

Re-Imagining Governance Working Group
October 17, 2015
Proposal for Reimagining Governance

A. Background.

Over the past two years, the Reimagining Governance Group has had several Board and linkage conversation on ways to transform the Association's governance process and General Assembly. Our task is informed by the [2010 Motion on Transforming Governance](#), more recent Board statements and Board and linkage conversations.

1. Board Statements. The UUA Board in April 2014 accepted a "set of principles and areas of agreement" during its "Strengthening GA" discussion, which reflected "areas of broad agreement based on what we have heard through a variety of linkage sources." :

- *We want a process and gathering for Unitarian Universalism that is more inclusive and less privileged than what we experience at General Assembly today.*
- *We are committed to making the changes needed to assure that the cost of participation is not an obstacle to inclusion. We believe that it is the work of both the congregations and the UUA together to find the funds to make this happen.*
- *We want delegates to be informed, accountable, and prepared both intellectually and spiritually.*
- *We know that delegates will need support in this work.*
- *We envision a gathering where congregations discuss, discern, and articulate the theological and cultural direction for Unitarian Universalism.*
- *We also need ways for congregations to provide or governance direction to the UUA. This may or may not be accomplished through large physical gatherings of Unitarian Universalists.*
- *The current forms and practice of governance at General Assembly are not welcoming and inclusive to all, and it is important that we make changes to address this.*

- *We envision a model where we leverage 21st technology to enable broad based participation in the work of our Association.*
- *We recognize that many opportunities for learning and leadership development happen at GA. We believe that these experiences are important, and we are open to new ways for these services to be delivered.*
- *We are willing to give up our privilege to enable the gathering(s) that fulfill these principles.*
- *The Board is prepared to change our bylaws, our processes, and our customs as needed to fulfill this vision.*

2.Board and Linkage Conversations. Since that time, we have had continuing Board and linkage discussions regarding the transformation of governance and our General Assembly. The most important learnings will be cited in this proposal. The following is a reference guide to summaries of those conversations.

1. [GA 2014 Workshop and Fall 2014 Survey Re: Draft Values and Principles](#)
2. [October 2014 Board Discussion](#)
3. [November-December 2015 Re-Imagining Governance Survey](#)
4. [November-December 2015 Re-Imagining Governance Congregational Dialogues](#)
5. [Engaging Congregations Discussions](#)
6. GA 2015 Workshop

B. Discussion Items and Proposal

We are not proposing bylaw changes in 2016. That does not mean we are simply resting from changing them for more effective and meaningful governance. Such revision is related to issues yet under review or which the Board has discussed reviewing—our Committee structures, our CSW process, our Article II process. Other issues intertwined with those is the overall extent of detailed processes enshrined in the bylaws, our understanding of the purposes of General Assembly, questions of the role of covenanting communities in our governance, the manner in which we now engage delegates in our governance process--and the ways future generations will want to engage.

But change can begin now. Beyond continuing the Bylaws discussion, we do propose the Board prepare for General Assembly 2016 as a time of experimentation with some of our General Session processes, and that the Board continue to discern the larger issues of transformation needed, while keeping our discussions focused on specific sections of our Bylaws.

1. The Larger Question--The Powers and Duties of General Assemblies--UUA Bylaw C-4.2

Gil Rendle, in his monograph, "[*Waiting for God's New Thing: Spirit and Organizational Leadership in the In-Between Time*](#)", cautions us to be aware of what transformation really is. He notes how easy it is, in times of deep change, to believe one is creating something new when one is simply going after the low-hanging fruit.

UUA Bylaw C-4.2 states "*General Assemblies shall make overall policy for carrying out the purposes of the Association and shall direct and control its affairs.*"

Does Bylaw C-4.2 continue to accurately and fully describe the purposes of our General Assemblies, as envisioned in our Board statements and linkage discussions? The answer may very well be a resounding yes, but consider:

- In our 2015 survey, a large number of those responding felt that essential or very important to more effective governance was that "*Delegates (and through them their congregations) have deeper connections to the larger UU movement.*" There was also great interest in "*Increas[ing] training, preparation and accountability for delegates.*" However, there was markedly less interest in actually *requiring* specific commitments to greater accountability (such as a multi-year commitment from delegates). And in other linkage, the suggestion that greater "accountability" could be achieved has been met with some skepticism--at least, *not without greater engagement on issues that matter to congregations.* If we do not impose additional accreditation requirements on delegates, could we create greater engagement by delegates by re-framing the duties of General Assemblies?
- The most recent linkage focused on how to improve relationship and engagement of congregations with delegates and General Assembly, and delegates with congregations and the issues before General Assembly. One question asked how gatherings "might be more about shared experiences and discussion that *inform who we are in the world, to help us discern our primary and achievable goals as an association.*"
- The Board report at GA 2015 stated "we envision a governance process that is more engaging, fun and meaningful" and "an agenda that is dominated by issues that *really matter to the future of our faith and our Association.*"
- Is there a way, as an association of congregations, to discern our primary and achievable goals and still respect our congregational polity?
- Does Bylaw C-4.2 lack language of covenant or relationship, or lack definition of the role of delegates in General Assembly? Should it suggest the role of discernment and discussion by delegates is important? Or is all of that language best left out of Bylaw C-4.2? In "reimagining governance," are we only talking about our practices--but not the not powers or duties of General Assemblies?

