

## Commission on Social Witness Meeting



Notes – 2015 GA

**Commissioners present:** Richard Bock, David Breeden, Caitlin Cotter, Susan Goekler (Chair), Christina Sillari

**Staff/consultant present:** Gretchen Miller

### **6/23/2015**

Susan Goekler convened the meeting at 7:10 p.m. in the Portland Room of the Doubletree Hotel, Portland OR and began with a review of the CSW covenant adopted in August. She introduced Gretchen Miller, the new CSW administrative assistant for the GA; then we checked-in. Susan reviewed the GA agenda and the Commissioners' assignments for program. She asked Commissioners to help staff the exhibit, especially Wednesday afternoon and Thursday when people will be preparing AIWs. We created a schedule for Commissioners for Wednesday afternoon in the booth.

We discussed the processes for SOC mini-assembly, including who would facilitate each discussion group. We also discussed the orientation for the CSW volunteers.

Gretchen distributed CSW caps for use during plenaries and while on duty in the exhibit hall. Susan will be giving a CSW report at the Thursday morning plenary and asked all Commissioners to be present.

The Commissioners, staff, volunteers, and significant others will have dinner Sunday night. Gretchen will find a location and make a reservation after checking volunteers to determine whether any will be able to join us. Caitlin will leave Sunday afternoon, so will not participate.

Adjourned at ?? p.m.

**No meeting Wednesday, June 24.**

### **6/25/15**

Susan Goekler convened the meeting at 10:30 a.m. The CSW had received 7 pages of proposed SOC amendments electronically that the advisory group planned to submit at the SOC mini-assembly. We decided to review those prior to the SOC mini-assembly to determine whether there were any potential landmines. Although no amendments can be officially submitted until the mini-assembly, we decided whether there were some that were easy fixes that we could agree on, in case they were eventually submitted at the mini-assembly. This was not standard practice, but knowing that the time for considering amendments after the mini-assembly was tight, we decided to deviate from normal practice. Adjourned at 12:30 p.m.

Reconvened at 6:00 p.m. Caitlin and Richard were not present – they were participating in the Service of the Living Tradition. We reviewed all the proposed amendments and agreed on those that the three

Commissioners deemed non-substantive. After Caitlin and Richard joined us at 9:15 p.m. Jyaphia Christos-Rodgers, the incoming appointed Commissioner, also joined as an observer and stayed for about one hour. Commissioners reviewed the amendments pertinent to their assigned section of the SOC. Each Commissioner took the lead for the CSW's discussion of his/her section. For proposed amendments that substantively changed the content of the SOC, we agreed to leave them unincorporated. Since congregations had not had a chance to see those additions in order to offer comments, Commissioners thought it best for the delegates to discuss and make those decisions.

For each unincorporated amendment, we provided a brief explanation of our reason for leaving it as unincorporated. We then prioritized the unincorporated amendments. Those that were editorial or grammatical were placed at the end of the list. Those that were substantive were at the top with ones that had generated the most support in the small groups at the mini-assembly first.

We adjourned at 11:30 p.m. Then Susan and Gretchen stayed to prepare the CSW Alert.

### **June 26, 2015**

We met at 5:30 p.m. All Commissioners and Gretchen were present and Jyaphia again joined as observer for the first half of the session. Before considering the AIWs, Susan reported on an amendment proposer complaining that her unincorporated amendment was so low in the list that it did not get consideration. The proposer challenged the criteria for prioritization and Susan admitted that the process is somewhat arbitrary. In the coming year, we will spend time creating a more definitive and deliberate prioritization process. The same amendment proposer also complained that in one small group the Commissioner facilitator apparently had fore-knowledge of amendments to be considered and gave preference to one individual. During the CSW meeting, the Commissioner involved accepted responsibility and the Commission agreed that reviewing proposed amendments prior to the mini-assembly was a complicating factor. Commissioners agreed to be careful about maintaining neutrality and giving equal voice to all in the future.

After confirming that all 9 submitted AIWs had the required number and diversity of signatures, Commissioners read each full text AIW independently and individually rated each using a 10 point scale for the published criteria 1, 2, 4, 5, and 6 below (with 10 being high). Any submission that did not use civil language would be disqualified or the proposer asked to revise. Because we had not distributed recent AIWs, we also did not consider recent AIWs. Commissioners then shared scores verbally and discussed the score if there were differences of opinion. Susan declared a conflict of interest on an AIW submitted by her husband and did not score it or participate in discussion of it. Scores were averaged, taking into account the number of Commissioners scoring each (thus the one that Susan did not score was not penalized for her missing numbers.)

Published AIW criteria:

- 1) An issue that requires **immediate** action for our witness to make an impact
- 2) An issue that is **specific** and that is too narrow to merit three years of study and action that define the Congregational Study/Action Issue process
- 3) An issue that does not duplicate a recent AIW
- 4) An issue that is **grounded** in our Unitarian Universalist theology and practice
- 5) An issue that **fits** with our member congregations' capacity to take meaningful action

- 6) An issue that presents **opportunity** for our member congregations to become respected participants in public dialogue
- 7) An issue that is crafted in civil language

Two proposed AIWs clearly scored lower than the others. Three others were within a point of each other – which was too narrow a range to use scores alone for a decision about eliminating one more proposed AIW. After discussing those three, we decided to eliminate the one that was most complex, hardest to comprehend, and addressed an issue on which the US Senate had taken action this week, making some of the calls to action moot.

