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June 2015

Report to the UUA Board of Trustees and Delegates to General Assembly

Narrative

Over the past year, I have visited 16 congregations and participated in 14 conferences; and way too many webinars and conference calls to count. While my anecdotal observations cannot be extrapolated to apply throughout the Association, I see positive trends that suggest more and more clergy and lay leaders have growing confidence that the collaboration between board and staff are improving the efficacy of our governance structures. Moreover, the focus of the Board and staff on monitoring progress toward our [Ends](#), or Shared Vision, has been noticed and appreciated.

My observations from these visits and interactions can be catalogued into three broad areas that bear reporting: *the concern of a few that the Board of Trustees' reimagining-governance initiatives appear to be an attempt to concentrate power, the challenge of making GA more inclusive and financially accessible, and the need to recognize that covenant is both a noun and a verb.*

First, I sometimes hear a concern that the Board of Trustees' reimagining-governance initiatives appear to be an attempt to concentrate power. There are several initiatives that have created some anxiety in the system:

- the move to a smaller board of two years ago,
- the recent movement of four districts in the Southern Region to dissolve their governance structures and rely on the UUA Board as the singular governance entity,
- the proposed bylaw amendment this year to change the Commission on Appraisal to a smaller appointed rather than elected commission, as well as

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- the proposed bylaw amendment to remove the ability of districts and regions to place bylaw amendment and business resolutions on the Tentative Agenda.

All of these initiatives are seen by some as an attempt to concentrate power. I don't see it that way. Over time, we - meaning all of us - had developed systems and practices of governance that kept us focused on the internal workings of governance and our association. We must do better than this. The model the Board, and I as Moderator, are working toward is intended to free up not only our staff but also literally hundreds of talented volunteers to do the work of bringing our faith to life. The Board has developed, continues to develop, new models for broad based inclusion and input to governance decisions. As the Moderator and we as a board must continue our efforts of modeling and communicating our work at transparency and linkage with our [Sources of Authority and Accountability](#) to better frame our work and efforts to balance the cost of governance with the benefits to our congregations.

While we have been live-streaming our board meetings when meeting in Boston; posting our board agenda, packets, and minutes on the website; and hosting post-board meeting and pre-GA webinars; but we are still not reaching many people. We are committed to finding ways to make better use of social media to communicate and demonstrate our transparency and encourage feedback.

As I travel the country, I have spoken to these issues, and that all of these governance-related changes are in fact for the purpose of making the governance structure more accountable and accessible to congregations and other [Sources of Authority and Accountability](#). My congregational visits and our board linkage activities have spoken to the need for more congregations to elect, charge, send, and financially support delegates to General Assemblies that are more inclusive and who will be accountable to the congregations. These delegate attributes are essential if we are to create a representative delegate body that is essential to our democratic aspirations.

Second, the challenge of making GA more inclusive and financially accessible comes up over and over in linkage conversations and surveys. As I reported earlier in the year, I propose creating a pilot scholarship program for the General Assembly in Columbus, OH in 2016. The objective of the project would be to attract traditionally under-represented constituencies as delegates that would otherwise not be asked or able to attend. Partnering with the GA Planning

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Committee, we would expect to increase the number of delegates by ten percent over our current ad hoc approach. This pilot scholarship program will be partially funded by a special collection at GA on Saturday that would provide seed money to jump-start the pilot for 2016. Additionally, we would engage the Stewardship and Development staff to ensure the special collection is appropriately monitored to ensure donors' intentions are honored. If the pilot meets the objectives, then we would make these scholarship funds part of the governance budget in future years.

The program imagines that congregations who participate would seek to select youth, young adult, people of color, and other historically marginalized people to represent those congregations at GA 2016. The registration fee would be born by the pilot program, and the congregation would be expected to underwrite some of the travel expenses in conjunction with other funding sources available in districts and regions. There would be pre-GA web meetings to prepare these delegates for their responsibilities, orient them to the process, and support them during GA. There would be post-GA web meetings and surveys to assess the success of the program in targeting a different demographic to the delegate body and congregations who have not sent delegates in recent years.

