
Open UUA Committee – Annual Report

2016/2017

Date: June 28, 2017

Subject: Report to the UUA Board of Trustees

From: Cheri Cody, Chair; The Rev. Christian Schmidt; Rev. Shawna Foster

To: UUA Board of Trustees

The year from July 1, 2016 through June 30, 2017 has been a year of changes and transition for the Open UUA Committee. As of June 30, 2016 there were three people on the Open UUA Committee: Dick Jacke (outgoing chair); Matthew Weinstein (presumed chair); and Cheri Cody, member. Dick was elected to the UUA Board of Trustees so could not continue on this committee. The Appointments Committee recommended The Rev. Christian Schmidt be appointed to fill one of the openings on the committee effective July 1; this was approved at the Board of Trustees June meeting at GA. In mid-August 2016, Matthew decided that his other commitments precluded him from continuing on this committee and he submitted his resignation. Cheri was appointed chair of this committee in October 2016 following which, she and Christian held the first formal meeting of the committee since 2016 GA. Rev. Shawna Foster was appointed to the committee at the end of January 2017 thus bringing the number of members to three, which is the membership level recommended by the Board. In discussions at our June 24 meeting, we agree that a committee of three members is sufficient to fulfill our charge at this time.

In spite of these challenges it has been a productive year for the Open UUA Committee and here are our accomplishments:

Reorganization:

In communications with Dick Jacke and Tim Atkins, we learned that some of our activities overlapped with that of the Board Committees Working Group so that Group has encouraged us to keep doing our work and they will review our reports. Staff liaison, Stephanie Carey Maron, has been tremendously helpful, especially for Cheri as the new chair, but also for the entire committee in explaining budgets, posting meeting invitations on the webpage, and responding quickly to our questions.

Communications with Committee Chairs:

In January 2017, we sent out an introductory email to current committee chairs which included some history of the committee, the wording of Rule G-2.1, and a description of our interpretation of effective transparency. We also attached a copy of the most recent version of the transparency guidelines which had last been updated in 2013. We invited committee chairs to contact us at any time and that we hoped to meet some of them at GA in 2017.

Update of Transparency Guidelines:

In follow-up to a question about instructions in the transparency guidelines, it was apparent that the guidelines were in need of a thorough review and updating. In checking with our staff liaison, we found that some of the contact emails were no longer in existence and other instructions were outdated. The guidelines were updated and with our liaison's help, active links were included to a couple of items for those accessing the guidelines on the webpage. The new guidelines were included in the 2017 committee chair manual which should eliminate some confusion. Updated guidelines were also sent with the Review of Committee Webpages discussed below.

Conduct Review of Committee Webpages:

Every couple of years, the Open UUA Committee conducts a review of the webpages of the UUA Committees to ensure that they are being transparent by posting member lists, contact information, meeting times, etc. on their UUA webpage. We completed that review in May 2017 and recorded results for the following areas: Listing of committee members, contact information, e-mail sign-up list; Committee charge; Dates, times of meetings posted; Advance notice of meetings given; Agendas, reports, and other supporting materials available on timely basis before meetings; Observers accommodated at meetings (including teleconference); Minutes posted on site in timely manner; and any other general relevant comments. This year the Open UUA Committee went beyond just reviewing by emailing the results to each committee chair in June so they would have the opportunity to make any corrections needed. We have received appreciative feedback from some committees for sending this information to them for updating. We had a question from the Music Leadership Certification Committee (MLCC) about whether they were subject to the review; Cheri explained that we reviewed all committees that were on the committee list sent to our committee. ***The question of which committees are covered by Rule G2.1 has been submitted to the Board of Trustees by this committee in previous years and it would be good to have the Board give firm guidance to us and the committees on this issue.***

Appointments Committee:

We have been in communication with our contact on the Appointments Committee in recent months to ensure that a new chair would be in place on July 1 when Cheri reaches the end of her third term; Christian Schmidt has been recommended. The Appointments Committee has also identified a replacement for the open position effective July 1 and both recommendations will be submitted to the UUA Board for approval at their June 2017 meeting.

Increasing Connections:

In a conversation with our staff liaison about the Openness mailing list, we discussed transitioning the list to a discussion forum. That has not yet been finalized. However, in June 2017 Christian created a Facebook page for the Open UUA Committee and we invited our UU Facebook friends to visit the page. We have had many views and will continue to add relevant content so that the page is truly useful to those who visit. We are pleased that we have expanded our social media presence and given UU's another opportunity to engage.

