

MINUTES

**FIFTY-SIXTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE
UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST ASSOCIATION
HELD IN NEW ORLEANS, LA**

The General Assembly was convened on Wednesday, June 21, 2017, at approximately 7:30 p.m., by Moderator Denise Rimes at the Ernest N. Morial Convention Center, New Orleans, LA.

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

The Assembly received written and, in some cases verbal, reports from the Interim Co-Presidents, the Vice Moderator, the Treasurer, the Financial Advisor, the Secretary, the Board of Trustees, the General Assembly Planning Committee, the UUA Staff, the Commission on Social Witness, the Commission on Appraisal, Black Lives of UU, Beacon Press, the Renewing the Covenant Task Force, the Annual Program Fund, 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.



Action on Bylaw Amendment

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

Underlining indicates insertion; brackets indicate deletion.

Section C-2.1. Principles.

The living tradition which we share draws from many sources:
23 • Direct experience of that transcending mystery and wonder,
24 affirmed in all cultures, which moves us to a renewal of the spirit
25 and an openness to the forces which create and uphold life;
26 • Words and deeds of prophetic [woman and men] people which challenge
27 us to confront powers and structures of evil with justice,
28 compassion and the transforming power of love;

A second motion to dispense with the study commission described in Article 15.1 of the Bylaws with respect to the above proposed bylaw change was passed by the Assembly by a vote of greater than 80%.



Vote on Statement of Conscience

The following Statement of Conscience entitled “Escalating Economic Inequity” received a vote of two-thirds or more of the Assembly:

Escalating Economic Inequity

Challenging extreme inequity locally and globally is a moral imperative. As a pragmatic faith we are committed to working to change economic and social systems with a goal of equitable outcomes of life, dignity, and well-being experienced by all. The escalation of income and wealth inequity undergirds many injustices that our faith movement is committed to addressing, including: economic injustice, mass incarceration, migrant injustice, climate change, sexual and gender injustice, and attacks on voting rights.

Since the adoption of the 2000 Statement of Conscience on *Economic Injustice, Poverty, and Racism*, economic inequality has escalated. We have experienced accumulation of debt, decreased support for growth and innovation, and increased concentration of wealth accompanied by wage stagnation for most of our population. In 2013, the average income of the wealthiest 20% of those in the U.S. was 15 times greater than that of the poorest 20% (\$202,600 vs \$13,100). In 2011, the average net assets (wealth) of the wealthiest 20% exceeded \$630,000, while the net assets of the poorest 20% were negative \$6,000. Furthermore, racial and class disparities in income and wealth increased.

The growth of inequity does not happen by accident. It is a direct consequence of the decisions of those people who own and control the nation’s and world’s corporations and resources and their allies in government, who take for themselves the wealth created by the hands and minds of the many and the bounty of our fragile planet. Their actions and policies have led to the decline of labor unions, the increased cost of education and health care, and automation. Unlimited funding of campaigns by wealthy individuals and corporations, lack of access to conventional financial institutions, predatory lending, and flawed tax policies increase inequity and insecurity. In the political realm, corporate personhood and the focus on individualism (rather than the collective good) have also contributed to escalating inequity.

Intersectionality

All forms of oppression or privilege intersect and contribute to inequity and inequality. We are not a homogeneous nation. Social differentiation; where we live, work, and play; and our family systems all determine our access to money and wealth. Our political, social, and economic constructs do not provide an equitable playing field. Because the tax system in the United States is increasingly regressive, billionaires often pay little or nothing, while others pay taxes and are still driven into financial insecurity by

complexities of bankruptcy, educational debt, medical costs, and a lack of public services.

The 2000 Statement identified systemic racism as a major factor in economic inequality. The current statement also calls out white supremacy and capitalism as key factors. Other oppressions based on identity are deeply embedded in systems of technology, health care, education, judicial and criminal justice, community development, environment, and transportation. A change in one system usually affects other systems. Therefore, improving the economic system requires making changes beyond the finance and business sectors. Increased rates of incarceration have disenfranchised and made less employable large numbers of people, especially people of color. The persecution and lack of protection for the large numbers of undocumented workers, increased automation, and the decline of worker and labor protections put downward pressure on wages for many jobs and encourage exploitation. Within societal systems, gender identity; sex; sexual orientation; race; class; religion; and physical, mental and developmental ability and disability all intersect with issues of economic inequity. These identities shape one's labor market experience, opportunity, and outcome.

