

MINUTES

FIFTY-FIFTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE
UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST ASSOCIATION
HELD IN COLUMBUS, OHIO

The General Assembly was convened on Thursday, June 23, 2016, at 8:15 a.m., by Moderator Jim Key at the Columbus Convention Center, Columbus, Ohio.

The Assembly adopted, by a vote of two-thirds or more, Rules of Procedure for the conduct of the meeting.

One new congregation was recognized as having entered into membership in the Unitarian Universalist Association during the past fiscal year: Unitarian Universalists of Benton County, which serves northwest Arkansas.

The Assembly received written and, in some cases verbal, reports from the President, the Moderator, the Treasurer, the Financial Advisor, the Secretary, the Board of Trustees, the General Assembly Planning Committee, the Commission on Social Witness, the Commission on Appraisal, Beacon Press, the Journey Toward Wholeness Transformation Committee, the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee, the UU College of Social Justice, and the Unitarian Universalist Women's Federation.

On the basis of an initial report by the Secretary of the Association, a quorum was declared present from the time the meeting was called to order.

Members of the Distinguished Service Award Committee presented the 2016 Award for Distinguished Service to the Cause of Unitarian Universalism to the Rev. Dr. Laurel Hallman.



Action on Bylaw Amendment

The Assembly passed by a vote of two-thirds or more an amendment to the bylaws so as to read as follows:

Underlining indicates insertion; brackets indicate deletion.

Section 4.16. Additions to the Agenda of Regular General Assemblies.

- (a) Non-substantive items related to greetings and similar matters may be admitted to the agenda by a regular General Assembly.
- (b) Prior to **[2013]** 2018, there will be no General Assembly Actions of Immediate

Witness on the agenda.

(c) (1) A General Assembly Action of Immediate Witness is one concerned with a significant action, event or development, the timing or specificity of which makes it inappropriate to be addressed by a UUA Statement of Conscience pursuant to the Study/Action process.

(2) **[Beginning with General Assembly 2013,]** No more than three General Assembly Actions of Immediate Witness may be admitted to the agenda of a regular General Assembly.

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Vote on Study/Action Issue

A Study/Action Issue on The Corruption of our Democracy received a majority vote of the Assembly and was referred for study in accordance with Bylaw Section 4.12.
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Business Resolutions

A proposed business resolution entitled “Screening Out Investment in Corporations Complicit in the Violation of Human Rights Including Palestinian Rights” did not receive the requisite vote of two-thirds or more of the Assembly.

The following business resolution received the requisite vote of two-thirds or more of the Assembly.

Thanksgiving Day Reconsidered

WHEREAS, the year 2020 marks the 400th anniversary of the arrival of the ship “Mayflower” in the region now known as New England; and

WHEREAS, concern has been expressed by Native American tribal leaders, by human rights advocates, by environmental justice advocates, and by others, about the celebration of the 400th anniversary of the colonization of New England; and

WHEREAS, several of the New England congregations that were established during the 1600s continue today as Unitarian Universalist congregations; and

NOTING the role of Unitarian Universalists in developing the holiday that is known as “the American Thanksgiving Day”; and

NOTING the desire of Unitarian Universalists to work for peace and justice for all the world’s people;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that this General Assembly encourages all Unitarian Universalists to enter a time of education, careful reflection, and healing, during the years 2016-2021, and that special attention be given to the suffering, indignity, and loss that native peoples have suffered since the early 1600s; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this General Assembly asks the President of the Unitarian Universalist Association to report to the 2017 General Assembly on national, tribal, and congregational plans for both the 400th anniversary of the “Mayflower” voyage and the 400th anniversary of the first harvest festival in Plymouth Colony; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this General Assembly asks the President of the Association to work in consultation with Native American peoples to present recommendations to UU congregations, districts, camps, and theological schools that wish to observe what is often called “the first Thanksgiving Day in America;” and

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED that we encourage Unitarian Universalists to work with all of the religious groups that trace their religious root to the Pilgrims and the Puritans. When we confront the past that we share with others, we ask for wisdom with charity as we try to better understand the people and the environment of the 1600s. To prepare for the future, we must make peace with our past. As we approach the Plymouth Colony quadricentennial dates, we ask for religious education programs that acknowledge the Radical Reformation and the religious Dissenters and Separatists of the 1600s. The story of religious Dissenters and Separatists is part of our Unitarian Universalist story, and their influence is still with us. We ask for religious education programs that honor and respect the spiritual wisdom of indigenous people, including the Wampanoag Tribal Nation (of Mashpee, Massachusetts), who first met the Pilgrims. We ask for all UU congregations across the United States of America to enter into dialogue with the local Native People in their areas about the Thanksgiving holiday and its history. In today’s world, we know that we are part of an interdependent web of all existence. With this awareness in mind, we ask for a time of truth and reconciliation for all Americans, including Native People, during the years 2016-2021.



