

Governance 2 (WtC 5)

Opening Words

“Too often we make decisions based on what generates the least conflict within the majority culture, and what allows conformity to continue. Tools for encouraging constructive conflict and understanding that our living tradition requires us to always be living into new ways of being are important.” WCC Report, p. 36

Check In How are you thinking about Widening the Circle since we last met?

Discussion:

Congregational Polity & Covenant

“Congregational polity is concerned not only with interrelationships among congregations, but also with the governance process of each congregation. Under congregational polity each congregation is self-governing, choosing its own leadership, handling its own finances, and choosing its own delegates to the General Assembly (UUA Bylaws, Sections C-3.2, C-11.1, 4.8). However, this independence does not imply that we must reinvent our governance process in each congregation. Yet we provide few guidelines for congregations to follow.”

(from <https://www.uua.org/leadership/learning-center/governance/polity/47009.shtml>)

From the WCC report:

“Misconceptions about the nature of our congregational polity should be addressed as they are used to empower individual ministers and lay leaders to maintain a stagnant and exclusionary status quo.”

Most institutional forms of Unitarian Universalism are congregational, which means emphasis is on a white-dominated culture and institutional practices. These can be seen as the only right way of being together and do not allow space for those from other experiences to lend their leadership and gifts. Those who would call us to more fully live into a liberatory faith are often cited as troubled or troublesome.

Relationships within our faith communities should be respectful and supportive rather than grounded in a culture of critique and a bias toward gadflies and outliers. Too often we make decisions based on what generates the least conflict within the majority culture, and what allows conformity to continue. Tools for encouraging constructive conflict and understanding that our living tradition requires us to always be living into new ways of being are important.”

- How should we educate our community members on congregational polity instead of assuming that they are informed?
- When should our community make opportunity to discuss this?
- How do we discuss it with those new to our community?

COIC Report Recommended Actions

- **Action:** Promote a more accurate understanding about what congregational polity is, especially its covenantal nature and its relationship with our belief in the inherent worth and dignity of people and their ability to participate in decision making through a values frame.
- **Action:** Audit leadership experiences, including online spaces tooled for accessibility across income levels, and make strategies for equity, inclusion, and diversity a part of these, as well as accurate information about the covenantal nature of congregational polity. Make practical education in anti-oppression work part of all UUA regional gatherings.
- **Action:** Incorporate principles of covenant into anti-oppression work across all UU organizations.

USG Goals and Actions:

Possible USG Goal: Offer ongoing education for the congregation about congregational polity

- **Possible USG Action:** Include explanation and discussion of congregational polity annually in the leadership retreat (planned for the fall), annual meeting, and perhaps during a sermon. *Board/Kent responsible?*

COIC report Recommendation

Governance within the Association needs streamlining, as outdated and duplicative structures exist. The unnecessary complexity of the current Unitarian Universalist governance structures is biased toward the more privileged, who have the time and resources for extensive volunteerism.

In contrast to local and regional groups, which often operate too informally, there are too many Unitarian Universalist organizations with overly complicated leadership structures, which makes needed change difficult and slow. The UUA has too many organizations with disparate leadership, which makes the kind of change needed difficult and slow. Consolidation of the many organizational structures would allow leaders to lead with the sort of agility needed in these times of rapid change. An assessment of the number of committees and groups should be conducted as well as an assessment of the number of bodies with independent boards, as all of this results in fragmentation. The separate elections of a president and a moderator, for example, have allowed difficult issues such as work to build a more equitable, inclusive, and diverse Association to be passed around among different accountabilities.

Why does this hinder our attempts to be more equitable, inclusive, and diverse? Because each organization and structure can choose or not choose to invest in the anti-oppression work critical to meeting contemporary standards, and that makes service in the larger Unitarian Universalist frame a morass of aggressions and inconsistencies for leaders who are Black, Indigenous, people of color, or from other underrepresented groups. People of color and other marginalized people among us are often called to serve in a variety of capacities in the interest of diversity. Encountering different standards or a lack of multicultural competence in organizations promoting UU values is one of the leading reasons Black people, Indigenous people, and people of color leave Unitarian Universalism.

Many religious associations do not have separate governing boards for every kind of professional group, for the international justice arm, or for the local structures for justice or cluster work. All of these levels and separate organizations mean that each one of these organizations is a separate set of decisions or nondecisions around anti-oppression work. The result is that Black people, Indigenous people, people of color, and other marginalized peoples can experience harm at a variety of levels if a particular entity has not yet committed attention and resources to more intentional practices. Any ongoing working agreement with affiliate organizations should include a commitment to prevent racial harm.

