

GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE UUA, June 21-25, 2023
Report to Unitarian Universalist Community Church, Augusta, Maine
Helen Zidowecki and Michaela Loisel, Delegates
Karen Allen and Kathy Kellison, Sunday Morning program

GENERAL ASSEMBLY OVERALL

Following are notes from General Assembly (GA) of the Unitarian Universalist Association, located in Pittsburgh and attended virtually by Helen and Michaela. Background information about our participating in GA is available on <https://augustauu.org/assets/UUCC-Goes-to-GA-2023.3.25.pdf>. Further comments and questions about these notes or GA in general are welcome to the participants.

The preliminary Credential Report of attendees given in the last General Session was:
2593 delegates from 715 congregations in 50 states, Canada, DC and Philippines
1317 were onsite, and the rest were virtual or business only attendees.
This is partial count, as there were attendees who were not delegates. The official count from UUA will be more accurate, or ‘official’.

The UUCC Sunday Morning Service from GA was live-streamed to UUCC on June 25. We changed our plan to live-stream the Closing Session Sunday afternoon and made the link available so that it could be watched in locations of choice. This change was made on Sunday morning, due to heat, but may be the way to engage more people than gathering again at church.

There were General Sessions of business reports, reflections and discussions. The focus of this report is decisions made at the General Sessions, specifically
Article II of the Bylaws
Business Resolution on Fossil Fuels
Articles of Immediate Witness

The Closing Session included celebration of the six years of the UUA Presidency of Rev. Dr. Susan Frederick-Gray and the installation of Rev. Dr. Sofía Betancourt as the new President.

ARTICLE II OF THE UUA BYLAWS
Helen and Michaela voted for this proposal. It passed by 86% vote.

The Article II Study Commission presented a draft revision of the Bylaws:
--The draft revision had been widely distributed to members, with numerous opportunities for discussion in the months prior to GA.
--The Study Commission selected 15 of the 80 amendments that were received for action at General Session. Five of these amendments passed at GA.
--The 2023 vote on the Draft Revision, including the passed amendments, passed by 86%. (Had it failed, the process of revision of Article II would have stopped for several years.)

Comments and Next Steps:

--The Revised Draft Revision of Article II of the UUA Bylaws will be further reviewed, undoubtedly with further amendments. The Final Draft will be on the agenda for GA 2024.
--Our present bylaws are the legal authority. However, Article II presents a refreshing way to be in community that is reflected in the vote itself. Let us “live into” the new guidelines presented in the Article II revision throughout this next year in preparation for final vote in 2024.

Unitarian Universalist Association Bylaws and Rules: Article II Purposes and Covenant Passed as the statement to move forward in discussion toward GA 2024.

Section C-2.1. Purposes.

The Unitarian Universalist Association will devote its resources to and use its organizational powers for religious, educational, and humanitarian purposes. Its primary purposes are to assist congregations in their vital ministries, support and train leaders both lay and professional, to foster lifelong faith formation and spiritual development, to heal historic injustices, to support and encourage the creation of new Unitarian Universalist communities, and to advance our Unitarian Universalist values in the world.

The highest purpose of the Unitarian Universalist Association is to actively engage its members in the transformation of the world through liberating Love.

Section C-2.2. Values and Covenant.

As Unitarian Universalists, we covenant, congregation-to-congregation and through our association, to support and assist one another in our ministries. We draw from our heritages of freedom, reason, hope, and courage, building on the foundation of love.

Love is the power that holds us together and is at the center of our shared values. We are accountable to one another for doing the work of living our shared values through the spiritual discipline of Love.

Interdependence. We honor the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part. With humility and reverence, we covenant to protect Earth and all beings from exploitation, creating and nurturing sustainable relationships of repair, mutuality and justice.

Pluralism. We celebrate that we are all sacred beings diverse in culture, experience, and theology.

We covenant to learn from one another in our free and responsible search for truth and meaning. We embrace our differences and commonalities with Love, curiosity, and respect.

Justice. We work to be diverse multicultural Beloved Communities where all thrive. We covenant to dismantle racism and all forms of systemic oppression. We support the use of inclusive democratic processes to make decisions within our congregations and the society at large.

Transformation. We adapt to the changing world.

We covenant to collectively transform and grow spiritually and ethically. Openness to change is fundamental to our Unitarian and Universalist heritages, never complete and never perfect.

