

USG Widening the Circle
Congregations and Communities (1) meeting notes, 7.7.21

Present: Lisa Dutton, Andrea Barsevick, Linda Bernstein, Eric Foster (note taker), Lois Murphy, Lee Meinecke, Dev Howerton, Ryan Hurd, Jim Salom, Nancy Anderson, Margaret Thompson

Check ins:

Some found virtual GA reinforcing for WtC

UUA is moving on anti-racism work; has a new 2021 Statement of Conscience (SOC) about it (<https://www.uua.org/action/statements/undoing-systemic-white-supremacy>)

New words used in these conversations and the doc require some work, but good work

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Governance goals from our poll were reviewed – some clear preferences emerged.

14 people responded (out of 25 in the group). Here are the tallies:

USG WtC Governance Goals Prioritization Summary	
Proposed USG Goal: Increase equity, diversity and inclusion in USG leadership.	
12	Develop mentoring process for people interested in leadership, particularly those with diverse identities.
11	Offer standardized training/orientation for new leaders including Multicultural sensitivity/Anti-racism training for leaders
9	Expand the Nominating Committee's charge to include work on cultivating leaders beyond just Board and NomCom.
8	Offer UU201 session(s): content - covenant, governance (frequency tbd)
6	Make the path to increased volunteerism more clear to encourage increasing activity/volunteerism. (eg A session on how to get involved more deeply, Committee Fair)
5	Make focused efforts to mentor young adults for leadership roles
5	Charge all committees with reaching out to and involving new people every year. (Track progress in Annual Report)
4	Create fund to pay for leadership training for people who request it
4	Clarify and promote how the church can support a person who has a ministry that they want to offer (have a structure where people are a support committee to people with new ideas, eg Standing in Solidarity for Racial Justice Vigils)
3	Support leadership development for interested youth
2	Increase connections between USG and regional UU activity (eg Central East Region (CER), UUA, Greater Philly UU cluster)
Proposed USG Goal: Increase access, equity, diversity and inclusion for USG GA attendees and delegates	
11	Make funding available for people who want to go to GA (whether they are delegates or not) who would be unable to attend without financial support.
7	During a service or in communications throughout the year explain GA to increase participation.
6	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.
4	Have an active denominational affairs committee/point person that talks year round about our connection to the denomination.

Getting more people interested in GA is a matter of mentoring and getting people to act on their interest.

Several things we voted on in the Governance goals are related to mentoring. Welcoming tried some time ago to assign "buddies" with new members, but not many people agreed to do it.

Committee involvement could be encouraged by mentors, a “Committee Fair,” and some wider social support.

The Governance goals were found to overlap with next two chapters quite a bit.

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Recommended list from Widening the Circle document of congregational practices to increase equity, inclusion, and diversity (EID) were discussed.

We already support and have set up funding GA "scholarships." We are also putting money into budget for anti-oppression trainings

Covid interfered with modeling some of the EID recommendations in RE (CSD?) but will probably start up again in the Fall.

Most of the items on the list, or ideas related to them, were already brought into the open with the previous chapter, Governance.

Hospitality training needs to be thoughtfully done; role-playing about micro-aggressions, e.g., to overcome blind spots would be good, but don't forget to emphasize what works well, too.

Due to pandemic and zooming, we have forgotten some of these things, but will be easier to do in person. So we need to revisit and relearn ways to be welcoming. As we think about getting back together, don't just glom onto our familiar friends. Be intentional about how to be welcoming to new people (take this back to the Hybrid Task Force); be mindful about inviting people back into each other's presence.

Micro-aggressions are still happening in the present. Supporting people who have been affected cannot be the only approach, because sometimes people disappear and we don't get a chance to correct a misstep. This is why we also need to educate and coach congregants, not just leaders, who are here, to avoid the fault to begin with.

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"Covenant and commitment, not comfort, should be the binding fabrics of UU congregations and other communities."

With the two actions recommended, the leadership team feels we addressed them with our Theology actions.

WtC recommended Action: Prioritize workshops on covenants of right relationship and curate models of covenants for congregations and communities of different sizes and demographic profiles.

