

Fifth Principle Task Force

Report to the UUA Board of Trustees

December 2009

Our vision is radically democratic suggesting a ground up, and grounded participation, congregation to neighbors to district or regional representative to Board of Trustees to President and paid staff united in policies, strategies, budgeting, analyses, accountabilities and, together, producing an energy of evangelical proportion that can propel Unitarian Universalism into the future of growth we really do yearn for.

Fifth Principle Task Force

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A Central Principle

A central principle of policy-style governance is a board's assurance that it acts as the informed voice of the organization's sources of authority and accountability – its moral owners. Through active, meaningful connections with the moral owners, termed “linkage,” a board sees that ultimate purposes and priorities are aligned and makes accountability real. The primary sources of authority and accountability for our UUA Board of Trustees are the duly elected and called leaders of the member congregations, and specifically member congregations' delegates to the UUA General Assembly. And, in accordance with our polity and Associational covenant, meaningful linkage and accountability must be effective among congregational leaders and delegates as well as between the congregational and Associational leadership. The General Assembly of our UUA *must* be configured to promote meaningful, effective linkage and accountability, and engage delegates in substantive Associational business.

According to the UUA Bylaws, General Assembly is first and foremost an event to serve the governance of our Association. Article IV Section C-4.1 states “*Each meeting of the Association for the conduct of business shall be called a General Assembly,*” and the Article goes on to further state that “*General Assemblies shall make overall policy for carrying out the purposes of the Association and shall direct and control its affairs.*” (Section C-4.2). Accredited delegates, largely from certified member congregations, are the voters at General Assemblies authorized to conduct the Association's business.

Between General Assemblies it is the Board of Trustees who are authorized to act for our Association, conduct its affairs, and carry out its policies and directives (Article VI, Sections C-6.1 & 6.2)

Executive Summary

The task force name, “Fifth Principle” reflects the Board's interest that General Assembly serve its Bylaw's designated function of Associational governance and its concern that GA has evolved over the years in ways contrary to excellence in governance and the democratic process. Although the Board's charge to the task force called for two or more recommendations on the future configuration (including frequency and duration) and content of General Assembly, your priority on excellence in governance is what has informed the work of the task force and is why we do not have two radically different recommendations. If we are not going to make substantive change in our governance, then simply make the current GA biennial for reasons of financial sustainability and better stewardship of staff time and resources.

We have focused our meetings and this report on governance, because it is at once the primary purpose of GA and is dramatically broken. Four points buttress this contention of brokenness: GA is not really democratic in that delegates are neither representative of their congregations, other than being members, nor are they accountable to them; without subsidization of delegates, GA is economically discriminatory, and therefore generationally

discriminatory; as long as GA continues as an annual event, its cost is a heavy burden to the Association and the member congregations; the GA process is not in alignment with the Board's embrace of policy governance. As we approach the UUA's 50th anniversary, it would be appropriate to change the delegate body from passive receptors to active policy makers, giving power and the responsibility inherent in it to the people who are the member congregations.

Over the years General Assemblies have assumed many more purposes than the conduct of Association business. Little clarity or consensus exists over what constitutes the business of the Association, what policies carry out its purposes, and how a General Assembly directs and controls its affairs. It is questionable how well the delegate body represents and is accountable to member congregations. We know that in recent years on average less than 60% of member congregations have one or more delegates at GA, and the average delegate body since 2001 of approximately 2,200 is less than 45% of eligible delegates. Although no hard data exists on congregational practices in selecting, preparing and authorizing their GA delegates, substantial anecdotal evidence indicates that many, if not most, are self-selected and self-funded. Delegates participate in GA business with little or no guidance from or sense of accountability to their home congregation. Other than the procedures of the Commission on Social Witness (CSW), there is no formal or systematic preparation of delegates for thoughtful conduct of the Association's business. Most have had no relationship or even communication with the Board of Trustees as a whole or with their district trustee representative.

