

## GA 2018 Co-Moderator Spoken Report

E: Hi I'm Elandria

B: Hi I'm Barb

Both: and we are your co-moderators!

{Barb} The theme of General Assembly this year, "All Are Called," reminds us that no one gets to take a back seat in the work of transforming our faith communities and institutions so that we may personify the Unitarian Universalism our world needs today.

This last year has been far from easy. The thing about being called is that the sort of call we're here to engage with together rarely comes from the path that is smooth, well-worn, obvious, and easy. It comes from the path that is difficult to find, challenging to stay true to, and arduous to make progress on.

When we answered the call to become your interim co-moderators, we did so in the context of our denomination's most recent awakening to and grappling with the ways white supremacy culture operates in our midst. We also did so while our faith community was still mourning the untimely death of former moderator Jim Key and celebrating the election of Rev. Susan Frederick-Gray. It was a moment of turmoil, and loss, and hope, and change. We said "yes" to this call, in part, because we couldn't be more committed to supporting this movement in embracing what the Commission on Institutional Change has framed as an "urgency around transforming the Association" to embrace "the fullness of a transformative multiculturalism as a fulfillment of our principles and heritage."

We were excited to explore collaborative leadership together, not just in our role as co-moderators but also in terms of the work of the Board and the larger context of our movement as a whole. We want to take a few minutes to share some of our learnings from the past year with you, as well as our hopes and plans for next year.

{Elandria} The first learning is that a transformed Unitarian Universalism requires transformed leadership models. A key question for us as co-moderators this year has been: What does it mean to have leader-full movements, leader-full organizations, and leader-full congregations? Specifically, what form can collaborative leadership take in these contexts?

When we make space for different leadership models, we make space for different leaders. The role of moderator, our denomination's chief governance officer and chair of the Board of Trustees, is a volunteer, unpaid position. Yet this is no ordinary volunteer gig. In the eleven months that we've been co-moderators, we have averaged one or two major trips each month, served as liaisons to no less than 30 committees, task forces, and professional organizations, and received more than 3,000 emails. This in addition to monthly Board meetings and countless conversations, phone calls, and meetings with colleagues and stakeholders. So is it any wonder that this role has traditionally been filled by someone who is retired, or well-off financially? Someone white, and cisgender, and able-bodied?

By the very nature of the scope of this role, people like us have been kept from being of service. When the highest leadership positions in our faith aren't accessible to people of color, queer and trans people, young people, folks with full-time jobs, parents, people with disabilities, people with health or family struggles, people who are financially insecure, and others who occupy the margins of our communities, our faith community misses out on so much and it is harder to dismantle the systems that marginalize and oppress people with non-dominant identities and experiences. We are working to change this. *[pause for applause]*

We want to be really clear that neither of us—as queer people, younger people, folks who don't have traditional education paths, trans and non-binary folks, and more—neither of us would be in this position of leadership without generations of those who came before us and nurtured us and chiseled away at systems that prevented people like us from being leaders. Also, neither of us would be here if it weren't for leadership development opportunities that we gained both within and outside of Unitarian Universalism. We cannot stress enough how

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important it is that time and intention is put into leadership development at every level of our denomination.

This year we've been reimagining the way leadership works within the Board—instead of top-down leadership, all Board members share leadership. So you'll be seeing all Board members up on stage this year helping to run different things.

We've also been having conversations about how our understandings of volunteer work within our movement need to shift and be more equitable. For one thing, we're working to scale the position of moderator down to focus on governance and facilitated leadership. Although the Moderator Nominating Committee did a faithful job in seeking candidates for the next moderator election, the sorts of leaders they were seeking could not commit to a volunteer role of this position's current scope. Therefore, the Board decided to postpone nominations for the 2019 election for moderator and work to reimagine the moderator position in line with the aspirations of our faith community.

{Barb} A second learning from this year is that collaborative leadership requires deeper relationships and increased communication. Not only would it have been impossible for us to serve as interim co-moderators if we didn't already have a long and loving relationship, but collaborative leadership takes putting more time and attention into our relationship. A lot of people think we are similar and agree on everything, but in fact we're really different, so working together takes hard work and lots of communication.