Generosity. We cultivate a spirit of gratitude and hope.

We covenant to freely and compassionately share our faith, presence, and resources. Our generosity connects us to one another in relationships of interdependence and mutuality.

Equity. We declare that every person has the right to flourish with inherent dignity and worthiness. We covenant to use our time, wisdom, attention, and money to build and sustain fully accessible and inclusive communities.

Section C-2.3. Inspirations.

As Unitarian Universalists, we proclaim that direct experiences of transcending mystery and wonder are a primary source of inspiration. These experiences open our hearts, renew our spirits and transform our lives. We draw upon, and are inspired by sacred, secular, and scientific understandings that help us make meaning and live into our values. We respect the histories, contexts and cultures in which they were created and are currently practiced. These sources ground us and sustain us in ordinary, difficult, and joyous times. Grateful for the experiences that move us, aware of the religious ancestries we inherit and enlivened by the diversity which enriches our faith, we are called to ever deepen and expand our wisdom.

Section C-2.4. Inclusion.

Systems of power, privilege, and oppression have traditionally created barriers for persons and groups with particular identities, ages, abilities, and histories. We pledge to replace such barriers with ever-widening circles of solidarity and mutual respect. We strive to be an association of congregations that truly welcome all persons who share our values. We commit to being an association of congregations that empowers and enhances everyone's participation, especially those with historically marginalized identities.

Section C-2.5. Freedom of belief.

Congregational freedom and the individual's right of conscience are central to our Unitarian Universalist heritage.

Congregations may establish statements of purpose, covenants, and bonds of union so long as they do not require that members adhere to a particular creed.

BUSINESS RESOLUTION: COMPLETE DIVESTMENT FROM THE FOSSIL FUEL INDUSTRY AND SUBSEQUENT REPARATIONS

Helen and Michaela voted Not to Pass. It received 31% vote to pass.

This resolution was submitted by petition by Youth and Young Adults. There have been divestment proposals over the last several years that are being implemented by the UUA. The focus of this proposal was on the urgency and need for immediate change. However, that would be detrimental to the structure and sustainability of the UUA itself. The proposal itself gives witness to the complexity of the process of divestment. That process continues and the urgency was noted.

ACTIONS OF IMMEDIATE WITNESS ON AGENDA

Michaela and Helen voted for all three to be discussed. All three passed.

An Action of Immediate Witness (AIW) is a statement about a significant action, event, or development in the world that necessitates immediate engagement and action among UU member congregations and groups. Six AIWs were submitted, and Congregations had an opportunity to vote for three to be discussed at GA. All three were passed at GA.

**Protect the Dreamers, the Recipients of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrived (DACA)
with a Pathway to Permanent Residence**

This AIW expresses UUA support for the Dreamers and calls on Congress to pass legislation giving them a pathway to permanent residence. It also calls on UUs to support the Dreamers in their communities and contact their members of Congress to advocate for their protection.

Proposed by: Steve Eckstrand, partnering with Unitarian Universalists for Social Justice (UUSJ), Pablo DeJesus, executive director of UUSJ, & Terry Grogan, co-convener of the Immigration Action Team, UUSJ.

WHEREAS, Unitarian Universalists for Social Justice (UUSJ) and many Unitarian Universalists hold that no human being is illegal and all merit treatment with inherent worth and dignity;

WHEREAS, Unitarian Universalists have a deep history passing Actions of Immediate Witness and Statements of Conscience in support of immigrants and a healthy immigration system;

WHEREAS, Immigrants and migrants are members of our families, our households, and our communities and are integral to the social and economic fabric of our society;

WHEREAS, Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) is an immigration policy that allows some undocumented immigrants, who were brought to the United States as children, to receive a two-year renewable period of deferred action from deportation and an employment authorization document (work permit) in the U.S.;

WHEREAS, DACA has provided temporary relief to more than 825,000 undocumented immigrants since 2012;

WHEREAS, current DACA recipients (often referred to as Dreamers) have lived here for more than 15 years, and nearly 80% of them are employed, many in jobs deemed essential;

WHEREAS, DACA recipients have families here—more than 1.3 million people live with a DACA recipient, including more than 300,000 U.S.-born children who have at least one parent with DACA;

