

2023 General Assembly Report Presented to the UUSD Board of Trustees, July 26, 2023
Pat Schaeffer, Business-Only Virtual Delegate to the 2023 General Assembly

This was my 18th General Assembly (GA), and I thank the Board of Trustees for allowing me the privilege to serve my congregation as a delegate. After many years serving as a delegate, this is my last one. I hope other UUSD members, particularly church leaders, volunteer to serve their congregation in this important capacity.

Following are my personal reflections on GA 2023.

- 1. The delegates approved the Article II Bylaws as amended without the Seven Principles and references to Humanism, Earth-Centered traditions and Jewish and Christian teachings in the Sources. Important new terms, such as accountability and covenant, remain undefined.**
- 2. I believe amending the Article II Bylaws at GA 2024 to incorporate the Seven Principles, Humanism, and other Sources will be difficult and likely fail.**
- 3. I believe it is likely the Article II Bylaws as amended will pass at the GA 2024.** Support from the Delegates for the Article Bylaws at GA 2023 was strong. The UUA Board of Trustees, Staff, and Article II Commission have an organized and well-messaged campaign in support of passage.
- 4. The Article II Study Commission says the Seven Principles will remain part of our history—Is that enough? How will this work?** According to the Article II Study Commission, “If the revision of Article II is adopted as currently written, the UUA Principles will no longer be incorporated in the UUA bylaws. We (UUA Article II Commission) anticipates congregations and individuals will continue to utilize the UUA Principles alongside the newly articulated shared UUA Values, as previous covenants and statements of commonly held beliefs are used within their historical context today.” Reference: <https://www.uua.org/uuagovernance/committees/article-ii-study-commission/blog/faq>
- 5. Some UUA officials criticized UUs for apparently expressing concerns about the UUA’s approach to anti-racism and dismantling white supremacy culture and patriarchy.** I was surprised to hear these statements (below) made by two UUA officials. My concern is their remarks could be interpreted to mean that if UUs disagree with the UUA or raise questions about their approach to culture change issues (or the non-contested election of the UUA President), these UUs will be criticized. Such messages may also discourage UUs from openly sharing their opinions or some may become disenchanted and simply walk away from Unitarian Universalism. We need a loving strategy from the UUA that will bring about greater unity within our denomination.

Outgoing UUA President, Rev. Susan Frederick-Gray, President’s Report.

“...And unfortunately, in times of change and uncertainty, there is always a risk that fear and anxiety will dominate and lead people to cling more tightly to what has been, to a status quo that has never served the cause of human need nor the values of justice and equity. Even more dangerous, during times of significant change, some people begin to cling to some fabricated imagination of a mythical “great” past. We see this in our country, but also within our own tradition.

I recognize that for some Unitarian Universalists, the focus on anti-racism and dismantling white supremacy culture and patriarchy, has been challenging. Change is difficult. Yet the vast majority of UUs have affirmed – without fail – the importance of this work through decisions made by congregational delegates at General Assemblies for more than a decade.

And what breaks my heart is that despite this overwhelming support, there remain small, uncompromising groups that seek to undercut the democratic process by obstructing their congregations and the UUA in living our values and commitments. As UUs, we will never all think alike. You can be in Beloved Community and have different

opinions. But it is damaging when individuals - especially people of privilege - break covenant, attack the motives of leaders, and insist on their own way against the will of the community". (emphasis added)

Source: <https://www.uua.org/ga/off-site/2023/business/ii/presidents-report>; <https://www.uua.org/files/2023-06/UUA%20Staff%20Report%202023.pdf>

Rev. Dr. Mathew Johnson in representing the UUA Election Practices Campaign Committee: These remarks were made at the beginning of the Presidential Candidate Forum about questions raised concerning having only one candidate for the UUA President position: "...And, what is clear to me from my social location is that the questions about this, which preemptively call into the question the legitimacy of her presidency, are both premised on faulty facts and in this moment and context are both racist and sexist." (emphasis added).

Source: (General Session III. 11:43 in video), <https://www.uua.org/ga/off-site/2023/business/iii>

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. I recommend the UUSD Board of Trustees take a leadership role in ensuring the congregation is fully informed about the upcoming Article II Bylaws on a regular basis and that the congregation has an opportunity to engage in ongoing discussions about these issues, including the UUA's focus on anti-racism and dismantling white supremacy culture and patriarchy.
2. I also recommend that recruiting for GA 2024 delegates begin in the fall to ensure there are a sufficient number of delegates willing and prepared to participate in GA 2024 and to engage in information and discussion activities with the congregation involving the Article II Bylaws and the UUA's focus on anti-racism and dismantling white supremacy culture and patriarchy.