Women are especially vulnerable to economic inequity. The gender pay gap has life-long financial effects and contributes directly to increased poverty levels of women of all ages, races, and cultural backgrounds. Lack of access to affordable and effective reproductive health care threatens the economic well-being of women and their families.

Marginalized people including, but not limited to, people of color, LGBTQA+, and gender-diverse people as well as immigrants, refugees and migrant workers are relegated to socially devalued work, and are over-represented in low-wage occupations with limited chances to move up the ladder of opportunity. These issues are compounded by underfunded public schools, increasing costs of higher education, and increasing student debt, which limits purchasing power. People in poverty often cannot get to jobs because of inadequate public transportation services. Even when people of color and other marginalized populations surmount these obstacles, they often still face discriminatory policies and practices.

Religious Grounding

Our Unitarian Universalist faith calls us to respond to economic injustice and advocate for those among us being harmed by inequity. We know that there is enough for everyone's need but not enough for greed. We can create a global beloved community based on inclusive sharing of resources and universal sufficiency. We cannot ignore the harm caused by a system that gives control of wealth and resources to a very small percentage of people while many others, including those who carry out the work of the world, struggle to survive. Our sources, principles, and theologies of our faith compel us to act.

Wisdom from the world's religions inspires us in our ethical and spiritual life. Buddhists acknowledge the poisonous nature of greed. Islam asserts that the principle of justice must be at the core of economic activities. The *Tao Te Ching* states that if people chase

after money and security, their hearts will never unclench. Our Jewish and Christian roots teach that poverty is an unjustifiable burden and that we should love our neighbors as ourselves. Our own Universalist tradition counsels that we should manifest our mutual salvation on the earth by our individual and collective efforts in service of sufficient abundance for all.

We believe that our worth and dignity is inherent in our humanity, not dependent on economic status. We will all live in more abundance when our economy connects human gifts with human needs. People are prioritized over profits when the moral statements inherent in budgets implement Unitarian Universalist values. Money should be a tool to serve the collective good, not an end unto itself or a measure of success.

Words and deeds of prophetic people challenge us to confront powers and structures of evil such as inequity with justice, compassion, and the transforming power of love. We are called to be in solidarity with the most vulnerable, disenfranchised, and oppressed among us. Our prophetic call is to speak out against toxic ideas and falsehoods that divide us and pit us against one another rather than bringing us together in love.

A Moral Economic System

Our principle of justice, equity and compassion in human relations drives us to work for healthier and more equitable economic systems. We strive to build communities where everyone is supported in living healthy, safe, and sustainable lives.

A moral economic system would include:

- Equal pay for equal work and elimination of the racial, ethnic, and gendered wealth gap.
- A major societal investment in communities that have been left out and locked out.
- A guaranteed minimum income for everyone.
- A minimum wage, indexed for inflation that provides a living wage with benefits regardless of disability or ability.
- A tax structure that rewards the creation of good paying jobs and adequately and fairly taxes the wealthy and corporations, including the reconstruction of the inheritance tax.
- Worker protections and rights, a union movement, and worker-friendly trade agreements.
- A growing sector of locally owned businesses and worker-owned cooperatives.
- Wages that honor the work of hands as well as that of minds.
- Universal access to non-predatory lending and affordable banking.
- Financial sector reforms that lower risk and create markets that reward long term investments, research, development, sustainability, and reinvestment in people and communities.
- Investment in innovation, long-term growth, and institutions and businesses that provide good paying jobs and career paths.
- Environmentally sustainable economic practices and policies such as renewable energy.

- Universal access to affordable quality education at all levels (from preschool through vocational or graduate school) and to job training and retraining plus support in achieving a career path.
- Universal health care and paid sick leave.
- Access to paid family leave and other economic support for those who care for children, the elderly, and people with disabilities.
- An open immigration system that provides equal opportunity and protection for both citizens and non-citizen workers.
- Affordable and equitable housing for all.
- Dismantling the system that forces many to enlist in the military to receive a basic income, healthcare and education.
- Dismantling the prison industrial complex, including reform of laws pertaining to bail, sentencing, incarceration, and civil forfeiture; and implementing systems of restorative justice.