The Task Force did not feel it was urgent to address other content beyond GA's governance purpose. Indeed the programmatic, worship and community features of the present GA are generally well received and some (Service of the Living Tradition and the Ware Lecture) even revered.

Our Association is a system in change, and the recommendations of the Fifth Principle Task Force align well with movements toward more accountable and disciplined practices of governance – specifically Carver-style, policy-style governance – at all levels from congregational boards to the boards of districts and our UUA. These recommendations build upon the positive influence of fairly recent initiatives to bring congregational leaders into Associational linkage through partial subsidies of congregational presidents at GA from 2004-08 and the spawning of regular meetings of congregational presidents in clusters and districts.

Recommendations

A. Biennial Delegate Assembly in odd years:

- Content is governance-focused. The Assembly is for delegate teams, UUA Board & Administration.
- 2 ½ days over a weekend in August
- Smaller number of authorized delegates with delegate teams fully or partially subsidized by the UUA
- Settled ministers (one per congregation) part of the delegate teams

- Delegates elected and certified by their congregation or board serve in an accountable relationship with geographically neighboring delegate teams and with UUA trustees
- Some at-large delegates are selected by regions (clusters of districts)
- Teams can include alternate delegates without UUA subsidy
- Non-delegate observers pay a registration fee
- No delegates from associate member organizations or from the UUA Board of Trustees

B. Same as “A” except that the 2 ½ day delegate assembly is immediately preceded or followed by a 2-day program assembly:

- Content of the program assembly similar to current GA programming
- Non-delegate attendees pay registration fee without UUA subsidy
- Delegate’s registration for program assembly is paid by UUA subsidy. Delegate subsidy for room & board covers the delegate assembly only, not the program assembly.

The future of our UU movement can ill-afford to continue the ways of faux democracy and unaccountable representation that have characterized Associational governance, including the content and process of General Assembly. The Task Force believes that the status quo for General Assembly is not an option. We believe our recommendations lay out a vision for effective governance that reflect core values of our liberal faith and the imperative for bringing the leadership of member congregations and our Association together in mutually accountable relationship around matters of greatest importance to the present and future vitality of our UU movement.

“The thinking activity of the denomination has no focus now. ... no focusing process or mechanism.”

Conrad Wright in meeting with Task Force members, September 17, 2008

Re-imagining Governance through a Biennial Delegate Assembly

- *Associational business is meaningful*
Duly elected delegates from the member congregations would expect to work closely with their UU neighbors-in-faith and their trustee-representative to the UUA Board for a full day prior to the formal plenary session day considering end statements, assessing progress and performance by national and field staff members in achieving those ends, becoming conversant and comfortable with opportunities and obstacles discovered along the way, analyzing financial data -- LINKING the aspirations of the singular congregation to its immediate neighbors, to the congregations in its district or region, to the Moderator and Board of Trustees, to the administration and the office of the UUA president.
- *Delegate body is accountable, diverse in perspectives and voices, and well prepared*
Congregational delegates and alternates are elected by their congregation or congregational board and reported to and certified by the UUA Board at least a year

(preferably 18 months) ahead of the Biennial Delegate Assembly. Initially the new formula (see Addendum) will provide approximately 1850 potential delegates from congregations, including settled ministers (one per congregation that call them). Additionally, 100 delegates will be chosen at-large by regions (clusters of districts) to lift up and encourage participation by people of color and youth and young adults.

According to the congregation's Fair Share status delegates are subsidized to participate in the Biennial Delegate Assembly so that qualified leaders can be elected to represent their congregation regardless of personal financial means. Both at the Biennial Assembly and between biennial assemblies delegates work as teams in shared ministry with peers from nearest neighboring congregations. Through ongoing linkage, UUA trustees are mandated to work with delegates to inform their work and prepare for the business of the Biennial Delegate Assembly. We imagine delegates and trustees interacting in-between biennial assemblies through a special website that posts schedules, announcements, agendas, reports and delegate materials, through regional/cluster linkage and assembly-preparation sessions, bridge calls, web conferences, and Facebook-like networking.

