

Social Witness by the UUA

A discussion with the UUA Board and
CSW representatives Jan 23, 2016

Some big picture issues

- In policy governance, the board sets policy, the staff implements.
- Commissions such as CSW are independent and considered discernment groups.
- What does it mean to discern? How does discernment influence what we do as a denomination?

History

- Apparently the CSW's historical roots included providing consultation to the denomination President on social witness activities and pronouncements – meeting in Boston with the President at least annually. Per the bylaws, the President is a member of the CSW, but has never participated in my memory.

Where we are now

- The CSW has become the facilitator of the process for developing social witness statements adopted by delegates – not really a discernment group.
- The process is prescribed in detail in the bylaws and in other documents, providing little room for innovation or flexibility.
- The final statements do not bind the congregations; they do provide guidance to UUA staff, but do not factor into staff decisions about priorities.

Making changes

- Several years ago, the UUA Board proposed having only one issue for 4 years of study and action and eliminating AIWs.
- The delegates agreed to a 4-year process, with two issues running in a staggered sequence.
- The delegates rejected eliminating AIWs, but agreed to reduce the number.
- For one GA, delegates agreed to suspend AIWs; then the Justice GA partner wanted a statement, so a Responsive resolution was used instead.

Issues with current process

- Although statements of conscience carry the full weight of the denomination and AIWs of only the delegates at one GA, the amount of time and energy spent on AIWs versus SOC's at a GA skews their relative importance.
- For study action issues, issues for which we lack guidance are often not brought forward and issues already considered are recycled

More issues

- There is no time to fact check AIWs, so the process trusts that authors are accurate.
- There is no process for updating adopted statements or archiving outdated statements.
- There is no attempt to coordinate social action events at GA initiated by either the staff or the GAPC with the current delegate-selected study action issues.

More issues con'd

- UUA staff generate statements on issues before there are statements adopted by the delegates and often those statements continue to have a prominent place on the UUA website even after the delegates adopt a statement, making it appear as if the official UUA positions are those written by UUA staff.
- Getting changes made to CSW-related pages of the UUA website is challenging.

Some ideas

- Redefine the relationship of the work of the CSW; the delegates; the staff including Standing of the Side of Love, outreach, and Multicultural Faith and Witness; the GAPC and local partners; and the UUA Board.
- Reconsider who can propose topics in need of study, discernment, and action. Once topics are decided for CSAIs, that process seems to be working.

Ideas, con'd

- Consider showcasing at a GA general session congregational as well as staff work done on adopted SOCs (could be one adopted a while ago.)
- Consider AIW alternatives (see attachment).