Actions

Unitarian Universalism has a prophetic message about the human capacity to create change and make our world, societies, systems, and communities better. By speaking, acting, and spending in concert with one another and by centering, resourcing, and empowering communities who are most impacted by economic inequities, we can create better and more just economies. Together we can make a difference. Listed below are possible actions that individuals, congregations, state legislative ministries, and the denomination could take.

As Individuals we can

- Review our personal history and our national history with money, our class backgrounds, and how that shapes our relationships with financial matters.
- Examine our role in the financial system and what we are willing to change.
- Assess how we personally spend money and use our money in support of our values.
- Invest in social impact hubs that fund entrepreneurs representing those parts of society that are economically oppressed or marginalized.
- Seek out and support black-owned and indigenous-owned businesses, as well as businesses owned by other racialized and marginalized groups.
- Recognize and support other enterprises directly benefiting those who are marginalized or oppressed.
- Consider the ecological consequences of every economic decision and whenever possible, buy local and participate in Community Supported Agriculture (CSAs), farmers' markets, and locally owned businesses.
- Spend money compassionately, considering whether items are ethically sourced and employers have ethical labor practices.
- Track, promote, and abide by boycotts and support firms that treat workers, suppliers, and the environment fairly.
- Actively support or participate in unions, union retiree groups, worker centers, and organizing drives.

- Mobilize ourselves and others to use the ballot box, campaign donations, and letters to the editor, social media, and calls/emails/visits with elected officials to work for a moral economic system.
- Invest in micro-loan projects, crowd-source funding, time banks, and other finance options outside the corporate banking and investment system.
- Engage in ecologically and socially responsible investing and use our power as stockholders to influence company policies.
- Divest from racist systems; invest in communities of color.
- Move accounts from corporate banks to local banks or credit unions.
- Report and avoid businesses that use enslaved labor.

As Congregations we can

- Engage in continuing study on inequity using materials such as the Commission on Appraisal's 2017 book on Classism.
- Assess the congregation's biases and attitudes toward those from various class and economic backgrounds and then make adjustments as needed to be more welcoming and inclusive.
- Examine the congregation's relationship with money, including how finances drive operations and programs and how money is discussed, disbursed, and secured.
- Create an equitable salary scale and benefit package for the congregation's staff including the minister(s) using the UUA guidelines.
- Determine how transparent the congregation is about money matters.
- Organize advocacy initiatives such as postcards, Twitter storm, flash mobs, petition drives, or other large volume campaigns in support of a moral economic system.
- Keep the congregation's money in socially responsible investment vehicles.
- Divest from racist systems; invest in communities of color.
- Advocate for affordable housing and other community efforts that assist those who are oppressed, marginalized, or disadvantaged.
- Partner with other local faith communities and social justice groups on joint actions for livable wages, affordable housing, disruptions of intact low-income neighborhoods, gentrification projects, etc.
- Actively participate in interfaith and other community organizing efforts for local policy and systemic changes that affect economic inequity.
- Organize or participate in local alternative financial opportunities such as time banks and co-ops.
- Sponsor educational opportunities within the congregation and the community that reveal factors contributing to increased economic inequity as well as potential solutions.
- Advocate for getting money out of politics, ending corporate welfare, reforming corporate governance, changing tax laws to be more equitable, revising bankruptcy laws, and increasing support for public education.

State Legislative Ministries can

- Include economic inequity as a factor in determining legislative advocacy priorities.

- Create and publish report cards on state legislators’ records on issues impacting the financial well-being of marginalized groups.
- Host bi-partisan forums that bring attention to issues identified as part of a moral economic system.
- Engage in advocacy consistent with a moral economic system: getting money out of politics; ending corporate welfare; reforming corporate governance; reforming bankruptcy laws; reforming the tax code; reforming work place protection to include the LGBTQA+; reforming laws pertaining to bail, sentencing, incarceration, and civil forfeiture; enacting state level universal health care, universal parental leave, and fair wage legislation; and increasing support for public education and job retraining.

As a Denomination we can

- Offer to all interested Unitarian Universalists an affordable group health insurance plan and advocate for universal health care coverage for all.
- Continue socially responsible investment practices.
- Invest in state legislative ministries and in advocacy at the national level.
- Participate in interfaith coalitions and other social justice groups that work toward achieving a moral economic system.
- Continue to work cooperatively with the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee (UUSC) on projects such as “Behind the Kitchen Door.”
- Invest in low income communities.
- Invest in communities and leaders of color, and support reparations.
- Advocate for the various elements of a moral economic system.