The plenary floor of the delegate assembly would reflect neighborliness and regional linkage by having seating arranged so that delegates are seated adjacent to congregations nearest to them and so that all congregations in a region are seated together, permitting constant interaction with elected trustees and UUA field staff.

Allowance for alternate delegates provides enhancement to congregational participation and future leadership preparation including youth and young adults. We envision that by virtue of UUA subsidy for delegates and holding the delegate assembly every two years instead of annually, more congregations will be inspired to raise and set aside monies to subsidize their delegates' alternates. Alternates would participate fully in all preparation and actual procedure of the assembly with the exception of voting. We are cognizant that by bringing alternates into the process we are enriching the dialogue back in the congregation and training future delegates.

- *Learning*
Excellence requires a system-wide commitment to continuing education and thoughtful training. At present, delegates and the congregations that authorize their attendance at GA have no requirements regarding preparation. There is no serious intent to understand the business coming before the plenary body much less to debate the issues in a congregational setting. Except for the CSW process, the GA as a system of governance stands apart, a romantic notion of involvement and inclusion unsupported by practice. We recommend development of a protocol for delegates that might include an e-newsletter from the Moderator and BOT, webinars for education and regular assessment before and after the assembly, and regional gatherings of delegates and other interested lay and clergy leaders.

Summary of Values and Features of Recommendations

Features of Task Force recommendations by the values that inform and underlay the recommendations:

- Economic accessibility and sustainability
 - ⇒ *Subsidized, smaller delegate body*
 - ⇒ *Biennial rather than annual*
- Empowered delegates authorized to represent congregations
 - ⇒ *Delegates elected by congregation or its board*
 - ⇒ *Delegates and alternates elected well before the next assembly (a year to 18 months), with responsibilities to participate in linkage with the UUA Board and in preparation for the assembly*
- Excellence in shared leadership & ministry
 - ⇒ *Lay and ordained delegates from neighboring congregations prepare and work as teams linked to the UUA Board of Trustees*
 - ⇒ *Focused training and preparation of delegate teams*
- Excellence in governance
 - ⇒ *Assembly business reflects ultimate questions as a liberal religious movement (Associational Ends), budgetary priorities and accountability*
 - ⇒ *Substantive linkage between UUA Board of Trustees and delegate teams in preparation for and during Biennial Assembly*
 - ⇒ *Delegates empowered and accountable to congregations through election or official appointment*
 - ⇒ *Delegate training in their governance role*
 - ⇒ *Encourage governance leaders of congregations to serve as delegates and alternates in Associational governance*
 - ⇒ *Ongoing excellence through participation of elected “alternate” delegates*
- Multi-generational participation & decision-making
 - ⇒ *Encourage inclusion of young people on delegate teams*
 - ⇒ *At-large delegates selected regionally*
- Awareness and inclusiveness of AR/AO/MC concerns
 - ⇒ *Intentional AR/AO/MC lens to the Assembly business and preparation*
 - ⇒ *At-large delegates selected regionally*

Challenges

- Maintaining energy and momentum when moving annual GA to biennial
- Creating an Associational business meeting that will attract delegates and is worth their time and attention
- Appropriate meaningful linkage between the Board and delegates in between biennial meetings to prepare them for conducting Associational business
- Congregational cultures of indifference to Associational business

