

**Report of District President's Association Observer
Kathy Burek, President, District Presidents' Association
UUA Board of Trustees Meeting—April 18-21, 2013**

Overview: As District Presidents, each of us has received the communication piece from the UUA Board, presenting their summary of this meeting (see <http://board.blogs.uua.org/uncategorized/uua-board-of-trustees-letter-to-congregations-may-2013/>). In addition, the *UU World's* Michele Deakin posted a summary for the weekly online edition of the *World* (see http://www.uuworld.org/news/articles/285331.shtml?utm_source=n). This Observer's report will elaborate on issues of particular interest to the DPA, rather than on repeating information found in the board letter or the *UU World* report.

Leather and Grace, an organization for Unitarian Universalists interested in BDSM (Bondage & Discipline, Dominance & submission, Sadoomasochism), were observers throughout the Board's meeting. Members of the group met with the Right Relations Team of the UUA Board for discussions prior to the Board meeting. See <http://leatherandgrace.wordpress.com/> for further information about this group.

In the Aftermath of the Boston Marathon Bombings: Sometimes, we find ourselves doing ordinary business in the midst of extraordinary events. Thus it was for this meeting of the UUA Board of Trustees. The meeting began in the shadow of the tragic bombings at the Boston Marathon three days earlier. Day Two, Friday, began with news that the City of Boston was locked down. No public transportation was available. People were asked to "shelter in place", meaning that the streets and the Boston Common were empty and quiet. Most UUA employees were unable to come to work, giving 25 Beacon Street a "Saturday" feeling of empty hallways and offices.

By 6 pm, the lockdown was lifted. After dinner, Trustee Linda Laskowski and I walked to Boylston Street. At the fences marking the edge of the crime scene perimeter, members of the community had left flowers, condolence notes, and other remembrances of the victims of the bombing. The memorial, like so many others, was a spontaneous expression of a community's grief, and its hopes for a better future. Along the bed of tulips in the Boston Garden were small signs expressing desires for peace and hope.

Sunday, rather than worship at 25 Beacon, as is the Board's normal practice, we joined fellow UUs at the Arlington Street Church. It was a lovely spring day, and crowds of people were enjoying the Common and the Boston Gardens. As we were bathed in the light of the church's Tiffany windows, we were reminded of the tragic loss of life and the hundreds injured only a few blocks away. We remembered the law enforcement officers killed and injured by the bombing suspects, and also those killed and injured in the Texas explosion, the earthquake in China, and the all those whose lives are touched by violence. Catie Scudera, the congregation's Intern Minister, and Tina Cheri of the Louis D. Brown Peace Institute, spoke to us of the need for love and forgiveness rather than hatred and division.

I begin my report with this story, since for me, it was a reminder of what we as UUs are really all about. It isn't monitoring reports or Ends, or budget deficits. It is our message of love and healing for a broken world. Each of us, as we work to lead our Association, at whatever level, need to remember this whenever we find ourselves struggling with the necessary details of governance and operations.

Linkage Work: Trustee Linda Laskowski reported for the Linkage Working Group on the joint UUA Board/DPA Linkage Task Force. The partnership of the District Presidents' Association is greatly appreciated. After Linda reviewed the major findings, participants, including observers, broke into small groups to wrestle with some of the statements that needed additional discussion. The members of the DPA Linkage Task Force will share more information about the feedback at our meeting in June. We'll

be able to incorporate some of this information into our strategic planning work. The feedback is also broken down by district, which can be shared with our boards for use in district planning.

The Board continues to be gracious and open in involving observers in work where it is appropriate to do so. Involving the DPA, UUA senior staff, and the moderator candidates strengthens commitment to the overall direction of the Association. Including other visitors, like the Leather and Grace, who are occasional guests, ensures that voices from outside the Board/Administration power structure are heard.

FY 13-14 Budget Issues: UUA Treasurer Tim Brennan presented the proposed FY 13-14 Budget for the UUA. (See http://www.uua.org/documents/finance/130408_fy1415consolidatebudget.pdf).

