

## GA 2017 Report from Delegates and Attendees

### Lynda Shannon Bluestein:

Three things that draw me to General Assemblies year after year, and this was the 20<sup>th</sup> GA I have attended:

1) **The worship services** – there are so many of them from the Welcoming Celebration through Sunday services morning and closing. Every day at GA begins with a 25-minute service that never fails to start my day off right. GA services are challenging, creative, diverse, and are not easily categorized based on the content of any given service.



2) **The music** – of course this is part of worship, but also part of our Plenary or business sessions. At breaks in Plenary sessions the Moderator will call on one or more of the talented UU Musicians to lead us all in song accompanied by the GA Band. The GA Band brings together a pick-up band from across the country combined with local artists to give each GA its own soundtrack. NOLA's band was particularly exciting – lots of New Orleans Jazz riffs on our old familiar hymns from the gray hymnal.

3) **The Ware Lecture** – I am always eager to hear from the thought leader chosen by the President of the UUA on Saturday night at the Ware Lecture. The list of past Ware Lecturers reads like a Who's Who in defining the America I want to live in. Linus Pauling – Martin Luther King, Jr. – Saul Alinsky – Dr. Helen Caldicott – Marian Wright Edelman – Norman Lear – Julian Bond – Mary Oliver – Van Jones – and this year's stunning speaker, Bryan Stevenson. Thrilling, inspiring, stimulating and provocative – makes GA, GA for me. 'We will not change the world if we're not willing to do uncomfortable things.'



### Randy Burnham:



If had to choose one thing I would not have missed at this GA it would have been Sunday morning worship or the workshop with Rev. Glen Thomas Rideout (actually that is two things) because it is wonderful to worship with thousands of other UUs.



NOLA as a place for GA was okay even with the bad weather. This was my 15<sup>th</sup> GA and I had work to do for the UUA Nominating Committee which was rewarding and less frenzied than the years when I have been involved with election campaigns. This year I had to remain neutral on the candidates running for election due to my position on the Nominating Committee. I enjoyed the City and being with both the Committee and reconnecting with old friends and making new ones. All in all, one of the better GA's for me.

What I wish our congregation would know about GA: Just how enjoyable it is to be taking care of our Association, our church and myself through governance, social justice, friendships and workshops and worship. To be with a gathering of our tribe is a fantastically enriching and rejuvenating experience.

GA 2018 will be in Kansas City 2019 will be in Spokane WA and GA 2020 will return to Providence, RI. I hope to make all 3.

**Denny Davidoff:**



This was a banner year –marking 49 years since Jerry and I first discovered GA and the larger denomination thanks to Rev. Ed Lane! Thing is, 1968 was the famous year the UU Black Caucus was led by Hayward Henry who later, after the 1969 walk out of 1,500 Black UUs-- became Dr. Mtangulizi Sanyiki. He returned to New Orleans to GA 2017 this year at the invitation of the current BLUU (Black Lives UU) folks. There were seven of us- veterans of 1968 – who got to meet with him and reminisce. Oh, how he remembered us! He recalled how Jerry had become the parliamentarian for the Black Caucus and shown up nobly on the GA floor!

This kind of devotion to the future that must be liberal UU religion is the stuff of commitment I wish for our congregation! All too many of our members and friends don't know our history and have an "only me" attitude that isn't useful and not sustainable. And what is more, financial commitment counts as well. Sacrificial and passionate variety!

**Marjolijn de Jaeger:**

If I could have done just one thing at this GA it would have been the Ware Lecture because Bryan Stevenson was so on target, such a dynamic speaker, and just simply not to be missed, and NOLA as a place for GA was just perfect. I wish more members of our congregation could realize just how much you learn about what other UU's are doing, about the UUA itself, and the many new people



you can meet by attending a GA. I am looking forward to GA in Providence, RI in 2020 which will likely be the next one I will be able to attend.

I loved seeing Linda Hudson and Carrie McEvoy's smiling faces up there with the rest of the marvelous GA choir! The Banner Parade is always inspiring and joyful. The Exhibit Hall deserves



multiple visits as there is much to see, read, find out, and buy--yes, that, too.

**Ellie Grosso:**

This was my 1st GA. I've been wanting to go for years. Since it was my 50th birthday and it was in New Orleans-I made my mind up to go. Here are (some) of the things I LOVED about GA.

