

Fifth Principle Project

In our research, we frequently heard the call for reform of our largest governing body, the General Assembly, particularly in regard to the unequal access to decision making that our current structure perpetuates. The Fifth Principle Task Force Report to the UUA Board of Trustees in December 2009 lays out in detail many of the challenges and potential remedies to this issue. The Task Force reports,

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.

The report continues,

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 reflects 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 report recommends a fully sponsored, biennial delegate assembly and details the values that informed its recommendation: economic accessibility and sustainability; empowered delegates authorized to represent congregations; excellence in governance; excellence in shared leadership and ministry; multi-generational participation and decision making; and awareness and inclusiveness of antiracism/antiracist/multicultural concerns (AR/AO/MC).

We would place particular emphasis on economic accessibility, multi-generational participation, and decision making, as well as awareness and inclusiveness of AR/AO/MC concerns as being vital to all potential governance reforms of the Association. We recommend that the Board of Trustees revisit the findings of the Fifth Principle Task Force as part of a broader governance reform agenda. You can read the Fifth Principle Task Force report here: uua.org/sites/live-new.uua.org/files/documents/boardtrustees/5thprinciple/0912_report.pdf

Action Adopt an implementation plan toward the areas of this report with annual targets and outcomes through 2025, with an annual review of progress toward these goals, with these goals reported at General Assembly and to the congregations.

Nominating Committees as Agents of Change

In the effort to bring about the Beloved Community, we often err on the side of the individual as the primary agent of change over and against systemic change. Motivated by the belief that if we, as individuals, are not racist, sexist, ableist, homophobic, biphobic, or transphobic and are willing to recognize the ways in which the accumulation of privilege for some depends on the marginalization of others, then the work of dismantling white supremacy culture is well under way.

Open hearts and minds, loving kindness, faithful fellowship, and our commitment as individual Unitarian Universalists to promote and affirm our inherent worth and dignity are indeed invaluable. Yet individual efforts do not guarantee the Beloved Community. For this, we need hard and committed work that engages the individual as well as soberly addressing the institutional dimensions of the work.

We need to keep in mind that individual Unitarian Universalists do not operate in a vacuum, but rather in institutional and cultural contexts. Our cultural context provides us with unconscious learning about who is valued and who should be heard, and undoing these is key to our survival and ability to welcome and be inclusive in our faith.

Just as institutional well-being can provide for the structure that supports our best intentions, dysfunction in our institutional structure can leave Unitarian Universalism unable to accomplish its transformational ministry in the world. Institutional structural

well-being is also imperative in order to accomplish any task that requires a commitment over time—and unlearning a preference for white, male, heteronormative, cisnormative, ableist leadership is a change that requires a commitment over the long haul. Without these, new forms of leadership cannot thrive.

Our commitment to growth, learning, and institutional change requires a commitment to leadership development and support. Many of our institutional structures will be challenged to set clear goals and cast an expansive path as we journey toward the Unitarian Universalism of the future.

While many of our congregations and institutions may choose to experiment with new and different organizational structures, some basic mechanisms help ensure that institutions may always need to organize themselves in order to get things done. These mechanisms require regular maintenance to ensure their efficiency and to promote shared leadership. Key among these are mechanisms for leadership development and conscious cultivation through key structures such as nominating committees.

Nominating committees play a key role at all levels: in congregations, in the Association, and in Unitarian Universalist professional associations, camps, and conference centers. These committees determine whom we call into leadership and how they understand their commitments to work toward justice and equity. These are fundamental areas of concern during