WHEREAS, DACA recipients make significant contributions to the U.S. economy— each year DACA recipient households pay \$6.2 billion in federal taxes, \$3.3 billion in state and local taxes, and, after taxes, have \$25.3 billion in spending power;

WHEREAS, on July 16, 2021, a U.S. district court judge ruled that DACA violated the law and prohibited the government from accepting new applications to the program but allowed current recipients to keep their status while the case goes through the appeals process;

WHEREAS, on October 5, 2022, the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals affirmed that DACA is unlawful but returned the case to the district court for a decision on the current DACA policy;

WHEREAS, the U.S. district court heard oral arguments on DACA on June 1, 2023, and a decision is expected soon;

WHEREAS, since the federal courts have barred new applications for DACA, there are now hundreds of thousands of additional undocumented immigrants whose dreams for the future are in jeopardy;

WHEREAS, an ultimate court decision that DACA is illegal would disrupt the lives of millions of DACA recipients and family members,

WHEREAS, only Congress can provide a pathway to permanent residence for DACA recipients;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED:

That the Unitarian Universalist Association supports the Dreamers and believes that they are valued members of our communities, as are other immigrant populations;

That the UUA calls on Congress to expeditiously pass legislation to provide Dreamers with a pathway to permanent residence;

That the UUA encourages its members to support the Dreamers in their communities and to communicate with their members of Congress to urge them to support legislation protecting the Dreamers;

That the UUA will be vocal and forward-leaning in its work to encourage members to deepen our theological grounding in issues of immigration justice; collaborate with local partners to combat anti-immigrant narratives, including those by state legislatures, and work with grassroots organizations/campaigns centering on those most directly affected by anti-immigration policies and other failures of the U.S. immigration.

Organizing for Healthy Equity

Attacks against abortion rights, against gender affirming health care programs, and against the very young and the very old, combined with the impact of systemic racism, pandemics, poverty, and other problems, have raised awareness about the need for health equity and mutual aid. This AIW calls for new partnerships to secure personal and social wellness, with justice for all people, in all nations.

Proposed by: Robert Murphy, partnering with United Fellowship, in Saint Peterburg, Florida, with other community organizations in the American South. The Florida Project. Unitarian Universalists for a Just Economic Community.

WHEREAS recent attacks against abortion rights, against gender affirming health care programs, and against the very young and the very old, combined with the impact of systemic racism, pandemics, poverty, and other problems, bring all nations to a new conversation about health equity and human dignity; and

NOTING that the 2023 Sustainable Development Goals Summit will convene at the United Nations in September to reimagine and reshape global programs for public health and justice;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the General Assembly calls for immediate action. We want individuals to have more control over their bodies. We agree with the World Health

Organization that health equity is achieved when everyone can attain their full potential for health and well-being. We know that racism, agism and ableism, homophobia, misogyny, and other forms of systemic oppression, prevent many people from enjoying wellness.

THEREFORE the General Assembly nurtures partnerships at three levels

- o INTERNATIONAL ACTION: Global programs in public health will require global solutions. We support global partnerships for health improvement with a strong Unitarian Universalist presence at the United Nations. We ask congregations to study the Sustainable Development Goals and the United Nations programs that promote health equity and justice. We ask Unitarian Universalists to celebrate Human Rights Day in December.

- o NATIONAL ACTION: We will work with others to create multigenerational alliances, so that different people, in different communities, can care for each other.

We call for equitable programs for paid family and medical care leave. We support a strong Social Security programs and programs that empower people of all ages and with different abilities. In the United States, we affirm our support for a single-payer system that will provide medical insurance and long-term care insurance for all residents.

There has been a resurgence in labor union organizing during recent months. We support workers as they organize democratic labor unions to secure adequate compensation, worker representation, pensions, and occupational health and safety.

- o LOCAL ORGANIZING: As North Americans move into the hot weather season, we want congregations and other community organizations to work together for health equity.

New programs for emergency preparedness, for mental health services, for health and safety education, and to provide access to family planning services, are needed immediately. We ask for mutual aid and solidarity instead of charity.

The 2023 Farm Bill is being prepared. Different Communities are asked to help each other by creating a Farm Bill that works for the distribution of health food in a healthy environment.

As people of faith, we affirm the inherent worth and dignity of all individuals and we join with others to reduce suffering and to overcome injustice. Health care programs should be proactive, and they should help to empower individuals in healthy relationships. We will work with others to create healthy workplaces and communities.

