

## **Delegate's Report from Brendan Shea on the 2018 UUA General Assembly**

This year, Melissa and I attended the UUA's annual [General Assembly \(GA\)](#) which was held in Kansas City, MO from June 20 through 24. We weren't quite sure what to expect, but found the experience to be enlightening, uplifting and energizing, and we wanted to take the opportunity to share some of what we learned and experienced with you. We were lucky to share the experience with the McKanans (Dan, Tammy and Oriana) and with Rev. Marta, who helped lead the [morning worship service](#) on Thursday June 21. I was also pleased to serve as one of our two congregational delegates along with Oriana McKanan, who did a fantastic job (more on that later!)

### **All Are Called**

The theme of this year's GA was 'All Are Called'. This was a call to all present to take an active role in the transformation of our faith communities and institutions so that our faith can truly align with our democratic principles. One of the main points stressed throughout GA was the need for us to become a more inclusive community, in particular with people of color (and in particular religious professionals of color), and a number of the sessions and items discussed during general session were focused on how to accomplish that.

Being my first GA, I was struck by how engaged everyone was, and the fact that beyond the walls of UUCM, there is a larger community that we are connected to. I was also struck by how many of the challenges we face are also challenges faced by others in that community: How to reach out to people unfamiliar with Unitarian Universalist and provide them a spiritual pathway that works for them; how to make our congregations more diverse; how to be financially sustainable while staying true to our principles; and more. It was a great opportunity to connect with others who have passed through our UUCM sphere (in particular, Rev. Elizabeth Nguyen, Rev. Lilia Cuervo and Matt Meyer who lead worship services as our church this past year) as well as to meet new people to add to our network.

### **Business**

I quickly discovered that one of the main purposes of GA is to conduct the business of the UUA, and help it support its mission of connecting member congregations and promoting the values of Unitarian Universalism in the wider world. Much of the form this takes is voting on changes to the UUA's [bylaws](#). Many of the proposed bylaw changes that we voted on were aimed at making them simpler and making it easier for congregations' and individuals' voices to be heard without being bogged down by arcane procedure, which I understand has been a problem in the past.



*Oriana McKanan addressing the assembly*

One of the [bylaw changes](#) discussed was the creation of ‘youth trustees’ on the UUA board. Currently the UUA board has a ‘youth observer’, who is allowed to participate in board discussions but not vote; this change would expand that role to a full trustee. During the discussion on this change, my co-delegate Oriana spoke in front of the assembly (*remember, we’re talking several thousand people!*) in support of this change, which overwhelmingly passed. Great job Oriana! You can see the video of her speaking [here](#) (she’s at 40:42). I’m anticipating the day when Oriana *becomes* a youth trustee on the UUA board...

## Congregational Study/Action Issue

In addition to bylaw changes, one of the main items discussed and voted on by delegates is called a [Congregational Study/Action Issue](#). The idea is that this is an issue that congregations will learn about, discuss, and take actions on over the next four years in an effort to learn about and improve the issue being discussed. This year, there were two issues brought forth; per the UUA bylaws, one must be selected. The one selected by the delegation was [Undoing Intersectional White Supremacy](#). One of the biggest things that I learned during GA was how the term ‘white supremacy’ doesn’t just refer to white supremacists, but also refers to systems and processes that center whiteness and marginalize people of color, making it harder for their voices to be heard. Some of those systems are in place in Unitarian Universalism – for instance, in structures of governance, the ways in which we worship, etc. Part of studying this topic will include, as painful as it might be, looking at ourselves, and whether we support such systems, perhaps without even being aware of it.