The implication of re-framing our purpose would be a deeper engagement with delegates. Dialogue would not simply be through Responsive Resolutions or voting in General Sessions, however important they are in our democratic process. There would be a greater responsibility on the Board for preparing materials and holding discussions in a way that educates delegates and learns from them, invites voices and respects and welcomes our diversity.

Consider the *tone* of the United Church of Christ in stating the purpose of its General Synod-- inviting discussion and reminding of covenant:

The General Synod *deliberates, discerns, and identifies* the mission of the wider church of the United Church of Christ in God's world and receives and *offers suggestions, invitations, challenges, and assistance in covenant* with Local Churches, Conferences, and other settings as they engage in mission together. (italics added) (Article IX, sec. 53 of the UCC Constitution)

As we have discussions of what covenanting, rather than membership, means in our congregations and Association, we should include what it means in governance.

2. Remove Financial Barriers to Inclusion and Encourage Participation by a More Diverse Group of Delegates. The **two greatest concerns** that we have heard in our 2015 linkage survey and dialogues with congregations were (1) the need to reduce economic barriers to participation and (2) the need to increase participation by young adults, lower income people, and people of color.

- In the 2015 survey of 900 Unitarian Universalists, the following characteristics were found most essential to a more effective, democratic and inclusive General Assembly and UUA governance.:
 - 1. Economic barriers to participation are reduced
 - 2. There is increased participation by young adults, lower income people, people of color and others whose inclusion supports our progressive future.
- In the 2015 Congregational Dialogues, the highest priority for effective governance was increased participation by young adults, lower income people, people of color & others whose inclusion represents our progressive future.

The Board, to support bringing a more diverse delegate body to GA,, can :

Support the pilot scholarship program for GA 2016. A special collection at GA 2015 raised \$18,860 for a pilot scholarship program proposed Key. The goal of

the program is to encourage traditionally under-represented constituencies to serve as congregational delegates. Features of the scholarship program will include:

- Scholarship funds will be available for youth, young adults, people of color, lower income people and others who represent historically underrepresented constituencies, including those who otherwise would not be able to attend General Assembly.
- Applications for the program will be available beginning in March, just as other current GA scholarship programs are.
- Available scholarships will be granted in the order of applications received.
- Whether an applicant meets eligibility criteria will simply be certified on the application form by a minister or Board president serving the congregation the delegate represents.
- The minister or Board president must also certify that the congregation is also providing some financial assistance to the delegate to attend GA as a delegate. For this pilot program, we will not set a minimum amount of assistance. However, we should consider a requirement that congregations are not *decreasing* their average financial assistance due to the availability of scholarship funds.

These funds should not only cover registration fees but some travel costs as well. In our January meeting we should have more detail of the number of likely scholarships available in this pilot year.

- The Board needs to ensure congregations know the scholarship funds are available. The Reimagining Governance and Communications WG should ensure the availability of these funds is known to ministers and lay leaders of congregations, and encourage applications. This outreach should begin well before March.
- All scholarship recipients will be asked, as part of the evaluation of the program, to confirm that they were provided some financial assistance by their congregations.
- A suggested benchmark for success is a 10% increase in the average delegate attendance due to the availability of scholarships. Given the uncertainty on the number of scholarships that may be funded this year, a different benchmark may be that at 80% of scholarship funds are used by eligible delegates.
- If benchmarks of success are reached in 2016, the Board in October 2016 should consider amending its procedures to include scholarship funding as appropriately included in its governance budget.

Motion: The Reimagining Governance Working Group and Communications Working Group shall ensure that the Pilot GA 2016 Scholarship Program is well-defined and that the availability of and eligibility for funds is communicated to ministers and lay leaders of congregations, and to congregations through all available Board communications channels. The Linkage Working Group shall design pre-GA webinars to support scholarship recipients and post-GA materials for evaluation of the program's success.