We will be held accountable by future generations.

Rise Up to Stop Cop City

In light of the nation's largest militarized police training center being approved by Atlanta's City Council, which will result in severe deforestation, and resistance to the training center being severely criminalized, Unitarian Universalists are called to use our voices to say NO to Cop City.

Proposed by Rev. Jason Lydon Minister, Second Unitarian Church of Chicago, and supported by Rev. Taryn Strauss and the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Atlanta.

WHEREAS, consistent with Unitarian Universalism's living tradition, our 6th principle on a peaceful and justice world, our 7th principle on the interdependent web of existence, and our 8th principle on accountably dismantling racism, we affirm that the proliferation of policing at the expense of Black communities and the Earth is a threat to safety, sustainability, and Beloved Community everywhere;

WHEREAS, the Atlanta Police Foundation, in partnership with the Atlanta City Government and a committee of more than 40 corporate donors, has proposed the construction of a \$90 million militarized urban warfare training complex, deemed "Cop City," in the heart of a predominantly Black neighborhood

WHEREAS, the construction of the Cop City campus requires the destruction of 381 acres of land in one of Atlanta's largest remaining green spaces, known as Welaunee Forest, South River Forest, and one of the "four lungs" of Atlanta

WHEREAS, the Welaunee Forest is sacred land to the Muskogee people, who the U.S. government forcibly from their ancestral homelands in what is referred to today as the city of Atlanta in the 1820's and 1830's, and its further destruction continues the U.S. government's centuries of violence and land dispossession against Indigenous nations and people

WHEREAS, organizers who mobilized against police violence and the police murder of Rashad Brooks during the Summer 2020 Uprisings called for the Atlanta City Government to divest from policing, invest in non-policing solutions to community safety, and give control over public safety resources to community members rather than government officials;

WHEREAS, members of the Atlanta Police Department, Georgia State Police, and the Georgia Bureau of Investigation have already deployed violence in their continued efforts to build the Cop City complex and proven that their efforts do not increase community safety, including the murder of Indigenous nonbinary forest defender Manuel (Manny) "Tortugita" Terán, who was shot at least 57 times while sitting cross-legged with their hands raised, and the arrests of and "domestic terrorism" charges against at least 45 activists between January and June 2023

WHEREAS, pressure from Stop Cop City organizers and activists over the past two years has already resulted in the public divestment of individuals and corporations from the construction of Cop City, and continuation of these efforts is likely to lead to further divestment

WHEREAS, the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA), Unitarian Universalist Mass Action (UUMA), and Unitarian Universalist Service Committee (UUSC) have already joined more than

50 local, state, and national organizations in calling for Atlanta Mayor Andre Dickens to terminate the city's lease of the Welaunee Forest to the Atlanta Police Foundation and resign his position as mayor

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT as Unitarian Universalists we recognize the momentum of collective action to demand social change and we call upon the UUA and its member congregations to Stop Cop City;

THEREFORE, we will take action through self-organized phone zaps, mass email campaigns, personal and institutional divestment from banks funding Cop City construction, and other solidarity actions against investors, funders, and other corporate partners across the U.S. and Canada

THEREFORE, we will support those engaged in direct action to Stop Cop City with spiritual and material resources, writing letters to incarcerated activists, calling for their immediate release from jail, demanding that all charges against them be dropped, and providing spiritual care for protestors and survivors of police violence;

THEREFORE, we will continue and expand local, state, and engagement through UU organizations to deepen our theological grounding in issues of environmental justice and policing and prison abolition;

NEXT STEPS: Some thoughts.

We would like to find ways for discussion of this report within the congregation, such as:

- Referral of issues to Social Justice Committee

- Possibly some additional Small Group Ministry session plans for ongoing groups or specific focus sessions.

Keep UUCC aware of UUA items throughout the year. For example, engage in the process of submitting, selecting and voting on Actions of Immediate Witness to be placed on the agenda for GA 2024 throughout this next year.

Increase participation of UUCC representatives at GA in 2024 Virtual GA and 2025 Multiplatform gathering in Baltimore.

- This may include financial assistance as part of UUCC budget.

- Live Stream sections of the GA agenda as we did this year.

We can keep the UUCC website section on UUA Connections updated.

Helen Zidowecki July 2, 2023