Third and finally, the need to recognize that covenant is both a noun and a verb. Too often, I see congregational leaders speak of covenant only in the context of controlling unhealthy behaviors rather than an expression of how we manifest our love for one another and the world. Covenant is both the commitment and the means to practice engagement in community. It is both a noun – the promise itself – and a verb – the practice that manifests the promise. It is the collective commitment to and practices of religious community that we embrace when we say we are a covenantal faith tradition rather than a creedal one. Covenanting, the gerund, must be intentional if we are to counter the forces of individual isolation and institutional drift.

We need to explore over the next months how we might change the conversation from membership to mutual covenant. What we have seen as we discussed emerging congregations and covenanting communities over the past year is that the practice of covenanting has energized some groups that appeared to be isolated and static. Let's imagine, rather than signing the book, people entered and were welcomed into covenant that could be renewed periodically. Imagine if congregations entered and were welcomed into covenant with the

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larger association that would be renewed periodically. Perhaps this is an approach that would energize our movement and attract individuals who are increasingly uninterested in membership in yet another organization, but desire to get and stay connected, to probe for and express affiliation. Perhaps this process of covenanting is an activating impulse that connects our personal commitments in community, drawing individuals together to co-create a world of more love, justice, and peace.

I will ask the board at our October meeting to consider how we might imagine moving from the notion of membership to one of covenant.

Congregational and other visits

August 15, Columbia, SC – represented UUA at graduation of Rev. Jake Morrill from Chaplaincy School at Ft. Jackson

September 21, Oak Ridge, TN – participated in the ordination of Tandy Scheffler

October 5, Lincroft, NJ – spoke at services of UU Congregation of Monmouth County

October 11, Richmond, VA – participated in the dedication of remodeled facility of First Unitarian Universalist Church of Richmond

October 24, Berkeley, CA – Conducted a leadership workshop for Pacific Central District

October 25, Oakland, CA – Preached at First UU Church of Oakland

November 1, Athens, GA – Was Keynote speaker at 60th Anniversary Celebration of First UU Congregation of Athens

November 2, Athens, GA – Conducted town hall meeting between services

January 25 – UU Church of Aiken, met with leadership, preached

February 8 – First UU Society of Sacramento, preached

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February 9 – UU Church of Davis, met with leadership, Town Hall meeting

February 22 – UU Church of Bloomington (IN), met with leadership, preached

March 7 – UU Church of Birmingham, recognized contributions during the Voting Rights marches in Alabama in 1965

March 20 – Met with emerging congregation group in Pinehurst, NC

March 21 – Town Hall meeting at UU Fellowship of Raleigh

March 22 – Guest at morning Forum to discuss Selma experience, preached at service

April 17 – Met with board of Granite Hills UU Congregation, Prescott

April 18 – Keynote for Albert Lovejoy dinner, Prescott

April 19 – Preached at Granite Hills UU Congregation, Prescott

May 3 – Participated in Installation of Rev. Sarah Stewart, First UU Worcester

May 9 – Participated in Ordination of Pat Owen, First UU Richmond

May 24 – Preached at UU Fellowship of Beaufort (SC)

Meetings with committees and organizations

July 12, Atlanta, GA – Represented UUA at SCLC HQs with Jubilee Committee to plan and celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the Selma to Montgomery Voting Rights March of March 1965

November 6-8, Boston, MA – Met with District Presidents Association

November 13, San Diego, CA – Met with Susan Weaver on board business

November 14-16, Boston, MA – Met with President's Council

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January 8-10, Columbus, OH – Met with GAPC

January 12-13, Boston, MA – Met with Appointments Committee

January 20 – Teleconference with Safety Net (First UU Nashville) to plan GA workshop on CSM National Conversation

January 24 – Google Hangout meeting with Luminary Leaders (with Peter Morales)

January 28 – Video conference with representatives of CCCE to set meeting site and date (June 29-30, Portland following GA), and to assess charge from the board

February 16-17 – Met with Donna Harrison and Susan Weaver to plan General Sessions for GA Portland

March 5-8 – Participated in the Living Legacy Project's Marching in the Arc of Justice Conference in Birmingham and Selma, AL

March 24 – Met with Journey Towards Wholeness Transformation Committee via video conference

April 8 – Met with MFC in Boston

April 9-12 – Met with GA Planning Committee in Portland

April 30 – Attended UUSC's 75th Anniversary in Boston

June 3-5 – Participated in Summit on Economic Sustainability of Ministries in St. Louis