One of the highlights of GA for me was the [Ware Lecture given by educator and activist Brittany Packnett](#), where she talks about “the more you benefit from supremacy, the more responsible you have to be to dismantle it”. It is absolutely worth watching – you can see it here: <https://www.uuworld.org/articles/watch-ware-lecture-2018>

## Outreach

Melissa and I also attended a workshop titled ‘[Outreach & Inreach: Attracting, Integrating & Nourishing UUs](#)’, co-led by Rev. Tandi Rogers and [Rev. Sarah Gibb Millspaugh](#). Some of you may recognize Rev. Sarah as a regular guest minister that we have had at UUCM in the past – and a former Medford resident. In this workshop, we learned about perspectives on how to attract new people and integrate them into the community. One of the key takeaways for me

is that there is a continuum that people follow, from what brings them through the door, to what starts to get them engaged, to membership and perhaps ultimately to becoming a leader in the congregation; in this model, outreach is connected to things like membership and welcoming. We hope to take these learnings and utilize them in the new Outreach Committee that I will be heading – more info on that forthcoming.

## **Worship**

Another highlight of my GA experience was the variety of worship services that we could participate in. Each morning there was a morning worship, culminating in [Sunday Morning Worship](#). Each service had a different theme and feel. This year's GA featured the first bilingual service titled [Presente](#), conducted in Spanish and English – part of which was led by our own Rev. Marta! (You can see her at 17:00 in the [video](#).) I found all of the services to be moving in different ways, and it was interesting to experience worship in a much larger setting than we have at UUCM.

## **Next Steps**

I am excited to embark with you all on our study of *Undoing Intersectional White Supremacy*. It will be hard work, and uncomfortable at times, but necessary. I know Melissa is committed to continuing the conversation started with the *White Supremacy Teach-in* last year and I expect you'll hear more from her about that in the coming months. One of the other main takeaways from GA for me is learning about the experiences of religious professionals of color in our UU congregations; we heard a number of stories of how they had been marginalized or forced to leave their positions or felt that they unfairly shouldered the burden of 'teaching' their congregations about issues facing people of color. As a congregation with a minister of color, it is incumbent upon us to educate ourselves about the issues they face and ensure that the space we create for Rev. Marta is welcoming and open. This is a journey that we are overdue on starting, but we should start nonetheless. I look forward to embarking on that journey with you all.

In peace,  
-Brendan Shea

## **Delegate's Report from Oriana McKanan on the 2018 UUA General Assembly**

GA in Kansas City was an amazing experience for me. Although it was far from my first (I think it was my fifth), it felt like my first, because it was my first in Youth Caucus and my first as a delegate. Youth Caucus is the part of the conference designed for tenth to twelfth graders. It has workshops, game nights, and a section of the assembly room roped off. It really made me feel more like there was an important piece of work for youth to do, and I made some great friends.

Here are just a few of my highlights:

I went to a great workshop about art and social justice. They showed us different ways that artists were linking their art to social justice issues, and at the end we got to create a board game relating to an issue of our choice. My team's issue was immigration.

I went to a Youth Caucus led workshop about making our voices heard. We were invited to choose one of the issues relating to youth that were going to be discussed, and we drafted a statement for each one. Then, as Brendan said, I read our statement about youth trustees in the business session.

Additionally, the Youth Caucus supported an Action of Immediate Witness, about abolishing ICE. AIWs are issues that we vote on to support throughout the coming year. There were six to choose from, with three that were chosen. The three that were chosen were: "[End Family Separation and Detention of Asylum Seekers and abolish ICE](#)"; "[Dismantle Predatory Medical Care Practices in Prisons and End Prisons for Profit](#)"; and "[We are all Related: Solidarity NOW with Indigenous Water Protectors](#)."

Brittany Packnett gave the Ware Lecture this year, and she was incredible. [You absolutely need to watch it](#). In addition to that, she came to the Youth Caucus room and talked to us for a while before her official speech. (See right, I am in this photo, but only my back).

All in all, GA was an amazing experience for me, and I will definitely be back next year. Next GA will be in Spokane, WA and the year after, it will be in Providence, RI. If you are considering coming to GA, but don't want to travel too far, come when it is in Providence. It is only a few hours away. You won't regret it.

-Oriana McKanan



*Brittany Packnett addressing the Youth Caucus*