WtC recommended Action: Equip leadership development efforts at the Associational or regional level with information on how to facilitate needed conflict and how to promote racial equity.

USG Proposed Actions (T is for Theology)

Action T4.2: Increase congregational knowledge & use of the Covenant of Right Relations through publicity & education

Action T4.3: Develop practices that increase accountability to the Covenant of Right Relations

Action T4.4: Consider revisions to the Covenant of Right Relations that address microaggressions

Action T4.5: Consider creating a Right Relations Task Force to implement & support these ideas

Additional actions appear to be directed at the UUA, but if we have a liaison or a Denominational Affairs Committee as in **proposed Governance Action G3.4:** "Have an active denominational affairs point person/committee that talks about our connection to the denomination throughout the year," that would ensure we see all relevant communications., that would pertain to these actions.

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Congregational Audits concerning EID: "Congregations with an interest in incorporating practices aimed at increasing equity, inclusion, and diversity more fully into all their work have conducted racial audits."

If this is done, it should be presented with more context than last time. What are we doing right and well, not just negative focus, and don't call it a "white" audit.

Good to do education and awareness but should not be "judgey."

Should the audits be done by committees/groups themselves? Might be less defensive this way, avoid judging and raise consciousness but, perhaps, less "audit."

Are we auditing processes or criteria? Need to be clear about which approach.

Could normalize the audit by rolling it into end-of-year evaluations/report writing by committees.

But what committees are we talking about? Some are very small.

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Widening the Circle Caucusing recommendations

The UUA Board should look at the best way to provide ongoing active governance for congregations as the current annual General Assembly system is too costly and cumbersome for many to participate, as this disproportionately affects people of color.

- **Action:** Make caucusing for all diverse identities standard, and offer administrative support at regional and cluster events to allow more space, contact, and support for those who are often "the only one" at the congregational level.
- **Action:** Fully implement the regional system, making space for clusters of congregations interested in equity to form.
- **Action:** Convene General Assembly as a biennial gathering and on the off years, set and keep a schedule of regional meetings, with these meetings occurring at least biennially and perhaps more frequently by teleconference.

- **Action:** Ensure that regional/district staff are fully trained and demonstrate multicultural, antiracist, and anti-oppression competency to act as a resource for congregations and lay leaders in their antiracism work. Continuing education work in anti-oppression techniques should also be required.
- **Action:** Explore providing delegate status to members of alternate covenantal communities serving those less welcomed by current congregational cultures.

Most of these are at UUA or regional level. For USG, should we have a caucus for diverse identities, for white people? Ongoing workshops.

We had caucuses during the Teach-Ins, with mixed reactions. What would the context be this time around? Settings where people can "unpack" and share their feelings and thoughts about these issues.

If you don't know many people like you, this could be a good way to gather together others with similar experiences/views (listen to #204 from GA about this).

Maybe caucusing is appropriate or effective when something disruptive is identified to process it.

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Last Widening the Circle recommendation is at the UUA level

Development of a common frame of anti-oppression training and multicultural competency is needed for all regional staff, those trained to advocate for UU professionals during times of conflict, and regional boards and entities to help prevent injury and wrongdoing.

- **Action:** Begin a "Promising Practices" program to recognize congregations that have made progress in becoming more equitable, inclusive, and diverse.
- **Action:** Identify and curate anti-oppression resources that are appropriate for congregations of different sizes, geographies, etc.
- **Action:** Create methods of interaction between congregations to promote sharing of learning and promising models for equity, inclusion, and diversity work as well as models for accountable justice work. Ensure that all regional staff are trained in this work to be able to seed best practices.

Since one of our USG proposed Theology goals is to have all church leaders participate in anti-oppression/multicultural sensitivity training annually, it seems like we are in support of their assistance with this.

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Are we done with Governance and Congregations and Communities chapters? The group agreed we should proceed to the next chapter – Hospitality and Inclusion. We should keep the governance priorities poll results in mind, going forward and wed them to the preferred action items.

Next time, (after the Hospitality and Inclusion chapter) we might be position to ask some individuals to take on the tasks that have risen to the top.