GA 2017:

We took assignments to attend multiple workshops/meetings at General Assembly. These include nominating/appointments, business mini assemblies, social witness, recovenanting, Commission on Appraisal, and the MFC. Here are some brief reactions:

- UUA Candidate/Nominating Appointments – Some candidates were in attendance but it would have been helpful if facilitators had explained at the start why not all candidates were there (e.g., had conflict with other workshop, etc.). These were not competitive nominations so an initial explanation about the petition process would have clarified this. It wasn't clear where attendees could obtain bios of nominees to learn about them. The facilitators referenced a brochure about their process but it was not available in the room; participants were told to go to the webpage to see it. Having brochures would be more transparent and possibly encourage more interest in being nominated.
- MFC – Aspiring to be Learning Committee/Community – Excellent presentation, good introductions, open and receptive to suggestions. A concern is that there is a very clear path for Final Fellowship if in a parish context. However, it is less clear for those in community ministry, especially if not connected to a parish or a congregation doesn't have the resources for affiliation. No committee contact info was distributed.
- Business Mini Assembly #1 – First principle by-law – Good structure, good introduction. Lots of process questions that bogged down discussion but did approve two amendments. Very open with invitation to talk. Not sure how accommodated offsite participants but there was feedback from offsite so it did happen.
- Business Mini Assembly #2 – Board accountability bylaw – Discussion on changing “men and women” to people. The purpose of the meeting was unclear since, at the end, it could be that none of what was discussed would go back to larger assembly. Straw poll seemed meaningless with too many options for “fist-to-five.”
- Commission on Appraisal – Struggle with Class – All members were present and introduced themselves through a description of their history and class. It was very effective. Participants broke into twosomes and gave a similar introduction to their partner. Excellent combination of reporting and interacting.
- Collective Liberation Decision-Making/Reflections for UU Social Witness – Felt like there was no beginning or end. Leaders explained the process differently and it didn't seem well organized. An upfront scripted explanation of what would happen during the workshop may have helped. Not enough time to do well and only a few minutes for small groups to talk.
- Social Witness – This was a workshop on community organizing for an issue so not necessarily a workshop related to transparency. Very few people attended and it was difficult to find a topic that the participants wanted to work on, so stressful for presenters. They did salvage it by taking two smaller issues and, in collaboration with participants, posting information on the GA app.
- Recovenanting for the Future – This was an excellent workshop even though it was not supposed to be scheduled. Two members of the task force came when they heard that it was scheduled. They did a great job of explaining the history and the general plan for doing congregational conventions. There were lots of questions and good discussion and a positive reaction to this alternative to GA effort to enhance covenantal connections.

After observing multiple workshops, we believe that we could make general recommendations for presenters to make their offerings more understandable and helpful to participants. Christian will write a proposal/recommendations for this and it will be posted on our webpage and on our Facebook page.

Recommendations to the Board:

Following are our recommendations to the UUA Board of Trustees which include items from our experiences this year as well as renewed requests from this committee's previous report to the Board from January 2016. Recommendations are in bold italic font.

1. Provide Committee Chair Orientation Each Year

This request has been made in the past and we renew the request to make sure committee chairs have access to an orientation each year. For someone who is a new committee chair, it is bewildering to figure out how to navigate the processes required by the UUA. Ideally, there would be a good transition from one chair to the next, but if neither has had committee chair orientation then what is transitioned may not be correct. The orientation manual is appreciated and hopefully it is also reviewed and updated annually.

2. Provide Enforcement of Transparency Guidelines / Ensure staff liaison assistance

This year this committee forwarded to committee chairs our findings from reviewing their webpages. Some committees were very delinquent in their postings on the webpage and in one case, a committee member had died but was still on the member list. We understand how hard it is to be a volunteer and keep up with all of this task work. We encourage committee chairs to get the assistance of their staff liaison but the assistance varies widely among liaisons. One committee chair said they didn't use their UUA webpage for anything that needed to happen quickly because it would take the liaison a few days to get anything posted. This particular committee then used their list serve as the tool for quick communication which doesn't make it transparent to all. This process must be fixed so that agendas can be posted in advance, observers can be accommodated, and interested persons know who to contact. The Open UUA Committee will also note that people can contact them if there are concerns and we can refer to the Board Committees Working Group if appropriate. ***The Open UUA Committee can only inform, it cannot enforce Rule G2.1. We encourage the Board to communicate with each committee and clearly state the Board's expectations on transparency and what the consequence would be for noncompliance (e.g., change in committee chair). The Board must also ensure that the staff liaison is responsive to the committee's request (post items within one work day) so the committee is not reprimanded for action they cannot control.***

3. Maintaining Committee Records Online

In the January 2016 report to the Board from this committee, we asked for guidance on how long records (minutes, agendas, reports, etc.) should be kept online for each committee. ***It is the current opinion of the Open UUA Committee that records could be kept indefinitely given the resources of cloud storage.*** The UUA tech department would have better information on the capacity of our storage resources. If documents would need to be transferred to an archive, we would ask that the information still be readily accessible to those who want to research the history of the Board of Trustees or UUA committees.

This concludes our report; we look forward to your response.