Each Commissioner agreed to let one or more AIW proposer know our decision and whether the proposer needed to be prepared a 2 minute “pitch” for the General Session the next morning.

We reviewed processes for counting AIW votes during the Saturday morning general session. Counters (Commissioners, tellers and CSW volunteers) will use slash tally marks to record the three selections on each ballot. Susan will use an excel spreadsheet for recording each person’s tallies and add them quickly.

We discussed the plan for the AIW mini-assemblies. We assigned AIW rooms to Commissioners and clarified that David would facilitate the offsite delegate mini-assembly. Off site delegates would consider all three AIWs. Onsite delegates would attend a mini-assembly for one AIW. We discussed how to lead the AIW mini-assemblies. As soon as we knew which 3 AIWs were selected, Gretchen would take them to the printer. Commissioners were to pick up full text copies of their assigned draft AIW and amendment forms and take them to their assigned mini-assembly room. Susan would float during the mini-assemblies.

Susan and Gretchen stayed to prepare CSW alert for Saturday tomorrow morning.

Meeting adjourned at 10:00 p.m.

## **6/27/14**

In the morning, we met with tellers and counted ballots to select 3 AIWs.

Susan convened a meeting at 3:00 p.m. Jyaphia attended as observer. Each commissioner took a clean copy of the full text AIW about which he or she lead a mini-assembly and entered non-substantive changes that he or she felt comfortable accepting. Gretchen entered these changes into the electronic version. Before discussing the draft AIWs as a group, each Commissioner debriefed the mini-assembly at which the AIW was discussed. As a group, we reviewed projected images of each -- one at a time, discussing any suggested incorporated amendments we had questions about and then the remaining suggested amendments. The proposed AIW on Black Lives Matter was contentious, so we left that for last. By 5:45 p.m., we had completed deliberations on the other two draft AIWs, adding rationales for unincorporated amendments and prioritizing them. Before Susan and Richard left at 5:45, Caitlin received a message that the Right relationship team wanted to meet with the CSW. We asked her to respond with an invitation for them to meet us after the Ware lecture in our meeting room. After Susan and Richard left, the others processed the remaining AIW’s mini-assembly.

We reconvened at 9:30 p.m. Those present included current Commissioners and Jyaphia as observing incoming Commissioner, representatives of the Right Relationships Team, DRUUM, ARE, two chaplains, two youth leaders, a youth advisor, two UUA staff who work with youth and/or multicultural issues. The youth had requested the meeting, so started with their issue: The mini-assembly on Black Lives Matters was not well facilitated. As a result they felt:

- a) Caught in the middle between some powerful adult groups
- b) Put on the spot by participants who looked to them as authors and owners of the document, asking their permission to make changes.
- c) Treated condescendingly by some adults who thanked them for their courage, in ways that adults would not have spoken to adults.

The youth asked CSW to explain the training CSW had received for facilitating the mini-assemblies and their plans for ensuring that the process to be used in mini-assemblies is clear and consistent. As chair of the CSW, Susan admitted that the training was inadequate, rushed, and done when Commissioners were tired.

After discussing a variety of concerns and perspectives, the youth asked CSW how they will respond to their concerns. Susan said that in the coming year the CSW will create a script for all Commissioners to use when introducing AIW mini-assemblies. She explained that the process of developing the script would require defining processes. The youth indicated satisfaction with that plan.

Susan invited those present to stay as CSW discussed the Black Lives Matters AIW and proposed amendments. That generated more discussion and all visitors declined saying they were content to leave, but did not then leave. Susan again indicated that the CSW still had work to do and it was getting late. Still visitors did not leave. Finally after 11:00 p.m., the lead chaplain confirmed that all were satisfied and suggested that visitors leave. Before they left, the DRUUM representative asked to stay and asked all visitors to leave. Once she was alone with the CSW, she pointed out a micro-aggression -- the way the issue of time and tiredness was raised and that all volunteer leaders were similarly exhausted. She asked for continued discussions after GA between DRUUM and CSW to address other unnamed issues. We agreed.

At 11:20, we began deliberations of the draft Black Lives Matters AIW. Because of the sensitivity of the drafters, we accepted very few proposed amendments and had a lengthy list of unincorporated amendments. We finished our deliberations, adding rationales, and prioritization of unincorporated amendments about 1:00 a.m. We then considered whether to make any statement about what happened during the general session when the AIW debate occurs. We decided not to, although prepared a response if asked.

We adjourned at 1:45 a.m. Gretchen and Susan stayed to prepare the CSW Alert for Sunday.

## **6/28/15**

Susan Goekler convened a meeting to debrief immediately after the AIW debate and vote, which was very contentious during the General Session. Susan shared that she had spoken with UUA Moderator Jim Key earlier in the morning and he advised her to make a brief statement prior to introducing the AIWs for a vote. Later, she met Caitlin in the hall; Caitlin drafted a statement for Susan to use in the General

Session. Susan also had brief conversations with one of the youth in attendance the previous night and apologized for bringing up time as an issue. Isabella said that she also wanted the meeting to be brief and was glad Susan brought up time. Susan also met Kim (the woman who appeared very upset at the mini-assembly) in the hall and explained our decision on her proposed amendment. Kim seemed Ok and implied that this was no longer an issue for her.

Meeting adjourned at 4:30 p.m.