



Meeting Minutes
CSW Meetings – August 6-10, 2018
UUA Headquarters, Boston, MA

Present: Richard Bock, Jyaphia Christos-Rodgers, Meredith Garmon, Susan Goekler, Alison Aguilar Lopez Gutierrez McLeod

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY MINUTES

Every two years, the CSW gathers in August or September to draft a Statement of Conscience (SOC) for consideration by delegates at the next General Assembly the following June. In 2018, we reviewed the agenda and goals for the week of meetings. To start the SOC drafting, we brainstormed what the ideal might look like and then agreed that the ideal has never existed. As a statement of a faith community, however, we want to give a vision of what could be. The vision needs to be for the long-term; employing strategies that might take several decades. As a group we viewed the film *Legalize Democracy*, which is a recommended resource in the Study Guide, and reviewed comments received during the hearing in 2016 and from congregations in 2017 and 2018. Then we brainstormed concepts we wanted to be sure to include in an SOC.

On our second day, we revised the CSW covenant and mission, and then looked at the sections of previous SOC's to decide the organizational structure for this SOC. In groups of 2 or 3, we began drafting two SOC sections – each small group taking one section. After 2 hours, we shared our drafts, and then broke for lunch. Next, we reconvened in new small groups and drafted two additional SOC sections. Before adjournment, we discussed those sections.

On the third day, after reviewing the work so far, we divided into new small groups and started drafting possible actions. Before we broke for lunch, we shared our work, reviewed the Study Guide see if we omitted anything and the 2016 SOC to look for duplication. Susan Leslie, our UUA Staff liaison joined us for lunch and we discussed ideas for CSW. After lunch, we reviewed the actions, and then did a read through of the entire document, doing editing as we read and deciding on the order of sections.

On the fourth day, we read through and edited the document. We sought a grabber beginning, and clarity and greater simplicity throughout. After lunch, we our goals for a meeting with top UUA staff leadership. We met with the UA President and COO for over an hour and considered how a group such as the CSW could best support the work of the UUA. Both sides were open to re-envisioning the work and relationships. After that break, we discussed leadership transition of the CSW and how to proceed with updating information for AIW and CSAI proposers. We finished by returning to the draft SOC and to the brainstormed list from the first day to see if everything was captured in the statement.

On the fifth day, we did a detailed reading/editing of the draft SOC, looking for ways to simplify the language and make it less academic in tone. We considered its consistency with anti-oppression and anti-racism language and tenets and how well it read and hung together conceptually. We reviewed all the tasks needed for the CSW's work and continued discussion of leadership transition and next steps for the CSW.

DETAILED MINUTES

Monday, August 6

Facilitator: Susan Goekler; Note taker: Alison; Process Observer: Meredith Garmon

We reviewed the agenda and goals for the meeting:

1. Team building; reaffirming CSW covenant
2. Draft Statement of Conscience on Corruption of Democracy
3. Plan for revisions to CSAI and AIW proposers' guides based on bylaws revisions
4. Have a plan for CSW leadership and task/portfolio assignments for 2018-2019
 - a. GA grid meeting
5. Explore CSW relationship with UUA staff, including top leadership
6. Planning implementation of Undoing Intersectional White Supremacy
7. Schedule future meetings
8. Fill our well and share the water—meditation, check-in, respectful dialogue, ample rest, healthy food, gentle humor

Various Commissioners shared their feelings coming into the meeting:

- Jyaphia felt strongly that we shouldn't start from scratch, but utilize the study guide as a start. The staff has done valuable work that we can build on. In doing so, we would honor the work they have done.
- Richard commented that he found the book *Daring Democracy*, a UUA Common Read, depressing.
- Susan remarked that the AIWs adopted in 2018 are timely. SOCs, on the other hand, should be able to stand the test of time. We are starting with nothing written, but we are not starting from scratch. We have a lot of resources that people have provided us.

Susan invited us to take a few moments for visioning: to imagine what an ideal democracy would look like. Some of the ideas we brainstormed were:

- a. Radical Inclusiveness
- b. Getting big money out - Money not does not equal speech
- c. People would agree that they wanted a perfect democracy
- d. Decision making would occur through building consensus
- e. Eliminate Electoral College
- f. Eliminate corporate lobbying - undoing corporate personhood
- g. Transparency
- h. More bipartisanship with compromise- cooperation
- i. An end to the disenfranchisement of felons and ex-felons (which is in reality an extension of the 3/5th compromise)
- j. An engaged electorate that is actively growing and accessible