Election Results:

The following individuals were elected in uncontested elections:

Financial Advisor – three-year term

Lucia Santini Field

UUA Board of Trustees – three-year term

Dorothy Holmes
Richard Jacke
Denise Rimes
Elandria Williams

Nominating Committee – three-year terms

Randy Burnham
Ken Wagner
Amanda Weatherspoon

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Actions of Immediate Witness

The Assembly adopted by a vote of two-thirds or more the following three Actions of Immediate Witness:

Build Solidarity with our Muslim Neighbors

BECAUSE Unitarian Universalist Association’s Principles call us as member congregations to affirm and promote “The inherent worth and dignity of every person” and “The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all”;

WHEREAS, our living tradition draws from many sources, including “Wisdom from the world’s religions which inspires us in our ethical and spiritual life” and “Jewish and Christian teachings which call us to respond to God’s love by loving our neighbors as ourselves”;

WHEREAS, the United States Constitution is founded in part on the freedom of religious belief and practice;

WHEREAS, the histories of Unitarianism, Universalism, and Unitarian Universalism affirm the importance and centrality of freedom of religious belief and practice in this country;

WHEREAS, Muslims and others perceived as Muslims in the United States have faced increased levels of discrimination and hate crimes since 9/11;

WHEREAS, an additional layer of fear, prejudice and xenophobia have arisen following the Paris and San Bernardino terrorist attacks in 2015 and the Belgium and Orlando attacks in 2016; and some politicians have called for a ban on immigration and increased (unnecessary) surveillance for all Muslims following these events;

WHEREAS, the refugee crisis in Syria has become a target of this fear, prejudice and xenophobia;

WHEREAS, Muslim leaders have reached out to Unitarian Universalists asking for our partnership to combat Islamophobia, and congregations have responded with support;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the 2016 General Assembly of the Unitarian Universalist Association expresses its love, respect and support for Muslims in our communities and encourages its member congregations to:

- build bridges of partnership with Muslim neighbors in our local areas;
- increase understanding of Islam within and beyond our local congregations especially in this political moment;
- learn more about and act on the realities of religious discrimination and the various refugee crises and offer support to refugees (Syrian and other) within our communities;
- challenge acts and words of Islamophobia in solidarity and coordination with Muslims;
- advocate in opposition to Islamophobic bills and actions in our local and national governments, paying particular attention to increased surveillance and anti-immigration efforts; and
- work in this election cycle to foster greater inclusion of all peoples, regardless of their religious, ethnic, national, or racial identity(ies).

**Stop the Hate: Protect and Support our Transgender
and Gender Non-Conforming Family**

BECAUSE – “Injustice at Every Turn,” a 2011 nationwide survey of transgender and gender non-conforming people, detailed overwhelming discrimination across multiple major areas of their lives: education, employment, health, family life, housing, and public accommodations;

BECAUSE – Equality in all these areas is a fundamental human right;

BECAUSE – Transgender and gender non-conforming people are routinely mistreated while in law enforcement custody;

BECAUSE – Transgender and gender non-conforming people face obstruction, harassment, and abuse in attempting to obtain identity documents in their true gender, which serves to increase the social isolation transgender and gender non-conforming people experience and diminishes their ability to participate fully in society;

BECAUSE – Transgender and gender non-conforming people are frequently isolated socially as a result of hate and discrimination, which leads to a general lack of understanding in our society concerning transgender and gender non-conforming people;

BECAUSE – Hate and discrimination lead to transgender and gender non-conforming persons being at substantially increased risk of violent attack;

BECAUSE – All of the discrimination, harassment and increased risk of physical, sexual and psychological violence that transgender and gender non-conforming people suffer contribute to a shockingly high rate of attempted suicide - a rate ten times higher than the average for the general population; and

WHEREAS, is in keeping with our First Principle - The inherent worth and dignity of every person; our Second Principle - Justice, equity and compassion in human relations; and our Sixth Principle - The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all; the following actions are immediately needed to improve the life situations and safety of transgender and gender non-conforming persons

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that We, the Delegates of the 2016 UUA General Assembly, call on Unitarian Universalists to:

1. Strongly condemn the anti-transgender legislation recently passed in North Carolina, known as HB-2, in Tennessee as HB-1840, and in Mississippi as HB-1523, and call for their immediate and full repeal;
2. Make a strong statement against the passage of any further bills targeting transgender and gender non-conforming persons in other states where they are pending;
3. Support passage of The Fairness Act¹ and similar federal anti-discrimination legislation so that transgender and gender non-conforming persons might have their ability to fully participate in society affirmed and protected;
4. Pledge to educate ourselves and our faith and civic communities to provide ever safer, more inclusive, and potentially healing spaces for transgender and gender non-conforming people;
5. Pledge to educate social workers and educators about transgender and gender non-conforming people's needs;

¹ The Fairness Act amends existing state or local civil rights laws to include sexual orientation and gender identity or expression. Typically, this will prohibit discrimination in employments, public accommodations, education, credit or lending, and housing; create a private right of action for aggrieved individuals and provide for enforcement through a government agency.

