Commission could be diverse, more inclusive of different identities and classes, more balanced between lay members and ministers, more adept in practical skills that are needed to conduct a large project of this sort. We hope that you can help us move in that direction as we also engage with Nominating and consider Bylaws changes concerning the composition and number of members of the Commission. Among the Bylaws changes we have considered: a smaller Commission, bringing new members into the group in conjunction with the report cycle, or adapting how we work to make better use of new technologies. We do believe there is value in our independence, and we can see that the Commission might make better use of its power to place items on the agenda for General Assembly based on our work. Finally, we gather that the Board has had some discussions about our Commission, and we'd appreciate hearing any thoughts you have on how the Commission might need to evolve.

We would appreciate better communication and more clarity about our budget and the budget process, so that we can plan our work more effectively. We are certainly finding ways to have fewer face-to-face meetings and to leverage technology in conducting our study (Staff can help by identifying resources for web-based meetings). At the same time, we know that our work contributes to leadership development in our Association, that our work requires us to engage with congregations and other groups in our movement, that we can help to promote inclusion and enrich our covenant, and that we have a role in helping to transform our congregations and our Association as we move into the future.

Respectfully Submitted,
The Commission on Appraisal