As Unitarian Universalists our faith calls us to counter fear with courage and manifest a collective vision of a more just, equitable, and compassionate society.



Election Results

The following individuals were elected in uncontested elections:

Kathy Burek, Sarah Dan Jones, Rev. Manish Mishra & Christina Rivera: Board of Trustees

Karen Hall & Rev. Charlie Ortman: Board of Review

Rev. Meredith Garmon: Commission on Social Witness

David Friedman & Holley Ulbrich: Commission on Appraisal

Debra Gray Boyd, Oshara Meesha, Tuli Patel, and Chelsea Surfus: General Assembly Planning Committee

Jessica Falconer Rev. Joanna Giannino & Rev Michael Walker: Nominating Committee

The following individual was elected in a contested election:

Susan Frederick-Gray, President



Responsive Resolutions

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

MAKING THE “STANDING ON THE SIDE OF LOVE” CAMPAIGN MORE INCLUSIVE

WHEREAS, the Journey Toward Wholeness Transformation Committee report identifies Unitarian Universalism as a movement has made progress in anti-oppression work but still has work to do;

WHEREAS, part of the work we Unitarian Universalists need to do is make our justice campaign, “Standing on the Side of Love,” more inclusive;

WHEREAS, use of the word “Standing” as default justice language places a high value on the justice work and commitments of able-bodied people, while it makes invisible and excludes the justice work of people with a wide range of disabilities and autistic people;

WHEREAS, Unitarian Universalist principles call for “justice, equity, and compassion in human relations;” and

WHEREAS, our faith calls us to consider the impact of our words, and to take action and engage with ableism in the creation of a Beloved Community.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the 2017 General Assembly calls upon the leaders of the UUA’s “Standing on the Side of Love” campaign to create a new imagining that better includes and reflects the needs and contributions of disabled people.

COMBATTING ESCALATING INEQUALITY

WHEREAS, Tom Andrews of the UUSC said that he cannot think of a time when UU values were more under attack than they are today;

WHEREAS, Mr. Andrews exhorted us to take vigorous and sustained action to protect and further those values;

WHEREAS, the delegates of this 2017 General Assembly approved a Statement of Conscience regarding Escalating Economic Inequity; and

WHEREAS, the causes of escalating inequity intersect with the effects of white supremacy.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the 2017 General Assembly calls on the UUA Board of Trustees and UUA staff to help coordinate, strategize and advise Congregations on how to address effectively these deep-seated cultural issues.

APPOINTMENT OF A STUDY COMMISSION TO CONSIDER ADDING AN 8TH PRINCIPLE TO ARTICLE II, PRINCIPLES AND PURPOSES, SECTION C-2:1.

WHEREAS, the Interim Co-Presidents' Report and the Report of the Board of Trustees both address the issues of white supremacy and intersecting forms of oppression; and

WHEREAS, the delegates of the 2017 General Assembly believes that such issues are sufficiently important to be specifically addressed in the UUA Bylaws Principles and Purposes.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the delegates to the 2017 General Assembly call for the Board to appoint a study commission to discuss adding an 8th Principle that may be as stated below:

“We the member congregations of the Unitarian Universalist Association, covenant to affirm and promote Journeying toward spiritual wholeness by building a diverse, multicultural Beloved Community by our actions that accountably dismantle racism and other oppressions in ourselves and our institutions.”

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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 56th General Assembly of the Unitarian Universalist Association were 1657 on-site member delegates, 439 ministerial delegates, 4 credentialed religious educators, 3 associate member delegates, 23 delegates representing the Church of the Larger Fellowship (included in member delegate count), and 238 off-site delegates, for a total of 2341 delegates representing 638 congregations, 50 states, and the District of Columbia. Total on-site registration for the Assembly was 4092 including 320 youth.

Offsite attendance included 238 individuals from 35 states, including 206 member delegates and 32 minister delegates. Thirty-three congregations registered only off-site delegates.

Closing

The Assembly was adjourned *sine die* by Moderator Denise Rimes at approximately 4:30 p.m. on Sunday, June 25, 2017.

Respectfully submitted,

/s/ Sarah Lammert
Clerk