- k. Elected officials who are accountable and accessible
- l. Information about issues and candidates is easily obtained
- m. Gerrymandering is eliminated
- n. Contracting gov't functions to for-profit corporations is halted or minimized
- o. People would not have an anti-government bias
- p. All polling places would have paper ballots as a backup
- q. Institute instant runoff voting
- r. Voter role purging would seek not to disenfranchise eligible voters and those incorrectly purged would be reinstated readily
- s. Politicians would consider the public good above special interests
- t. Active engagement of voter participation/enrollment; and end to voter suppression
 1. Allow that day registration and voting
 2. Election polls open for a month- instead of election day
 3. Stop voter ID requirements
 4. Get youth involved
 5. Get voter turnout to 100 percent

We agreed that we have never had an Ideal Democracy. As a statement from a faith community, however, our Statement of Conscience needs to push the envelope of what we think is possible, so there can be movement forward.

The vision needs to be for the long-term; employing strategies that might take several decades. That is how to make and maintain changes. An example was that after Plessy vs Ferguson some forward thinkers strategized that change would come when more African Americans were judges and politicians. That led to the founding of Howard Law School, in order to develop black legal leadership.

Reading on the issue of democracy before coming to the meeting informed the above. Another insight was around meritocracy. There is a myth that people's opportunities are based on merit. If you start at an unequal place, there is too much ground to make up to even make it to where some (white people) start with.

As a group we viewed the film *Legalize Democracy*, which is a recommended resource in the Study Guide. That triggered more discussion.

We reviewed the notes from the hearing after the adoption of the CSAI in 2016 as well as the comments we received from congregations in 2017 and 2018. Then we brainstormed concepts we wanted to be sure to include in an SOC from the brainstormed list, the video, the study guide, and the hearing and congregational comments.

Susan stated that she facilitated today but as part of turning over the reins of committee leadership, each commissioner would facilitate one day of the week. Assignments this week would include facilitation, note taking, and process observation, with each commissioner taking responsibility for each task once during the week.

Meredith created a chart of all possible combinations of groups of 2 and 3 for writing.

Tuesday, August 7, 2018

Facilitator: Jyaphia; Note Taker: Susan; Process Observer: Alison

Jyaphia convened the CSW meeting on Tuesday, August 7 at 9:05 a.m.

As chalice lighting, we read the 2014 CSW covenant. Then we discuss changes we wanted to make to it and affirmed the following revised covenant:

As we endeavor to do the best possible work on behalf of Unitarian Universalist congregations and the UUA principles they have affirmed, we covenant to be in right relationship with one another by:

- finding the holy within each of us;
- listening to understand; acknowledging and articulating discomfort when it arises;
- being honest and open about our personal biases;
- respecting the contributions and circumstances of one another;
- trusting one another's good intentions and commitment to our work;
- affirming different learning and working styles; and
- grounding our relationships and work in the practices of anti-racism and anti-oppression.

We covenant to hold ourselves and one another accountable by referring to these commitments during process observations at the end of each convening.

We also reviewed the CSW's mission and revised it to state: "The Mission of the Commission on Social Witness is to engage UU congregations and the UUA in discerning and crafting a vision for the Association on pressing social issues as a reflection of the values of our faith." That led to a discussion of how to improve engagement of congregations. Suggestions included: Ask the UU staff, especially top leadership to promote congregational engagement and assigning each Commissioner one of the five regions to work with on improving communication

By 10 a.m., we began work on a first draft of a statement of conscience on the CSAI "The Corruption of Our Democracy." As a first step, we reviewed previous SOCs to determine how

each had been organized into sections. Sections included in previous SOC's were an introduction sometimes including definitions; intersectionality; religious or theological grounding; the ideal/moral; historical background; underlying factors; consequences; actions at local, state, and national levels. We decided to include the following sections as a starting point:

- Introduction
- Historical (intersectional issues) and underlying factors
- Theological/religious grounding
- The ideal/moral
- Actions

We broke into two groups and drafted historical/underlying and religious/theological grounding. Reconvening, we read through, commented on and revised those two sections.

After lunch, we formed two new groups – and drafted the introduction and the ideal/moral sections. Then we reconvened, read the sections, commented and revised them.

Alison gave process observations, referencing the new CSW covenant.

Adjourned at 4:25

Wednesday, August 8, 2018

Facilitator: Alison; Note Taker: Richard; Process Observer: Phia

Alison called us to order at 9:10am

Phia lit the Chalice and shared a Lucille Clifton poem – things we need to let go.... “The Lesson of the Falling Leaves.”

Susan shared definitions of ‘democracy’ – her midnight musings! The group considered how much of Susan’s musings to consider. We reviewed what parts of the SOC we have completed and what needs to be tweaked as we move forward. Asked if we need another section, Meredith suggested adding ‘measuring/criteria/elements of democracy’ be added. The group agreed to add this to the document.