2. Create a More Meaningful Agenda in General Sessions.

In the 2015 linkage, we learned that priorities for effective governance also included (1) more opportunities for learning and facilitated conversation in General Sessions, (2) better preparation of delegates to enrich discussion and decision-making, (3) General Assemblies with alternative focus—i.e., one year governance, one year social justice. Several steps could be taken to create a more engaging agenda that addresses these concerns:

- a. Fewer Reports in General Assembly; Receipt of Reports Electronically.**
Reporting to delegates takes up a substantial portion of General Session time. Many reports are required in our Bylaws to be placed on the Tentative Agenda and submitted to the General Assembly, including reports from the Commission on Appraisal (Sec. 5.9) , the Commission on Social Witness (Rule G-4.12.1)the Board of Trustees (Sec. 6.15), the Moderator, President, Financial Advisor and Treasurer (Sec.8.19), and UUA Administration (Rule G-4.12.3). Also, Responsive Resolutions are permitted in response to a substantive portion of a report by an officer or committee reporting to a General Assembly.

Certainly delegates need information on the affairs of the Association; it is part of transparency and required for informed decision-making and an effective democratic process. The Board should consider if it adequately takes advantage of other means (video or other electronic submissions) to provide reports to delegates at General Assembly that provide accessibility and greater flexibility with General Sessions time.

Reports *not* required by the bylaws also take significant time of the agenda. Many reports increase delegates' understanding of the mission and success of committees, programs, related institutions and associate members.

Decisions on use of time in the General Sessions is a Board role that falls largely on the Moderator, The Board needs to weigh the value of the information received in General Sessions against the need for other learning and facilitated conversation.

Motion: That the following Procedure 3.1.L be added to the UUA Board Procedural Document:

“The CGO, as representative of the Board in planning the General Session schedule of the General Assemblies, shall strive to provide opportunities for delegates to (1) be informed of the affairs of the Association and (2) discuss matters of importance that assist them in carrying out their duties.”

b. Create a More Inclusive and Richer Discussion. Our linkage discussions have confirmed that we do not meaningfully engage delegates and that our processes, which frustrate that engagement, are not welcoming and inclusive.

i. Consider revision of the unincorporated amendments process in General Sessions. The majority of the Working Group are concerned that consideration of unincorporated amendments in General Sessions does not strengthen our democratic process and takes considerable time in General Sessions. The Board should consider whether it wants to modify procedural rules in 2016 regarding this process. One suggestion (short of eliminating the discussion of unincorporated amendments in General Sessions) is to encourage attendance and dialogue in the mini-Assemblies by only bringing to the General Sessions those unincorporated amendments that receive support of more than 50% of delegates in mini-Assemblies

Amending the procedural rules will not affect the AIW process with respect to unincorporated amendments, which is provided for in Bylaw 4.16(5).

The procedural rules could also be amended to provide that time at the procedural mic is not counted against time for debate. This would actually increase General Session time but would ensure adequate debate time for substantive issues.

ii. Create longer mini-Assembly sessions, that allows for more in-depth learning and discussion in a less structured process. We are planning at GA 2016 to schedule mini-Assemblies in the last program slot of the day, so that if time is needed to extend discussion, there is an opportunity to do so. We also are reviewing education and trainings for moderators of all mini-Assemblies to ensure the process allows for full discussion of proposed amendments.

iii. Create break-out sessions for delegates on issues important to congregations and the future of the Association. We envision smaller facilitated discussions of 50-100 delegates. Facilitation guides could be provided in advance with the intent of providing information and asking questions that promote learning from delegates' ideas, experiences and opinions. Issues could be broad ("role of prophetic voice in liberal religion") or could address specific challenges to congregations and the Association ("challenges of sustaining ministry"). Results could be reported back to the General Assembly and to congregations. For the Board, it would be a form of linkage and communication. Such discussions might also inform Article II and Ends reviews . It would be the responsibility of the Board to prepare delegates for such discussions, and ensure the process is inclusive and welcoming.

One possible topic for GA 2016 is "From Membership to Covenanting", drawing on the Moderator and Board discussions of moving from a notion of membership in the Association to one of mutual covenanting. Would this approach energize our movement?

iv. Propose Bylaw Amendments, Rule Changes or Business Resolutions Every Other Year. In our linkage discussions, there was interest in alternating the themes of our General Assemblies—Justice GA , Governance GA. The Board could adopt a procedural rule to, as a general practice, introduce bylaw amendments every other year. Before considering whether such a procedural rule is really in the best interests of the Association, we suggest the Board this year exercise some self-discipline to keep the agenda as uncrowded as possible to allow for other discussions and focus.