

Unitarian Universalist Association

Annual Report of the Board of Trustees 2016-17

Our Association has reached a pivotal time in its history. For half a century and more we have been moving forward in fits and starts in pursuit of our aspiration to be a credible partner in working to end racism while at the same time changing our hearts and minds and practices in ways that will help to usher in a radically inclusive multi-cultural future for our faith. We want to express our deep gratitude to those who have gone before us in working to narrow the gap between our aspirations and our social realities. Honor is due especially to persons-of-color drawn to Unitarian Universalism by its theology and all too often repelled by its culture, those who stayed and those who had to leave.

This year the struggle has matured and come out into the open. After more than two years of thoughtful consideration the Board at our October 2016 meeting acted with clarity and boldness in voting to raise 5.3 million dollars in support of the ministry of the Black Lives Unitarian Universalist Collective. The decision was controversial and elicited considerable disagreement and debate. The board has done its utmost to enlist the interest inspired by the BLUU decision in furtherance of the Ends of the Association.

Having spent a number of years establishing best practices as a Board whose work is framed by policy-based governance we have developed a healthy balance among the three primary trustee duties of linkage, policy development and monitoring. We have also embraced a fourth essential obligation by recognizing the centrality of stewardship and taking steps to become full partners in the fund raising efforts of the Association. The trustees themselves have committed well over \$50,000 to the effort to fund our commitment to BLUU and to an anti-racist, multi-cultural future. A number of trustees have been assisting the UUA Stewardship and Development Office in cultivating and soliciting major gifts. The Board has also taken an active interest in evaluating and restructuring the Annual Program Fund. Greater clarity about the roles and responsibilities of trusteeship has allowed the Board to engage in generative conversation that has inspired greater vulnerability and courage in the way we interact with one another and with the Administration.

In addition to continuing to streamline both our policies and the monitoring process the Board has begun to explore diverse models for shared facilitation and leadership. There is general agreement that Roberts Rules of Order can be overly restrictive. Roberts Rules is decision making process that reflects white supremacist culture. The Board is exploring more culturally inclusive, spiritually grounded and empowering ways to make decisions. Continuing education for good governance this past year included sessions on policy-based governance, Trustee duty-of-care and a very informative conversation on risk management with Sean Rush who chairs the

UUA Audit Committee. The Board appointed a Leadership Development Taskforce to identify ways to better recruit, train and support current and future UUA leaders and worked with our Appointments Committee to significantly strengthen our focus on ensuring committees reflect the diversity to which we aspire. An annual reporting schedule was created so that the Board will be in regular contact with its committees.

The Board has begun to consider how best to refresh and further specify the Ends of the Association. We believe there is a direct relationship between that effort and the continuing work of the Taskforce on Reimagining Covenant. The Taskforce has made several recommendations to the UUA Board aimed at moving the organization from “membership to covenant”. Their report included a recommendation that the Association return to the practice of holding periodic General Conferences. These Conferences, unlike General Assembly, would focus on theological reflection together to determine the why, what, and how of our shared work as a religious movement. These gatherings could also serve to inform the process of setting priorities for the UUA. Given the need to refresh the Ends, the work of the Taskforce on Reimagining Covenant and the proposed changes to the C-Bylaws the Board has begun a generative conversation about our guiding documents and how best to move toward full alignment with policy-based governance. The conversation includes a deep dive into theologies of covenant, relations between the Association and its member congregations and communities and the structure of the General Assembly.

Building on some years of focused effort on the part of Ministry and Faith Development staff, the Ministerial Fellowship Committee and Board Congregational Boundaries Working Group we have continued to improve our ability to respond with compassion and care in situations of clergy misconduct. We have continued to meet with stakeholder and advisors to define an appeals process and clarify key roles and responsibilities. As always our chief concern is to maintain a just and compassionate support system for victims of misconduct.

There is a Chinese character that can mean either “crisis” or “opportunity.” As the year comes to a close we find ourselves at a moment of crisis that by grace and with bold leadership may well become the best opportunity we’ve yet had in our history as an Association to fulfill our promise. In response to what was perceived by many to be a hiring decision embedded in unconscious white supremacy a large and articulate constituency led by Unitarian Universalist persons-of-color and their white allies called for a full audit of UUA hiring policies.

With the best interest of the Association foremost in his mind UUA President Rev. Peter Morales tendered his resignation followed soon thereafter by Chief Operating Officer Rev. Harlan Limpert and Director of Field Services Rev. Scott Tayler (effective June 30th). The Board is grateful for their years of service and fully cognizant of the complex systemic realities that caused us to fall far short of our best intentions. The Board also recognizes its failure to provide the kind of evaluation and support significant change requires.

Having accepted the resignations of three core members of the senior staff the Board appointed the Rev. Sarah Lammert as Acting Chief Operating Officer. We are deeply appreciative to Rev. Lammert for accepting our invitation and for skillfully embracing her duties both as a manager and as a pastor to the staff.

In the wake of the resignations we prepared a transition plan for an interim presidency. The plan was intended to recognize the profound opportunity before us, to recognize the time constraints involved and to provide a Charge establishing clear priorities for the Board and the Administration. The Charge to the Interim Co-Presidents is as follow:

1. Ensure and direct pastoral and professional support to the UUA staff members of color and the Leadership Council as well as professionals of color serving in the larger association.
2. Call upon Unitarian Universalism to redeem its history by planning for and living into an anti-racist, multicultural future. This will include but is not limited to:
 - a. Center the conversation with professionals of color in the interest of ensuring non-racist recruitment and employment.
 - b. Create and submit for Board approval, a process by which to analyze structural racism and white supremacy within the UUA and will include an external audit of the power structure and power-mapping within Unitarian Universalism.
3. Be in communication with congregations and donors to help restore both confidence and vision.
4. Chair a Board appointed Commission whose purpose is to design and begin to implement the process in 2b, specifically:
 - a. Determine the necessary measures to make concrete progress toward expanding the number of people of color, including but not limited to religious professionals, employed within Unitarian Universalism. This includes particular and measurable emphasis on senior staff positions including the Executive and First Management level of the UUA.
 - b. Analyze past practices, structures and patterns which foster racism, oppression and white supremacy.
 - c. Provide the incoming president with a framework and guidelines that help to guarantee that anti-racist efforts will be central to the work of her administration. Quarterly progress reports will be required.
5. Ensure an adequate transition plan is in place for the incoming president.

Having determined that a team approach would be best in the brief interim period we were touched and delighted that The Rev. William Sinkford, the Rev. Sofia Betancourt and Dr. Leon Spencer agreed to serve as Interim Co-Presidents. We want to thank the First Unitarian Church of Portland, Oregon, Starr King School for the Ministry who have graciously allowed the Interim Co-Presidents the freedom to serve the Association at this pivotal time.

In closing we want to express our deep appreciation for the visionary and tenacious leadership of UUA Moderator Jim Key. He has been our leader and our dear friend. Ill health forced Jim to resign as Moderator but his clarity and courage remain at the center of our work. Grateful for the aspirations that continue to guide our efforts, inspired and encouraged by the leadership of our Interim Co-Presidents and our superb UUA staff and anticipating a close and creative working relationship with our newly elected president we remain committed to transforming what may seem like a crisis into an opportunity to commit ourselves and our Association to a profoundly anti-racist and richly multi-cultural future.