The group divided into the morning writing session, based on the team configurations Meredith had identified.

When we reconvened, each team shared its draft. We then started to brainstorm the ‘actions’ section and re-looked at the UUA’s Study Guide on The Corruption of our Democracy to be sure we have not missed important points. We also examined parts of the 2016 SOC on Escalating Inequality to help us avoid ‘reinventing the written word’.

At lunch, the CSW met with the UUA staff liaison Susan Leslie. During that conversation, we considered our need for better communication with congregations and that working with the regions might be the way to move forward. After lunch, we decided that each Commissioner would be liaison to a UUA Region as follows

New England	Meredith
CERG	Richard
Mid-America	Susan
Pacific Western	Alison
Southern	Jyaphia

The group then broke into our new writing groups to continue writing. Upon return we reviewed our writing on the Actions portion of our document. Having agreed on the actions, we began looking at the entire document and discussed the final order of the various sections. This was our first read-through. We starting editing as we read. Susan agreed to sending the Draft #1 to all as an attachment in case people want to look at it this evening on their own

The commissioners reviewed the minutes of May 15, 2018 – approved as presented. The minutes of the CSW meetings at Ga 2018 – June 19-24, 2018 were approved as corrected.

Thursday, August 9, 2018

Facilitator: Richard; Note taker: Meredith; Process Observer: Susan

Alison lit the chalice and shared "To Live in the Borderlands Means You" by Gloria Anzaldua.

Meredith shared edits he drafted last evening, which we read through. We continued editing seeking a grabbier beginning, and clarity and greater simplicity throughout.

After lunch, we discussed briefly what we hoped to learn and convey at a meeting this afternoon with UUA's President Susan Frederick Gray (via Skype) and COO Carey McDonald. At 1:30, we started the meeting with introductions.

Notes from that meeting:

Although the CSW worked with the UUA Board on some bylaws this past year, both groups are open to more radical re-visioning of CSW's role. Susan Goekler asked: If we were recreating CSW from scratch, what would its charge be?

Carey: Board seems indeed ready to consider substantial re-visioning. Organizing and justice work has shifted very much in recent years. When UUA adopts statements, it's powerful, but the process by which those statements come forward is not all that we might desire. I'm envisioning CSW as a body that does more social witness rather than just writes statements. CSW might have a role in creating the statements, but also in delivering the statements -- showing up and presenting them.

SG: I've seen a lack of coordination among UUA groups and departments.

Carey: Coordinating can be helpful, but so much of coordination happens very quickly. The UUA Staff recently completed an audit and decided that their advocacy priorities would revolve around:

- Criminalization, largely directed at communities of color;
- Climate justice, in particular as in effects indigenous communities;
- LGBTQ Justice;
- Involvement with the election cycle (more temporal).

I would love to find ways the CSW can be more engaged in these initiatives.

SFG: It resonates with me that historically the UUA created the current version of the CSW because we wanted public statements advancing our values. Public statements from a religious body used to mean something. New structures might be necessary to work in the current context. The processes we have created in the past -- for CSW and in many other ways -- might no longer serve the needs.

It's unclear where CSW can support and serve UUA.

"Immigration as a Moral Issue" was a part of the work that brought a watershed transformation among UUs on the immigration issue. This happened for a variety of reasons that had relatively little to do with UUA's formal systems.

2/3rds - 3/4ths of the budgets of our congregations are on worship and RE.

Our congregations have little time, energy, or resources for social outreach.

Yet, we spend a lot of time at the General Assembly on AIWs.

SG: Actually AIWs take a small percentage general session time at GA, and very little of the total programming time. Giving reports at general sessions is what takes up a lot of time. In 2018, comments on the democracy CSAI came from only one congregation.

Carey: We get a lot of invitations for "sign-on letters." We can almost always do so because GA has passed statements on almost everything. Israel-Palestine may be an exception.

SG: Net neutrality is also an exception.

SFG: There should be a mechanism for senior leadership to introduce topics.

SG: CSW relationship with the Board: When I first came on to CSW, we had never met with the Board at all. We aren't a Board Committee (we report to GA, not to the Board). We have strengthened relations with the UUA Board in the past few years.

JCR: CSW is supposed to be neutral on issues. But neutrality is not one of my strongest values. In 2 decades we have moved from UUs being largely unwilling to talk about racism to having passed a CSAI that directly addresses intersectional white supremacy.

I'm excited about that, I'm not doing this work to be neutral about that.

AM: The AIWs of 2018 were particularly relevant and timely. And here we are in Boston on our 4th day of writing, and I'm not sure this is the best use of my time. There are 5 of us and 5 regions. Would a more effective use of our time be to liaise with regions and help them engage more congregations in social witness.