- \* Rooming with Carrie McEvoy-I got to know her and we spent time together and made a special connection.
- \*\* I especially loved that there were SO many sessions on racism and white privilege-I was really impressed and happy to see this
- \*\* I loved that I got to go to a workshop with others who had been through Beloved Conversations
- \*\* I loved the shop! I was able to get some wonderful books and UU contraband
- \*\* I loved ALL of the breakout sessions-so many to go to I couldn't decide
- \*\* I loved being with so many UU's
- \*\* I loved that the UU's from our congregation made me feel that they were so happy that I came--showed me the ropes

\*\* I loved seeing old friends who have moved away from our congregation and ministers I haven't seen-Lara, Margie Allen, Roberta, et al.

\*\* I loved New Orleans

\*\*church and singing with ALL those UU's

\*\* I loved seeing the parliamentary system in action!!

\*\* I loved that there were so many people of color on the stage!

\*\* I loved seeing Denny Davidoff speak to our national gathering of UU's-we are SO lucky to have her

\*\* I hope that I can go every year-I hope that more can go.

Nothing better than making all of these connections. Made me so proud.

**Linda Hudson:**

After attending several GAs in the past, I opted for a new experience this time – singing with the 200-voice choir along with my buddy Carrie McEvoy – and it turned out to be as fulfilling as I’d hoped. Participating in worship ‘from the other side’ is incredibly moving and powerful.



The other highlight was the very honest, often painful – and ultimately hopeful - discussion of our white supremacist culture, in a panel with the UUA’s three marvelous interim co-presidents of color, Rev. Bill Sinkford, Rev. Dr. Sofia Betancourt and Dr. Leon Spencer.

Beignets. Need I say more?

**Carrie McEvoy:**

I wasn’t sure what to expect at my first UUA General Assembly. I’d heard from many people that it would be life changing. But a few months before GA, the UUA was called out for less than diverse hiring practices at the upper levels of the regions and national organization, followed by many people resigning, beginning with the UUA President Peter Morales. Then to adding to the denominational chaos was the illness and untimely death of the UUA Moderator Jim Key. This couldn’t possibly be a “normal” GA.

What I found when I arrived at GA was a deliberate, heartfelt and genuine answer to the question that I, fellow congregants and congregations, and indeed other denominations were asking of us. Will Unitarian Universalism live out our principles and make meaningful change? Will Unitarian



Universalism be a faith where all people will have a seat at the welcome table? I was able to see at GA that the answer could be Yes. I learned about when the UUA was at a similar crossroads in 1968, but fell short. At this GA, almost half a century later, the 3 co-presidents told us how they’d mapped the way forward so we wouldn’t fall short this time. Bryan Stevenson at the Ware Lecture, and so many talented and knowledgeable workshop leaders and panel participants gave us invaluable tools we could use along the way. The UUA Board pledged over \$5 million to Black Lives

UU, so they will continue their important work alongside the UUA. The many people of color on the stage showed us how all people can work together, with all bringing their unique perspectives, skills and experiences.

At my first UUA GA, I found Hope. It will take all of us working together to make a real difference in our hurting world. But now I know that I’m not alone – that there are many of us pulling and pushing in the same direction - that there are people who will help me and mentor me along the way – that there are people I can help along the same baby steps I’m taking. My first UUA GA changed my life.

**David Vita:**

GA in itself is always a highlight. My workshop focus was on racial justice—provocative, stimulating, disturbing and, sometimes uncomfortable. I’ve been to probably 10 GAs and the length of the standing ovation for Bryan Stevenson, the Ware lecturer, was the longest and certainly well-deserved that I’ve ever experienced.

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**Assembly adopts economic inequality Statement of Conscience** “Challenging extreme inequity locally and globally is a moral imperative” is the statement of conscience adopted at this General Assembly. Twenty-five percent (25%) of all certified congregations participated in a vote to place this on the agenda for 2017. Our congregation did not vote, again, this year. The Board will probably want to look at how we will want to receive information about the positions the delegates at each GA have adopted for our Association of Congregations if we are to “... **encourage** a culture of meaningful engagement among congregants that embodies our Unitarian Universalist values and principles.”

## CONGREGATIONAL STUDY ACTION ISSUES AHEAD

At the 2018 General Assembly, delegates will vote on adopting a new issue for four years of study and action as a congregational study/action issue (CSAI). Deadline for proposing an issue is OCTOBER 1, 2017.