In addition, in an era of scarce dollars for the work of our faith, we have outdated structures that can be retooled to focus more sharply on what is needed today. A more pertinent—and painful—example for the purposes of the Commission’s work is the Journey Toward Wholeness Transformation Committee (JTWTC), which was put into place as part of the anti-oppression work of the 1990s and has continued on though the funding for training and other accountability measures once built into Associational practices are long unfunded.

Though the JTWTC has continued to attract dedicated proponents of anti-oppression work, its role is no longer clear. This is a waste of the talents and time of very dedicated people.

Collaborative effort could be more efficient and effective. A model for this is the Common Code of Ethics, which is currently being discussed among the professional associations.

In other areas we have huge gaps. A tragic and indefensible fact is that we have not reinstated a national youth leadership program or young adult program. While leadership and spiritual development programs for these groups do exist on a smaller scale, no national umbrella or unified programmatic approach for UUA youth or young adult programs has existed for more than ten years. These programs have been critical to supporting youth and young adults of color and to building the anti-oppression skills of white youth. Youth and young adults are already more expert than older members of our community on what it means to live in an increasingly diverse and multicultural world, and their leadership is essential to our continued work.

- **Action:** Reexamine the current governance structure and identify changes that will allow a more agile and flexible structure that can meet the challenges of a rapidly changing religious landscape. The review should include a reexamination of the recommendations around the roles of the president and the moderator that were contained in the 1993 report by the Commission on Governance, chaired by Rev. Dr. Wayne Arnason.
- **Action:** Form an alliance of UU organizations, including professional associations and affiliated groups, committed to creating equitable, inclusive, and diverse practices to allow learning, collaboration, and development of a common set of standards.
- **Action:** Establish covenantal agreements with affiliate organizations that also understand the need for accountability, adaptability, collaboration, faith grounding, and continued education toward equity, diversity, and inclusion.
- **Action:** Repurpose the resources of the JTWTC toward the anti-oppression goals of this report. (The JTWTC should not be disbanded *until* a new structure is approved.)

- **Action:** Provide an expanded opportunity for youth and young adult leadership development and programming at the Associational level, with a grounding in equity, inclusion, and diversity and responsive to the challenges these generations face today.

Goals and Actions for USG

Proposed USG Goal: Increase equity, diversity and inclusion in USG leadership.

Action: Nominating Committee's charge could be expanded to include work on cultivating leaders beyond just Board and NomCom. Maybe add three NomCom members and the committee divides the work. They all study the current Excel database of information the NomCom has amassed. Then some members work on Board recruitment and NomCom recruitment, and some members canvass all other committee chairs to see which committees may need new volunteer energy. Next, reach out to USG members and friends who our info indicates may have an interest in those committees. Also, these NomCom members could work with the Welcoming team to see which new members and friends to informally interview/chat with about potential committee and volunteer interests they may have. (submitted by Shobhi who has chaired the NomCom.) *Board could consider in consultation with NomCom*

Action: Develop mentoring process for people interested in leadership, particularly those with diverse identities. Charge of each leader could be to cultivate the membership in the committee and a succession plan. Maybe there's a curriculum or guidelines *(ASD?)*

Action: Standardized training/orientation for new leaders including Multicultural sensitivity/Anti-racism training for leaders *(ASD?)*

Action: Make focused efforts to mentor young adults for leadership roles

Action: Support leadership development for interested youth *(CSD/Ryan?)*

Action: Create fund to pay for leadership training for people who request it *(Board/MET?)*

Proposed USG Goal: Increase access, equity, diversity and inclusion for USG GA attendees and delegates

Action: Consider asking the nominating committee to nominate delegates to GA including youth, young adults, and those from BIPOC and LGBTQ communities and those with financial support needs.

Action: Make funding available for people who want to go to GA whether they are delegates or not who would be unable to attend without support. (Board could whether to do this, MET could decide how to do it.)

Accountability Process Conversation

For future sessions:

- Idea raised during May Q&A: A place for white people to share and process the pain of addressing and healing from a culture of white supremacy (address during study of *Educating for Liberation*, ch 7?)

Check Out What do you want to make sure we cover at the next meeting? Are we ready for the next chapter or do we need to spend another month on Governance. What is people's availability July 7?

Closing Words

"Agility, flexibility, and innovation, along with a clear focus on mission, will be an important aspect of faith-based organizations that hope to survive the rapidly changing religious landscape in the United States." WCC Report, pp. 23-24