- Task Force recommendations require substantive Bylaw changes. How to get a relatively unaccountable delegate body to vote for them
- Financial affordability of a delegate subsidy system
- Administering a delegate subsidy system
- Loss of delegate status for UUA Board of Trustees, and those DRE's, ministers emeritus, and other settled ministers beyond one per congregation who are granted delegate status under Section 4.8.b of the Bylaws
- Loss of delegate representation for Associate Members (UUSC, UUWF and UU-UN)
- Participation of young people in a biennial business meeting and the loss of a meaningful annual gathering for them
- Effective participation by delegates from overseas congregations
- Loss of a meaningful annual gathering for affinity groups and their participation in a biennial business meeting
- Potential loss of familiar and beloved aspects of GA if it moves to a biennial, business-only meeting, such as the exhibit hall and annual meetings of organizations
- Loss of income for Beacon Press and UUA Bookstore
- Uncertainty over what happens to the Commission on Social Witness (CSW) process
- Uncertainty over what happens in even years
- Those who "can't do August" if the Assembly would move to that time of the summer

Discussion Outline

A. *Delegate Body*

Present system:

- Over 5,100 eligible delegates. Far more than other faiths which are much larger than the UUA
 - UCC: 925 total delegates
 - PCUSA: 1,000 total delegates
- On average less than 60% of member congregations have delegates at GA, and the average delegate attendance at GA the past 10 years is approximately 2,200 or under 45% of eligible delegates.
- Ministers Emeritus/a, Masters-level credentialed DREs and UUA Board of Trustees have delegate status. Associate Member Organizations and the CLF have delegates.
- Although no meaningful data exists on how GA delegates are selected by congregations and funded to attend, strong anecdotal evidence indicates that few delegates are actually elected by and serve in an accountable manner with their congregation; many are self-selected and pay their own way; very few have all of their expenses covered by their congregation.
- Little or no intentional, meaningful linkage among delegates and between delegates and the UUA Board

Envisioned system:

- Total eligible delegate body between 1,900-2,000 includes settled ministers (one per congregation) and 100 regional at-large delegates (see the example delegate allotment formula in the Addendum)
- Congregational delegates are duly elected by congregations or boards
- To promote economic fairness and accessibility, duly elected delegates from Fair Share congregations are fully subsidized by our UUA. Merit congregations' delegates partially subsidized at 50%. Other congregations would pay full cost for their delegates.
- Authorized alternate delegates are encouraged but are not UUA subsidized. Congregations are encouraged to subsidize alternates.
- Delegates and alternates are elected and reported to the UUA Board at least a year (preferably 18 months) ahead of the Biennial Delegate Assembly.
- Teams of delegates and alternates from neighboring congregations are in meaningful linkage with one another and our UUA Board well ahead for preparation and during the Biennial Delegate Assembly.
- To encourage diversity of perspectives and voices in the delegate body, each of five regions (clusters of districts) will select 20 delegates (total 100 at-large delegates), striving to cultivate leadership from among young people and persons of color. Where practical, regional delegates will prepare and caucus with the delegate teams of their home congregations.

B. Financial Considerations

If financial accessibility calls for subsidizing delegate costs, financial sustainability calls for shifting from annual to biennial. The following table compares estimated costs to the Association for two cases: 1) Biennial Delegate Assembly with APF Fair Share delegates fully subsidized at \$1,100; and 2) Biennial Delegate Assembly with APF Fair Share delegates partially subsidized at \$500. The table also shows estimates of net cost for a scenario when a program assembly immediately precedes or follows a Biennial Delegate Assembly such that program assembly registration fees partially offset delegate subsidy cost for a range of paid registrants: 1,500, 3,000, and 5,000.

Assumptions:

- 1,500 delegates attend (approximately 77% of total eligible delegates of 1,950)
- Full cost per delegate: \$1,100 (\$500 travel + \$480 housing for 3 nights, single rooms + \$120 per diem for 3 days)
- Delegates from APF Fair Share congregations receive full cost subsidy; equal 75% of the delegates in attendance, which equals 1,125 delegates.
- Delegates from APF Merit Congregations receive 50% subsidy; equal to 10% of the delegates in attendance, which equals 150 delegates.
- Other delegates receive no subsidy; represent 15% of the delegates in attendance, which equals 225 delegates.
- Fixed costs for the assembly = \$1,000,000 (includes space rental, audio-visual support, equipment rental, planning staff, etc.)
- Income estimates for associated program assembly based on \$350 registration cost.

