

Issues at 2022 UUA General Assembly

At the UU General Assembly to be held in Portland, OR and on Zoom June 22-25, Jim Dealing and Dave Macleod will be our official delegates, participating online and voting on matters presented by the UUA leadership. The most important is a proposal for a broad revision of UU bylaws, including Article 2 which defines our Principles and Sources and includes a Freedom of Belief statement. The second important matter is a contested election for two of the four Board seats being filled.

The UUA leadership has embarked on an ambitious, idealistic program to change the culture and practices of UUism. In 2017, in response to a controversy over staff hiring, the UUA Board pressured then President Morales into resigning and declared that UU culture harbored “structures and patterns that foster racism, oppression and white supremacy.” Various reports calling for change followed. The call to rewrite UU bylaws reflects frustration at the slow pace of change within the UUA, expressed most forcefully by UU religious professionals of color and reinforced by changing values in UU theology as taught in UU seminaries. The revised bylaws would come before the GA for a vote in 2023 or 2024.

UU critics outside the UUA Board worry that rather than supporting traditional liberal UU values, proponents of change see liberalism as part of the problem, decry the individualism implicit in the 4th Principle, and privilege group identities. Critics also believe that the 5th Principle is endangered by centralization of authority within the UUA. The Board of Trustees is a coopting body. The Board appoints a Nominating Committee who nominate only a single candidate for every board seat and for all other UUA committees. This year two UU people have navigated the petition process to challenge the nominees for two of the board seats. The petition candidates assert that the UUA has become increasingly dogmatic and authoritarian and are wary of overemphasis on group identity as if incompatible with individual conscience. GA delegates at a June 11 mini-assembly online also voted on amendments to the Board of Trustees’ resolution that would slightly broaden the group rewriting the bylaws and mandate retention of values embodied in the 4th and 5th Principles.

Inevitably, this summary oversimplifies. If you are concerned or curious about major changes to be voted upon at this year’s General Assembly, you are invited to a discussion session on Zoom and in person following the June 19 worship service. Jim and Dave will provide further information about the bylaw proposal and we can discuss possible implications for our congregation and the wider fellowship of Unitarian Universalists.