

Unitarian Universalist Association 2017 Elections

DRAFT v7

Introduction

Part of the bedrock of our liberal religious community is our shared belief in the value of democracy. In 1985, the UUA General Assembly (GA) in Atlanta formally adopted the 5th Principle which is, “the right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large.” The [By-Laws and Rules](#) further define the process used to elect a president and other officials.

Voting in elections is distinct from voting on questions during a General Session at GA. Electronic voting has been in use by off-site delegates for years, but elections have always been conducted using paper ballots and postal mails. *This document focuses on the new options for voting in elections.*

The Current Election Process

1. Certification. Each year, between November 15 and February 1, congregations certify that they are qualified to send voting delegates to General Assembly. The number of delegates awarded to each congregation is primarily based on the size of that congregation.
2. Delegate Credentials Delivered. Per the Bylaws, not less than 45 days before GA starts, the UUA sends to each certified congregation credentials for the number of delegates to which it is entitled. If an election is to be held, ballots are included with the credential documents. Since 2015, electronic credentials have been sent to the congregations' primary email address and directly to the administrator, president, and ministers of the congregation well in advance of the 45-day requirement.
3. Delegate Credentials Assigned. Congregations develop processes to assign credentials to individuals who agree to serve and vote as delegates. Because credentials are sent to congregations, not individuals, the UUA cannot determine the identity of a delegate. Per UUA bylaws, no person shall cast more than one ballot.
4. Absentee Voting. Beginning June 1 at 9 am CT, a delegate may access their election ballot by following the voting link found on their delegate credential document. Per the Bylaws as amended in 2013, electronic votes may be cast any time before the polls close on election day at General Assembly (5 pm CT on June 24).

Those unable to vote electronically may request and cast a paper ballot. However, completed paper ballots must be received by the UUA Secretary no later than 7 days prior to the start of GA (Wednesday, June 14). Instructions to request a paper ballot will be included on the delegate credential document.

5. In Person Voting. Delegates attending GA may vote at an onsite polling place on election day. Equipment and assistance are available at the polling place.

6. Counting of Ballots. At GA on election day (Saturday), absentee ballots and in-person ballots are tabulated. After the polls close, the last of the ballots are counted and the results announced that evening.

How will the 2017 election be different from previous elections?

Prior to the 2013 bylaw changes:

- Before GA began, any delegate, whether they intended to attend GA or not, could vote by mailing their absentee ballot to the UUA Board Secretary so they are received no later than 7 days before the first day of GA. In recent elections, absentee ballots were a majority of the votes cast.
- At GA, any delegate who had not already voted absentee could cast a ballot in person at an onsite polling place on election day.
- A delegate who expected to vote in person at GA but did not attend would forfeit their vote unless a substitute was designated.
- Votes could be submitted only between the 45th day and the 7th day prior to GA, and while the polls were open at GA on election day.

With the bylaw changes made in 2013:

- Any delegate, whether they intend to attend GA or not, may vote electronically any time between June 1 and the closing of the polls at GA. For a delegate to cast a paper absentee ballot, it must be received by the UUA Board Secretary no later than 7 days before GA (Wednesday, June 14).
- At GA, any delegate who has not already voted may cast a ballot in person at an onsite polling place on election day.
- A delegate who expects to vote in person at GA but then does not attend may still vote online.
- Electronic ballots may be submitted any time up until the polls close on election day.

History

At the 2010 GA in Minneapolis, plans for a Justice GA in Phoenix in 2012 included a charge to the staff to make it possible for delegates to participate in the daily business of GA from off-site, if possible. Staff began preparing, and the Board of Trustees authorized a pilot program for the 2011 GA in Charlotte. The pilot was judged a success and development continued.

Concurrent with the growth and acceptance of the electronic presence of off-site delegates, folks began noticing the availability of commercial electronic voting systems and asked whether such systems could be used for electing officers, rather than continuing to rely on paper ballots and the US mail.

In response, UUA staff and interested members of the Board began investigating voting systems. The Bylaws specifically mandated the use of only paper ballots and mail, and the investigators led a project to draft changes to enable electronic voting that would eventually be approved at the 2013 General Assembly.

With the enabling Bylaw changes in place and with encouragement from Moderator Jim Key, the staff set a goal of conducting an electronic election for the next President which would be in 2017.

The GA office and Information Technology Services collaborated on due diligence of vendors, with SimplyVoting being chosen. The Bylaws offer the Secretary flexibility in implementing the process. To take advantage of the speed of electronic voting, the Secretary determined that the window for electronic absentee voting could be shortened to begin on June 1, rather than 45 days before GA.

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