JCR: The work of connecting through our regions wouldn't be neutral work. That would feel more useful and valuable.

Carey: Regions deliver services and programs -- not just info. Certainly the struggle to get congregations to pay attention to what we do is real. But the issue is less a communication problem than a value problem. The CSAI isn't valuable to what our congregations are doing. I'm not sure that liaising with regions would accomplish what you hope it would.

SG: If people have a need for what we're doing, then we'll be relevant.

SFG: I was struck when Phia said we're neutral and don't have authority. Our structure is set up for neutrality when that doesn't empower our leaders to lead, to direct change. We are asking: How do people experience UUA? What's the end-user's experience? Are we doing anything that is valuable for people?

SG: Maybe GA should be more like a People's Congress than workshops and a conference.

The process of creating and considering statements is laid out in bylaws, but there is no charge specific to the CSW.

SFG: And we are looking to you all for input on how to reform our system and get more buy-in.

Carey: The Oct Board meeting will bring together stakeholders on these issues.

SFG: I don't mean just your input. I meant your participation in conversations. Mission should be clarified first.

Does CSW think it would be good to suspend some of its work to focus on conversation with the Board about what is needed.

Carey: We'd be very willing to think about this together. I encourage you to engage with the UUs who are doing the best Justice work. How CSW shows up in bylaws may be effected by how other groups and committees are involved and related.

SG: I once served as social justice chair for a whole District. But now we don't have Districts, and don't have District meetings.

Carey: We could help convene conversations with the groups that S Leslie is in touch with, or with "Side with Love" (Elizabeth Nguyen)

JCR: I'm interested in doing actual organizing work with our congregations. Since Katrina, our New Orleans congregations have been involved with a lot of Community Organizing. It's the sense of relevance that is why I'm in this.

We agreed to continue the conversation.

Then the meeting with UUA Staff leadership ended and we took a break

We continued to work on revisions of SOC draft until 3:50

We discussed whether we needed to spend time this coming year revising the "Social Witness: A Proposer's Guide" to be consistent with the bylaws changes. We decided that considering more radical changes to how CSW functions would be a better use of time, so to leave the Proposers Guide as is for now. One issue to consider is whether we need a process for amending already adopted SOC's. SG agreed to send the other commissioners the CSW's proposals from 2011 for alternative ways to do social witness.

Susan made clear that she will not continue to serve as CSW in the coming year. For a smooth transition after she term limits off the CSW, the remaining Commissioners need to know how to keep things moving. Susan had prepared a detailed list of CSW-related tasks with places for people to indicate what they would take responsibility for. This was distributed prior to the meeting. Commissioners agreed to look at this tonight and rate their level of willingness to take on each task.

We reviewed the brainstormed ideas from Monday to ensure we captured the key concepts, then discarded the flip chart papers.

After process observations, we adjourned at 5:05 p.m.

Friday, August 10, 2018

Facilitator: Meredith; Note Taker: Jyaphia; Process Observer: Richard

The group checked in and shared chalice lighting words. Starting at 9:30 am, we did a detailed reading/editing of the draft Statement of Conscience on Democracy Uncorrupted. The group considered ways to simplify the language in order to make it less academic in tone, as well as how well it read and hung together conceptually.

As this final in-person edit proceeded, the group engaged in a nuanced discussion about the differences and similarities between rights and privileges. The group extended time for this conversation in order to build greater collective capacity for anti-racist/anti-oppressive practice.

As the draft SOC was completed, Alison raised a discussion about collective access to documents the CSW creates or receives. She pointed out that the Google Suite has free tools for creating, importing and managing different types of documents. It allows commissioners to access work from anywhere, as long as they have an internet connection. The group affirmed this suggestion and agreed to utilize this system for all CSW work.

We reviewed the list of CSW-related tasks. Richard described the CSW budget and shared his management of the CSW finances. He agreed to continue handling that role for the next year. Richard agreed to keep the budget docs on the CSW Folder on the Google Drive so it can be viewed by all team members. This year, Jyaphia will apprentice as the budget keeper, in order to be prepared to assume that role next year. We agreed on all the other immediate tasks, but left some that would not require any activity for decision at a future meeting.

We decided that we might need monthly meetings in the coming year if we are to dig into the future vision for CSW's work. Jyaphia agreed to convene a meeting in October. She will create a doodle poll to determine a meeting date and time. Alison will be on sabbatical from September – December, so might not participate this fall.

After Susan provided some closing thoughts, we adjourned at 1:45 p.m.

Minutes approved March 11, 2019.