6. Pledge to educate health care professionals and law enforcement officers about transgender and gender non-conforming people's needs;
7. Pledge to educate legislators and other government officials about the need for transgender and gender non-conforming people's need for proper identification documents; and
8. Pledge to educate employers, agencies, and institutions about the needs of transgender and gender non-conforming people who might be employees, students, clients and customers, and encourage these employers, agencies and institutions to adopt affirming policies.

Some Guns, All Guns: Legislating Appropriate Restrictions

As the United States engages in a national discussion on ending gun violence, tragedy continues. The recent attack at the Pulse nightclub in Orlando, Florida, which took the lives of 49 people and injured 53 more, highlights an epidemic that claims 89 lives a day across the nation. While some aspects of gun violence are complex and systemic, we can take immediate action.

We can ensure responsible gun ownership with laws that keep **some guns** out of the hands of all people, and **all guns** out of the hands of some people.

First, we the delegates of the 2016 Unitarian Universalist General Assembly call upon state and federal legislators to make it a crime for civilians to knowingly import, sell, manufacture, retrofit or transfer a semiautomatic assault weapon or large capacity ammunition feeding device. Private citizens have no reason to have access to weapons like the MCX Carbine firearm used to murder 49 people in the Pulse nightclub in Orlando on June 12, 2016. These weapons have immense destructive power and do not belong in civilian hands. Specifically, we call on legislators to follow the lead of the seven states – California, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Hawaii, Maryland, New Jersey and New York – that already ban assault weapons for any purpose other than law enforcement or military and to join those seven states plus Colorado in prohibiting large capacity ammunition feeding devices that hold over 10 rounds.

Second, we call upon the states and the federal government to implement comprehensive, universal background checks. Legal access to guns is still too easy – and this recent tragedy is only the latest in a long line of examples. We call on states to require that all parties (private or licensed) conduct a background check of the proposed purchaser before selling any firearm. All states that do not currently do so should ensure that all relevant records are provided to the FBI's National Instant Criminal Background Check (NICS).

Policies such as expanding background checks to cover all gun sales would help keep guns out of the hands of those already deemed illegal purchasers. Ninety (90) percent of Americans, including the vast majority of gun owners, support background checks because they make us all safer. Since 1994, the Brady law has blocked over 2.4 million purchases.

These actions will not finish the task of building the world we dream of, but they will keep innumerable people safe as we continue to address broader issues of hate rhetoric, cultural violence, suicide, and access to mental health care.

As Unitarian Universalists we affirm the worth and dignity of all people, and promote justice, equity, and compassion in human relations. This General Assembly calls on Unitarian Universalists to work together and in collaboration with others to ensure that the states and federal government create safe and responsible gun ownership legislation and a more just and compassionate world.

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Responsive Resolution

The Assembly adopted by a vote of two-thirds or more the following Responsive Resolution:

Reaffirmation of Commitment to Racial Justice

WHEREAS, Unitarian Universalist congregations and individuals covenant in our first and sixth principles to affirm the inherent worth and dignity of every person as well as work toward a world community with peace, liberty and justice for all;

WHEREAS, the Unitarian Universalist Association lists as part of its primary purpose “to . . . extend and strengthen Unitarian Universalist institutions and implement its principles”;

WHEREAS, in our UUA Bylaws and Statement of Inclusion, we pledge to “replace widening barriers with ever-widening circles of solidarity and mutual respect as well as striving to be an association of congregations that truly welcomes all persons and are committed to structuring congregational and associational life in ways that empower and enhance everyone’s participation”;

WHEREAS, the Action of Immediate Witness, “*Support the Black Lives Matter Movement*,” was passed by the General Assembly in 2015;

WHEREAS, the Black Lives Matter AIW has been frequently referenced as satisfactory proof of our progress towards racial justice;

WHEREAS, the Board of Trustees of the Unitarian Universalist Association, in their 2016 report to the Assembly, called upon the Association to “find the will and the way to do a better job” in the fight for racial justice;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that we hold ourselves accountable to less witness and more action;

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED that the Board of Trustees shall issue a multi-year report on the board, staff, congregational, and denominational responses to Black Lives Matter, and particularly examine the year-to-year growth in these responses, at General Assembly 2017, 2018, and 2019.

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Credentials Report

The final credentials report of the Secretary of the Association, as corrected, was as follows: accredited and attending the 55th General Assembly of the Unitarian Universalist Association were 1391 member delegates, 311 ministerial delegates, 1 credentialed religious educator, 3 associate member delegates, 10 delegates representing the Church of the Larger Fellowship (included in member delegate count), and 126 off-site delegates, for a total of 1832 delegates representing 562 congregations, 48 states, and the District of Columbia. Total on-site registration for the Assembly was 3780 including 204 youth.

Offsite attendance included 154 individuals from 27 states, including 112 member delegates and 14 minister delegates. Nineteen congregations registered only off-site delegates.

Closing

The Assembly was adjourned *sine die* by Moderator Jim Key at approximately 3:50 p.m. on Sunday, June 26, 2016.

Respectfully submitted,

/s/ Harlan Limpert
Clerk