This extends to the Board and the entire governance of our denomination as well. So this year the Board spent a lot of time building deep group agreements, and some of the hardest ones we did in public. We asked fellow UUs, "What do you want from the Board in terms of communication? How do you want us to relate to you?"

We and the Board have also been engaging in collaborative leadership with the staff and the Administration of the UUA in new ways. It's been particularly gratifying for us to learn and lead with President Susan Frederick-Gray and Executive Vice President Carey McDonald. All four of us came into our new roles at the same time, so we are able to collectively ask questions about the norms and patterns that exist and make intentional choices about which to follow and which to disrupt in service of positive change. We are also all lifelong UUs and younger than 50 (along with all holding other marginalized identities as well), and our deep rootedness in the faith supports our dedication to working together.

Because of our collective dedication to practicing collaborative leadership, there have been new relationships, communication, and collaboration growing between the Board, the Administration, and related groups and committees—including the Commission on Institutional Change.

{Elandria} One of the biggest things we've learned this year is how many people feel unheard, unwanted, and unempowered in our movement—including leaders. To us this means we need to pause and start listening to each other more, and differently—building real relationships so we can have real conversations and honor each other. Because we believe that a faithful governance model requires empowering and listening to all voices.

We need all people who are part of this faith movement to feel as though they matter and they are wanted, needed, and honored in our governance processes—and this means finding ways for people who have historically not had a place at the table to participate and to feel valued as part of the process—for example, the masses of people who were raised UU but can't find a congregation that feeds their soul. We need to be accountable to people in congregations and people who aren't, and craft the faith that all of us hope for and long for. To practice this, one of the new things we tried this year was doing away with the traditional role of "observers" at the October meeting of the Board. We decided to fully include everyone who

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was present. We wanted to craft a different way of being, a different way of doing business, that honors all of us.

We are also working to make more space for all voices and perspectives here at GA, by setting aside three times for intentional conversations: later in this session, in small group conversations during General Session 6, and in report-backs during General Session 7.

{Barb} So where do we go from here? In direct answer to the Commission on Institutional Change, which called on the Board and the Administration to examine the current governance system in the UUA, we are embarking on completely overhauling our bylaws to make them more liberating and less confining.

As we reimagine what our faith could look and act like moving into the future, we need a smaller set of bylaws and a transformed governance model that can liberate our leaders and members to do faithful, sustaining ministry.

For example, what does it mean that we have a General Assembly where our congregations aren't all present, where large congregations have a bigger voice because of having more delegates, and where people who have left congregations because of oppression don't have a vote? This does not represent the faith we are called to be.

Over the next year there will be a bylaws review commission, a conversation guide for covenanted communities, and online and in-person opportunities to continue the discussion. GA 2019 will include many more opportunities for deep faith-rooted reflection and discussion of who we want to be as a faith and how our governance structures can help (and hinder) us, as well as strategy sessions and voting on fundamental changes.

{Barb} Our charge to you this week, if you accept it, is to join us in practicing living our highest values in community. This is not a light or easy ask, because it's hard to live our values together when we don't all agree. But we are *all called*, as Unitarian Universalists, to do so. During this General Assembly, in the next year, and beyond, as we continue to work to dismantle systems of oppression in our movement and in the world, we hope that you and UUs everywhere will engage in those conversations fully. Let us prioritize curiosity over fear of change, humility over judgment, and care over critique for critique's sake.

Reimagining our bylaws and our governance is going to take all of us—including those whose perspectives have historically not been in the room. So if you are someone who has experienced a lot of comfort in UU circles, we call on you to work to make space for those who have not. If you are someone who has struggled to remain here, we urge you to bring your perspective forward. Because all of us are called.

{Elandria} All are called to help move this movement and our faith. All are called to build spaces where community, refuge, and faith are one and the same. All are called to play a role, and to find the role that best honors our power and our purpose. All are called to be in deep relationship with all.

And we give thanks to those who have already answered the call.