- 1,500 Registrants = \$525,000
- 3,000 Registrants = \$1,050,000
- 5,000 Registrants = \$1,750,000

Delegate Assembly Cost Estimates (rounded to nearest \$000)		
	Fair Share Delegates Full Subsidy	Fair Share Delegates \$500 Subsidy
Delegate Subsidy Cost for Fair Share + Merit	\$1,320,000	\$600,000
Fixed Costs	\$1,000,000	\$1,000,000
Total Biennial Assembly Cost	\$2,320,000	\$1,600,000
Total Annualized Cost	\$1,160,000	\$800,000

Net Cost when Program Assembly immediately precedes or follows Delegate Assembly (rounded to the nearest \$000)		
	Fair Share Delegates Full Subsidy	Fair Share Delegates \$500 Subsidy
Net Biennial Cost		
@ 1,500 Registrants <i>equals Total Biennial Assembly Cost - \$525,000</i>	\$1,795,000	\$1,075,000
@ 3,000 Registrants <i>equals Total Biennial Assembly Cost - \$1,050,000</i>	\$1,270,000	\$550,000
@ 5,000 Registrants <i>equals Total Biennial Assembly Cost - \$1,750,000</i>	\$570,000	(\$150,000)
Net Annualized Cost		
@ 1,500 Registrants	\$898,000	\$538,000
@ 3,000 Registrants	\$635,000	\$275,000
@ 5,000 Registrants	\$285,000	(\$75,000)

So a reasonable range for anticipated annualized cost to the Association for a fully subsidized delegate body is about \$400,000 to \$800,000 for a scenario in which a program assembly with paid registration immediately precedes or follows a biennial delegate assembly.

We could imagine other related cost savings that could further lower the net annualized cost to the Association for subsidizing delegates to a biennial assembly. For example, the UUA Board or Trustees is interested in other governance reform, specifically significant reduction to the size of the Board. Reducing the Board size by 50% or more could save at least \$100,000 annually. If the delegate subsidy for housing is based on shared double rooms, the net annualized cost reduction would be about \$145,000 using the other assumptions above. Not quantified, but potentially more significant financial benefits could result from more

effective use of UUA staff time and program budgets by holding the General Assembly biennially instead of every year.

Potential other sources of cost savings to help subsidize delegates	
Action	Annualized Savings Estimate
Reducing the size of the UUA Board by 50% or more	\$100,000+
Delegate housing subsidy based upon shared double rooms	\$145,000
Better stewardship of UUA staff time and program budgets due to GA moving to biennial; opportunities for developing new programs serving other needs	<i>Not Quantified</i>

C. Frequency: Biennial

- If financial accessibility calls for subsidizing delegate costs, financial sustainability calls for shifting the General Assembly from annual to biennial.
- Allows time for the Board to prepare a substantive business agenda and to be in active linkage with congregations and their delegates, to listen to them, and to prepare them for their work on matters of highest importance to our Association and our faith
- Allows time for preparation, establishment, implementation of multiyear goals before reporting to the next assembly
- Allows for more effective use of UUA staff and budget – better stewardship of staff time and energy. More time for “engagement in mission” rather than continually “reporting on mission.” Staff could plan and participate in a more robust way biennially than in the press for the annual program.
- Opens up opportunities to utilize the same resources for specialized, regionalized and/or localized events during the even years that are potentially more relevant and effective
- Opens up opportunities for settled ministers and their congregations to utilize professional expense and leadership training budgets in other relevant and targeted ways

D. Timing: Early August

There’s no right time for everybody.

- August is closer to the start of the “church year” for most congregations.
- Early August to facilitate attendance by youth, young adults and teachers who start school in mid- to late August
- Heard from many that because of the June timing, the good energy and ideas from GA “go home to die” in the lull of summer church programming.