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FURTHER READING

- **Number of GA Registrants:** Total: Over 4,100: 1,768 online registrants; 2,380 in-person registrants (Reference: "GA 2023: Highlights and Recap," UU World, 6/26/23; <https://www.uuworld.org/articles/ga-2023>).
- **Number of GA Delegates:** GA 2023 included 2,593 credentialed delegates representing 715 congregations in fifty states; Washington, D.C.; Canada; Mexico; and the Philippines. Of those delegates, 1,317 were onsite, 827 were online, and 447 were business only delegates. A total of 2,109 credentialed delegates (81 percent) participated in the final round of votes. <https://www.uuworld.org/articles/ga-2023>
- **Article II Bylaws:** Delegates approved the proposed Article II Bylaws as amended (five amendments). A simple majority vote was required. The vote count: in favor 1818 (86.3%); against: 289 (13.7%). Reference: <https://www.uua.org/files/2023-06/Results%20-%202023%20General%20Session%20IV.pdf>
- **Article II Proposal (W/Amendments),** <https://www.uua.org/files/2023-06/Article%20%20Package.pdf>. Not approved: Amendment 61 to Article II - Proposed by Jan Radoslovich (2.2 Values) adds current Seven Principles as historic context [note: very similar to a number of other submitted amendments]

- **What's Next with Article II:**

- The Article II Study Commission has six months to incorporate and clean up the amendments passed by the delegates at GA. The Study Commission will send it back to the UUA Board of Trustees to be placed on the General Assembly 2024 agenda for a final vote.
- The approved Article II Bylaws version can be amended in 2024 only by a three-fourths vote in favor of an amendment submitted to the 2024 GA in writing by the UUA Board of Trustees or a minimum of fifteen (15) certified congregations by action of their governing boards or their congregations. Proposed amendments must be received by the UUA Board of Trustees by February 1, 2024.
- Final approval of the Article II proposal will require a two-thirds vote of the 2024 General Assembly to adopt the revision as the new Article II of the UUA bylaws.

*Reference: Article II Study Commission, Revision Votes,
<https://www.uua.org/uua/governance/committees/article-ii-study-commission>*

- **Uncontested Election of a New UUA President:** Dr. Rev. Sophia Betancourt was elected as the 10th President of the Unitarian Universalist Association. She was the sole nominee in an uncontested election. There were a total of 2,464 voters. Votes to preliminarily approve: Yes: 2320 (95.5%). No votes: 110 (4.5%), Abstentions: 34 (1.4%). *Reference:* <https://uua.simplyvoting.com/index.php?mode=results&election=205035>. The second nominee selected by the UUA's Presidential Search Commission declined the nomination. Rather than reopening the application process, the committee determined that the only fair and appropriate course of action was to move forward with the nomination of Dr. Rev. Betancourt. Source: <https://www.uua.org/pressroom/press-releases/psc-nominee-president> Election Results Link: <https://www.uua.org/files/2023-06/Results%20-%202023%20UUA%20General%20Assembly%20Election.pdf>
- **"Complete Divestment from the Fossil Fuel Industry and Subsequent Reparations,"** https://www.uua.org/files/2023-03/prop_bus_res_qa2023_final.pdf The business resolution, "Complete Divestment from the Fossil Fuel industry and Subsequent Reparations," proposed by UU Young Adults for Divestment, was not adopted, with 1,412 votes (68.3 percent) against and 654 (31.7 percent) in favor. <https://www.uuworld.org/articles/qa-2023>.

Following the vote, a group of young UUs in favor of the business resolution, demonstrated in front of the stage with signs and changes. "UUA Board Statement, Post-General Assembly 2023, Regarding Divestment Reparations," <https://www.uua.org/uua/governance/board/announcements/statement-post-qa2023-divestment-reparations>

- **Actions of Immediate Witness:** All three proposed Actions of Immediate Witness passed overwhelmingly: "Rise Up to Stop Copy City" (83.8 percent in favor); "Organizing for Health Equity" (85.8 percent); and "Protect the Dreamers, the Recipients of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrival (DACA) with a Pathway to Permanent Residence" (98.1 percent). <https://www.uuworld.org/articles/qa-2023>

AWARDS

- **President's Annual Award for Volunteer Service to the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA):** This award is given to the person or organization designated by the UUA President as having given extraordinary and vital service to the UUA as a volunteer. The 2023 Volunteer Service Award was given to the Commission on Institutional Change.

Background: The UUA Commission on Institutional Change was established and charged at the New Orleans 2017 GA to conduct an audit of white privilege and the structure of power within Unitarian Universalism and analyze structural racism and white supremacy culture within the UUA. The Commission released its final work to the UUA Board of Trustees and General Assembly in June 2020. (*Widening the Circle of Concern: Report of the UUA Commission on Institutional Change*) <https://www.uua.org/uua/governance/committees/cic>

“The WCC recommendations include work at every level of Unitarian Universalism, from local congregations to UU organizations and theological schools, to the UUA and its five regions.” https://www.uua.org/files/2022-07/WCC_2022_implementation_plan.pdf. Widening the Circle of Concern 2022 UUA Implementation Plan submitted by UUA Staff, June 2022. https://www.uua.org/files/2022-07/WCC_2022_implementation_plan.pdf

- **Angus MacLean Award for Excellence in Religious Education:** Awarded to Rev. Dr. Randolph “Randy” Becker.
- **Award for Distinguished Service to the Cause of Unitarian Universalism:** Awarded to Rev. Rosemary Bray McNatt <https://www.uuworld.org/articles/ga-2023>

Submitted by Pat Schaeffer, UUSD Delegate, to the Board of Trustees, July 26, 2023.

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