### Recent Past Congregational Study Action Issues

- 2014-2018 CSAI, now 2017 SOC: [Escalating Economic Inequity](#)
- 2012-2016 CSAI, now 2015 SOC: [Reproductive Justice: Expanding Our Social Justice Calling](#)
- 2010-2014 CSAI, now 2013 SOC: [Immigration as a Moral Issue](#)
- 2008-2012 CSAI, now 2011 SOC: [Ethical Eating](#)
- 2006-2010 CSAI, now 2010 SOC: [Creating Peace](#)

### [The UUA's CSAI Process](#)

#### **'Second line' parades Unitarian Universalist values through New Orleans**

It was a public witness event with a distinctly New Orleans flavor: hot, humid, joyous, full of music and dancing, and with a keen focus on the social justice that the city and the world, too, so desperately need.



#### **GA 2017 Responsive Resolution to Change the Name of the UUA's flagship Social Justice Campaign**

At the 2017, General Assembly there was a Responsive Resolution written by Rev. Theresa Ines Soto to change the name of the UUA's flagship social justice campaign "Standing on the Side of Love" to something less ableist. After some debate, it passed overwhelmingly. It was an historic moment when ableism was at last recognized as something important within Unitarian Universalism. The picture on the left shows the vote of the delegates, with Theresa in the center. The picture on the right shows EqUUal Access leaders Rev. Barbara Meyers and Rev. Suzanne Fast during the debate.



EqUUal Access also celebrated two congregations receiving A.I.M. (Accessibility and Inclusion Ministry) Certification. The process for A.I.M. certification is modeled after the Welcoming Congregation and Green Sanctuaries

### **Second Source language changed preliminarily at General Assembly 2017**

Delegates vote to change 'woman and men' to 'people' in Second Source; GA will vote again on amendment in 2018.

### **Susan Frederick-Gray elected UUA president**



The Revs. Alison Miller, Jeanne Pupke and Susan Frederick-Gray at the Candidate Forum

### **UUA board to appoint commission to review Article II of bylaws**

This new commission will examine **Purposes and Principles** of the association in Article II. UUA bylaws mandate a review of Article II every 15 years, and allows the board to appoint a commission to do so at any time. At a general session at General Assembly 2017, delegates voiced desire to talk more in-depth about UUA identity, which the commission will facilitate. The commission will be appointed by the board's October meeting, said trustee Greg Boyd.

### **Covenant Task Force calls for creation of UU general conferences**

The Renewing Covenant Task Force called for the creation of regularly scheduled general conferences as a way to deeply explore the mission of Unitarian Universalism and continually recommit to covenant. In addition, it said the organization of the Unitarian Universalist Association needs to be reassessed to help it move toward effective covenantal relationships.

### **Change must come if Unitarian Universalism is to thrive, say co-presidents**

In dismantling white supremacy within their faith, Unitarian Universalists could lead faith groups in 'long-needed work of justice and redemption in this nation.'

The leaders of Black Lives of Unitarian Universalism received the 2017 Presidents Award for Volunteer Service. the Liberal Religious Educators Association (LREDA) **honored three religious educators for creating the White Supremacy Teach-In**, in which nearly 700 Unitarian Universalist congregations participated in April and May. **Aisha Hauser, Christina Rivera, and Kenny Wiley** received a standing ovation for designing and organizing the teach-in in response to the hiring practices controversy at the UUA that erupted last March.

### **UUA Board appoints 2-year Commission on Institutional Change And approves funding for Black Lives UU (BLUU)**

Will analyze structural racism and white supremacy within the Unitarian Universalist Association.

### **TUCW Attendees at GA 2017**

Lynda Shannon Bluestein, President of the Board

Randy Burnham, on UUA Nominating Committee and member of Committee on Ministries at TUCW,  
former Board Chair

Denny Davidoff, former Moderator of the UUA, Legacy Committee at TUCW, former Board roles at  
TUCW

Marjolijn de Jager, member and part of Social Justice Committee

Ellie Grosso, member and Worship Associate at TUCW

Linda Hudson, on Nominating Committee, Worship Associate, former Board Chair at TUCW

Carrie McEvoy, member Board of Trustees

Rev. John Morehouse, Senior Minister

David Vita, Director of Social Justice at TUCW

Report compiled by Lynda Shannon Bluestein  
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