Right Relationships with Youth: Carey McDonald, the UUA's Youth and Young Adults Ministries Director, walked the Board through the UUA's Youth Policies. He offered the following suggestions to the UUA Board in developing right relationships with youth. District and Regional Boards with Youth Members should also be advised to consider these suggestions, and make sure their Youth Safety policies are adequate, and followed.

- Inclusion is about making space for leadership
- E.g., inviting youth to come along to dinner when Board members are making arrangements, make sure they are comfortable;
- Need two youth observers (also applies to other historically marginalized groups), so they aren't alone in discussions
- Avoid using acronyms; ensure that those invited into discussion can really participate
- Is the Board's work organized in a youth-friendly manner? E.g., travel, time to participate in meetings and work between meetings are issues for boards, committees, task forces
- Need systems of support, on front end, during, etc., e.g., booking travel, orientation; pay attention to dynamics; follow up;
- Youth in multigenerational contexts require different guidelines than youth-oriented events
- Guidelines are meant to protect everyone
- Check for mandatory reporting laws in the state where activities occur, and/or where person is licensed or credentialed, and who is mandated reporter
- Beer/wine—at least one responsible board member should avoid consuming alcohol in social situations; also consumption should be responsible for others
- Civil disobedience—Board adults really can't assume responsibility for youth in such situations; at least some adult board members would need to refrain from participating in activities involving risk of arrest
- Some policies meant to protect can be burdensome, e.g., youth can't walk alone to CVS for a toothbrush
- Be aware of the informal, unwritten aspects of a board culture that may not be youth-friendly

Future of GA: The Board and observers broke into small groups for the purpose of generating questions that could be used to focus small groups that will discuss the future of GA during this upcoming General Assembly. Some groups focused on generating ideas for radically reforming GA, others for making minor adjustments. These ideas were not generated for the purposes of possible action, but as stimulus for thought. Districts and Regions will be impacted by decisions relating to the timing and content of future GAs. Further, the same issues that impact accessibility and value of GA apply to our district and regional Annual Meetings as well. This is a conversation the DPA may wish to pursue as a group, and with our own boards.

Impasse and Breakthrough: Tensions between the board and the administration were in evidence at several points during the meeting. Several monitoring reports were rejected, with board members expressing frustration that what they were receiving from the Administration was not responsive. Senior staff, in turn, expressed frustration that what they saw as good faith efforts to respond were still not good enough. Some board members noted that over time, more of the monitoring reports were being accepted, indicating that progress is being made.

The most significant controversy occurred over the proposed FY 13-14 UUA Budget. Several board members stated that they could not vote for this budget, since it did not clearly show how the allocation of funds was tied to the Global Ends, nor was it clear to them how the Administration was proposing to measure success. Others asked the administration to explain their criteria for determining when a program was deemed unsuccessful and should be discontinued. President Morales and senior staff felt they had made the linkages the board requested. Several people on both sides shared their frustration that after four years, the situation was not better.

Under the UUA Bylaws, the UUA Board is required to present a budget at GA. If the Board rejected the bylaws, they would have had to come with their own budget. Since May 1 is the date specified in the UUA Bylaws for having all GA Business items published, there was less than two weeks to accomplish a highly complex task. To explore ways of breaking the impasse, Board members authorized the Moderator, Gini Courter, and a small group of Trustees to meet privately with President Morales and Rev. Harlan Limpert, who will be the Chief Operating Officer of the UUA as of July 1. The Board also determined that it would go into Executive Session without the President, staff, or observers the next morning. Several Board members felt the need to have a private conversation about their own thinking about these issues, and to see if they could come up with a resolution.

The latter move generated a discussion of the use of Executive Sessions. President Morales expressed concern about the absence of transparency. Morales noted that Executive Sessions were only intended for legal or personnel matters. Board members argued that their dissatisfaction with the budget and the monitoring reports was a personnel issue. Board members pledged that should any Executive Session deviate from an appropriate subject matter, they would move to go out of Executive Session. Other Board members noted that the administration has opportunities to engage in private conversation among itself, but the board does not. The motion to go into Executive Session, without the President, was approved.