E. Delegate assembly as 2 ½-day either on its own or associated with a two-day programming that would precede or follow the delegate assembly.

- Enough time to conduct substantive business and learning; short enough to fit into delegates’ life schedules

- Having a delegate assembly on its own would promote focus and attention to important business without distractions. The challenge would be a business agenda, assembly process and associated learning and worship of high enough quality and substance to attract enough leaders of our congregations.
- Having a delegate assembly either preceded or followed by a two-day program assembly would offer a biennial gathering of the Association that is fuller and more familiar to leaders. Delegates could combine in one trip their Associational business with other relevant learning, public witness and networking among a wider range of fellow UUs. An associated benefit of a program assembly would be registration income to cover some of the fixed costs and delegate subsidy of the delegate assembly.

F. Technology

- Substantive linkage and distant delegates participating through offsite voting are initially a clash of values. To get our vision of linkage right, person-to-person, eyeball-to-eyeball interaction is essential. Voting without interaction trivializes informed delegate participation, and makes voting a decision more important than the process by which you make the decision.
- We envision continued expanded use of technology to allow people (non-delegates) to see assembly proceedings and potentially to offer live comments and impressions.
- We envision expanded use of technology for linking, training and otherwise preparing delegates between biennial assemblies.

G. What would happen during alternate (even) years?

Some possibilities suggested in feedback:

- National Program or “Big Tent” assembly – bringing together congregational leaders and various interest and affinity groups for shared learning, worship, public witness, networking
- Thematically aligned Regional Gatherings
- A Unitarian Universalist “Week of Service”
- A year off

Addendum

I. Summary of Task Force process

- Task Force meetings since January 2008
 - 5 in person
 - 6 teleconferences
- Interviews/Feedback from:
 - UUMA Executive Committee
 - District Presidents Association
 - District Staff
 - GA Planning Committee
 - Commission on Social Witness
 - Commission on Appraisal
 - UUA Board of Trustees
 - Workshops at six District Assemblies in Spring 2009
 - Workshop at 2009 GA
 - Numerous individuals either in person, via email and through UUA lists
- Interviews with other denominations:
 - United Church of Christ
 - PCUSA (Presbyterian)
 - Episcopal Church of America
 - Union of Reformed Judaism

II. Delegate Allotment Formula -- *example*

One possibility using 2009 certification data for a total delegate body of less than 2,000:

Congregation Size	Delegates per Congregation	Total Delegates
1-250	1	838
251-550	2	282
551-1000	3	111
*1000+	4	25
Settled Ministers (one per congregation)**		600
At-large delegates (20 selected per region)		<u>100</u>
TOTAL Delegates		1956

* CLF and Philippines included in 1000+ category; other three international societies are in the 1-250 size category.

** Estimated number of congregations with settled ministers.

Not granted delegate status under this scenario:

- Additional settled ministers in congregations
- Ministers emeritus/a
- DREs
- UUA Board of Trustees
- Association Member Organizations

III. Comparison table of features of other denominations' assemblies in comparison with GA (interviewed by Fifth Principle Task Force in 2008)

Denomination	Frequency	Duration	Delegates	Total Attendance	Delegate Subsidy
UUA **	Annual	5 days	~5,100 eligible ~2,200 attend	4,300	None
Episcopal Church / America	Triennial	13 days	1,150*	15,000	Full
Presbyterian USA	Biennial	8 days	1,000	3,000	Full
United Church of Christ	Biennial	5 days	1,000	3,500	Full
Union for Reformed Judaism	Biennial	5 days	2,500 <i>estimate</i>	4,000	Full

* Total delegates at last assembly. Bicameral: house of bishops, house of deputies (1/2 ordained, 1/2 lay)

** UUA General Assembly delegate attendance and total attendance figures are approximate 2001-2009 averages.