

# Widening the Circle of Concern: Governance

Question & Answer Session

June 13, 2021

# What is Congregational Polity?

- Refers to self-governing churches; also called “congregationalism”
- There is No hierarchy that dictates local church affairs
- Individually, each person is responsible for their own beliefs
- Collectively, power is shared with other individuals & leaders within the church community
- Democracy is valued, but NOT democracy in the political sense (focused on winning)
- There is a balance & tug between autonomy & fellowship

# Where does Congregational Polity come from?

Dedham, Massachusetts, 1637

- 30 families conducted a yearlong series of cottage meetings to discuss the organization of a self-governing church
- They were discontented with the English Churches that dictated every facet of local church affairs
- Gathering & governing a church by congregational determination was later described as “The Cambridge Platform”
- Of the 65 congregations that ratified The Cambridge Platform in 1648, 21 are members of the UUA today

# The Dangers of Congregational Polity

- Most UU churches are white-dominated, placing an emphasis on white culture & institutional practices
- When change is called for, decisions are often based on what generates the least conflict within the majority culture & allows for continued conformity
- Those from other church experiences who want to make changes may be cited as troubled or troublesome
- We need to develop tools that allow us to grow into new multicultural ways of being together

# WCC Recommendation for Governance

- Promote a more accurate understanding of what congregational polity is, especially its covenantal nature & its relationship with our belief in the inherent worth & dignity of all people & their ability to participate in decision making based on UU values

# Proposed USG Goals & Actions for Governance

Goal: Offer ongoing education about congregational polity

Actions:

- Include explanation & discussion of congregational polity in:
  - Annual Leadership retreat (planned for the fall)
  - USG Annual congregational meeting
  - Church service
  - ASD/CSD classes
- Include an overview of congregational polity & the USG governance structure on the USG webpage

What are your unanswered questions related to what has been presented on congregational polity?

What are the most effective ways to ensure ongoing understanding of congregational polity by all at USG?

# Proposed USG Goals & Actions for Governance

Goal: Increase equity, diversity, & inclusion in USG leadership

Actions:

- Expand the charge of the Nominating Committee to include cultivating leaders for committees
  - Expand the size of the Nominating Committee
  - Determine the need for new volunteer energy on USG committees
  - Work with the Welcoming Team to identify new USG members as potential volunteers for committees



# Proposed USG Goals & Actions for Governance (cont.)

Goal: Increase equity, diversity, & inclusion in USG leadership

Actions:

- Develop a mentoring process for people interested in leadership, particularly those with diverse identities
- Standardize training for new leaders including multicultural sensitivity/anti-racism training
- Make a focused effort to mentor young adults for leadership roles
- Support leadership development for interested youth
- Develop and offer a fund to support leadership development training for people who request it

## Proposed USG Goals & Actions for Governance (cont.)

Goal: Increase equity, diversity, & inclusion in USG leadership

Actions:

- Charge all committees with reaching out to & involving new people each year; ask them to track their progress
- Encourage increased volunteerism; make the path to volunteerism clearer; hold a session about how to get involved
- Outline how the church can support an individual who has a ministry that they want to offer

## Proposed USG Goals & Actions for Governance (cont.)

Goal: Increase access, equity, diversity, & inclusion for GA attendees

Actions:

- Ask the Nominating Committee to identify delegates to GA including youth, young adults, BIPOC, LGBTQ+ individuals, & those with financial support needs
- Make funding available for people who would be unable to attend without financial support
- Have an active denominational affairs committee that explains GA & cultivates interest

Do you think the proposed diversity, equity and inclusion ideas will help us achieve it in USG leadership?

Is anything missing?