

UUA Board of Trustees Annual Report 2017-2018

The Board of Trustees closed our Annual Report 2017 with these words:

“In closing we want to express our deep appreciation for the visionary and tenacious leadership of UUA Moderator Jim Key. He has been our leader and our dear friend. Ill health forced Jim to resign as Moderator but his clarity and courage remain at the center of our work. Grateful for the aspirations that continue to guide our efforts, inspired and encouraged by the leadership of our Interim Co-Presidents and our superb UUA staff and anticipating a close and creative working relationship with our newly elected president we remain committed to transforming what may seem like a crisis into an opportunity to commit ourselves and our Association to a profoundly anti-racist and richly multi-cultural future.”

Shortly thereafter Moderator Key passed away. The Board spent the early part of this year processing the loss of such a beloved leader while at the same time embracing new models of leadership within our Association.

We remain eternally grateful for the inspired leadership of the Interim Co-Presidents the Rev. Sofia Betancourt, Leon Spencer and the Rev. Bill Sinkford. Their steady guidance and spiritually sustaining presence at the helm of our Association provided a strong foundation for the new administration of UUA president, the Rev. Susan Frederick-Gray.

During the interim presidency period, the Board was made aware of several large severance packages which were granted to UUA employees who had resigned in the spring. As UU World reported:

“The Unitarian Universalist Association gave severance packages totaling more than \$500,000 to employees who voluntarily resigned during a controversy over the association’s hiring practices, according to a [statement](#) released by the UUA on June 15.”

Based upon reports from the Interim Co-Presidents regarding the process surrounding the granting of these packages, the Board, at its June 20-21st

meeting, passed several policy revisions to allow for greater transparency, notice and Board approval should similar circumstances arise in the future.

The Board continued to embrace models of shared ministry and at our August 1 meeting appointed Elandria Williams and Mr. Barb Greve as Co-Moderators. Barb and Elandria agreed to serve and be nominated for a special election at GA 2018 to serve the balance of Moderator Key's term. The Board expressed its gratitude to Vice-Moderator Denise Rimes for her leadership in the interim period between Moderator Key's resignation and the appointment of the Co-Moderators. We also expressed our appreciation of General Assembly Tri-Moderators of Gregory Boyd, Elandria Williams and Kathy Burek. We noted the continued enthusiasm and affirmation from the Association in embracing these new models of shared ministry both in the President and Moderator positions.

The fall brought some of our earliest communications from the Board appointed Commission on Institutional Change. The Commission had been previously appointed by the Board at its June 20-21st meeting as follows:

Rev. Leslie Takahashi, Chair
Caitlin Breedlove
Mary Byron
DeReau Farrar
Rev. Natalie Fenimore
Dr. Elias Ortega Aponte

The charge to the Commission, including the Commission's status as a fully independent body, was reaffirmed and we also received the first draft of its proposed budget. The budget was later approved at the Board's October meeting.

In embracing our ongoing commitment to center Anti-Racism, Anti-Oppression and Multiculturalism in our work together as a Board, our October Board Retreat brought many new forms of facilitated discussions. We recognized that creating new Board culture together would be ongoing work and that it will make many of us stretch in new ways and might often be uncomfortable. As a group we affirmed our desire to work together to move into models of shared ministry, leadership and facilitation of Board meetings and General Sessions at General Assembly.

In November the Board heard from the Moderator Search Committee requesting a revised deadline for their work around the 2019 Moderator election.

Additionally Board members volunteered for working groups tasked with reviewing Bylaw and policy proposals.

December brought an update from the Commission on Institutional Change which was in the mid-phase of their review of the Southern Regional Lead hiring process. We also heard from the Moderator Nominating Committee that they regretfully reported that they did not have any names to submit for the 2019 Moderator election. The Committee did an excellent and expansive report on the ways in which the Moderator position might need to be restructured in order to embrace new models of leadership including offering compensation, formal co-moderator structure and/or changing the position to be Board chair-focused with other responsibilities shared among Board members and UUA staff.

January's Board meeting was held at the historic Highlander Research and Education Center in North Carolina. It is a site with deep history in supporting justice making and civil rights. Co-Moderator Elandria Williams was deeply pleased to be able to welcome us there as she has been affiliated with Highlander for years as both a child, adult and most recently as an employee. The Board heard a detailed report from the Commission on Institutional Change as their work continued with new administrative assistance as well as issuing requests for proposals for the racism audit of the UUA which is part of Commission's charge.

The Board took time to review its options regarding the nomination of a Moderator for the regularly schedule election in 2019. Included in this discussion was the need to fully articulate the scope and demands of the position. Ultimately it was decided that the Board would not make a nomination and would spend time in the coming months exploring how to revise the position to be in line with current expectations as well as aspirations.

In its ongoing efforts to center collaborative leadership, prior to convening at the Highlander Center, the Board developed a bylaws working group which did an initial review of the bylaws. This group was made up of members of the Board of Trustees, UUA President, Commission on Appraisal, Reimagining the Covenant Task Force, Regional Leaders Group, Journey Towards Wholeness Transformation Committee, General Assembly Planning Committee and with consultation from all the committees accountable to the UUA Board and delegates of General Assembly. Throughout the weekend, Co-Moderator Elandria led the Board

through a robust discussion and review process around potential bylaw revisions. Clear that these were just the first of many of these reviews and discussions, the Board agreed to focus on six bylaw amendments including Youth Trustee status and Co-Moderator collaborative leadership.

Much of the weekend was also spent in direct linkage with the Board's Sources of Authority and Accountability:

- Our Member Congregations
- Current and Future Generations of Unitarian Universalists
- The Heritage, Traditions and Ideals of Unitarian Universalism
- The Vision of Beloved Community
- The Spirit of Life, Love and the Holy

We were delighted to welcome Unitarian Universalists to the Highlander Center for a series of conversations as well as to be invited to participate in discussions at a cluster gathering of UU congregations hosted by Tennessee Valley Unitarian Universalist Church. The weekend was capped off by a rousing combined worship service bringing together hundreds of UUs from the cluster area congregations.

The spring brought intense work on reviewing and editing language around the proposed Board Bylaw revisions as well as the petitioned Bylaw changes from different Unitarian Universalist groups. We also heard from the Commission on Institutional Change as to their frustration about delays in getting the Commission fully staffed. The Board acknowledged its part in not more clearly supporting the needs of the Commission and its intention to do better in the future. The Board and Commission also discussed the recent communication from the Commission to the larger Unitarian Universalist community regarding the state of crisis for religious professionals of color serving our faith. Both bodies affirmed that this state of crisis must be a top priority for both our congregations and our Association.

Also in the spring, the Board accepted a request from the Rev. Peter Morales to address the Board in closed session regarding personnel issues from spring 2017. The Board met with Rev. Morales in March with members of the Commission on Institutional Change present to help inform their review of the events of the Southern Regional Hiring of the previous spring.

The April Board meeting was focused on the previously mentioned bylaw review process, plans for General Assembly, and the current crisis of religious professionals of color serving our faith. The Board began work on a communication to our larger faith community which resulted in a 3-part series which included outlining our concern and recommendations for supporting religious professionals of color serving our faith.

As we approach General Assembly 2018 the Board is focused on leading from a place of shared ministry and faith. We are embarking on a new way of living out our Unitarian Universalist values in practicing governance from our minds *and* hearts. We invite you, our sources of Authority and Accountability, to join us as we know that [All Are Called](#) to support our faith as Unitarian Universalists.

Respectfully Submitted,
Christina Rivera
Religious Educator
Secretary of the Association, Board of Trustees
Unitarian Universalist Association