The next morning, what was intended as a 60-minute session lasted 90 minutes? When the board reconvened its public meeting, they made this offer to the Administration:

- Accept the proposed budget for FY13-14
- Drop the request for remediation of monitoring reports on current Ends that are likely to change
- Add \$100,000 to the budget for a consultant who will be jointly agreed to by the Board and the Administration. The consultant will work with the new Board, Moderator and the administration to reach agreement on monitoring and metrics.

The Administration accepted the offer, and the budget was adopted.

This decision has generated some conversation on various UU blogs and websites. Some are concerned about the money being spent, when staff is being laid off. A recent joint statement from President Morales, Gini Courter, and Tom Loughrey responded to these concerns. See <http://www.uua.org/news/pressroom/pressreleases/286743.shtml>

Executive Sessions and the UUA Board: As an observer, I feel entitled to express an opinion about the Board's decision to go into a closed-door Executive Session on Sunday morning. I have mixed feelings about this. The Board most definitely should use private sessions when the discussion involves

individuals. None of us would like our suitability for an appointment, or our work as professionals discussed in public. It is also important that certain business decisions such as the purchase of the property on 24 Farnsworth be conducted in a manner that does not compromise the UUA's bargaining position in a real estate or similar transaction. Beyond that, transparency is an important value for an Association that is governed by the democratic process. Further, I would expect Board members to express in public any opinion about board business that they would express in private. That some board members might be intimidated by the presence of observers is understandable, but part of the responsibility of a board member is to be accountable to the constituency.

Overall, my sense is that the Board's decision to have a small group meet privately with President Morales and Rev. Harlan Limpert, and its decision to go into Executive Session to discuss their next steps about the budget, Ends, and metrics was long overdue. The Board needed a chance to talk amongst itself and come to some consensus about how it would attempt to bridge long-standing difficulties in their relationship with the Administration. I also felt that many comments made during the budget and metrics discussion were moving into performance evaluation territory. As noted above, I support the need for this type of discussion to be private. I would not support the Board using closed-door sessions to resolve any and all areas where they have disagreements. One function that Board can provide for the Association is to model the ability to come to consensus after having open, honest, and respectful disagreements.

My wish for the UUA Board and the Administration is that they are able to resolve their differences, allowing them to move our Association forward together.

Bylaws Amendments: Several proposals for amendments to the UUA Bylaws were approved for placement on the GA Final Business Agenda. These include two that originated with districts. From the Southeast District comes a proposal to amend the definition of "Member Congregation". The Central Midwest, Heartland, and Prairie Star Districts asked the Board to propose amending the UUA Bylaws to include "regions" and to recognize the MidAmerica Region in place of the three existing districts. The latter amendment also includes language to permit an orderly transition process.

Full text is in the GA Business Agenda, see http://www.uua.org/documents/gaoffice/agenda/2013_agenda.pdf

Transfer of Prairie Star District Assets: The Prairie Star District's Bylaws provide that on dissolution, its assets are transferred to the UUA. The District's assets include the property of a camp, along with cash and office furnishings. The UUA Board passed a resolution permitted the District to transfer its assets directly to the MidAmerica Region (in the case of the cash and office furniture), and to the Camp UniStar Foundation (in the case of the camp property and the camp's cash). Districts considering mergers should consult with legal counsel on the disposition of assets to determine if they will need a similar resolution.

Board Self-Monitoring: The Board reviewed its compliance with its own governance policies. They committed in the future to following a 24-month monitoring cycle, getting agendas out on time, and in continuing to work on transparency. The Board recognizes a need to manage its time and not accept every proposal for agenda items. The Moderator and Vice Moderators are responsible for this process.

Apology: I apologize to my DPA colleagues and the UUA Board for the delays in getting my observer's reports out. Juggling my role as DPA President, the MidAmerica Regionalization process and an increase in my consulting responsibilities have made the last several months challenging.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathy Burek, President
District Presidents' Association