

General Assembly 2023 Recap

The Unitarian Universalist Association's multi-platform General Assembly (GA) was held June 21-25 both online and in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. GA is the annual meeting of the Association where much learning, organizational decisions, and social connections occur. Specifically, participants: worship together; learn more about the theological foundations of the Unitarian Universalist (UU) faith; explore where our faith is headed; connect with and provide witness with others around a shared vision, values, and Principles; and make policy for the Association using the democratic process. Over 4,000 people participated in GA—almost 2,600 of whom served as delegates from over 700 congregations. Delegates retain the right to vote on denominational business. Delegates from All Souls included Pamela Coukos, Sophia Smith (youth delegate), Erika Landberg, Neil Manzullo, Kathy Mulvey, Pamela Sparr, and Justis Tuia.

At this GA, delegates:

- 1) elected new UUA leadership;
- 2) considered proposed language changes to Article 2 of our Association's bylaws; and,
- 3) identified and voted on Actions of Immediate Witness.

Leadership

On Sunday, June 25, the Rev. Dr. Sophía Betancourt, elected to serve as the next president of the UUA, was installed after securing support from approximately 96 percent of delegates who voted in the election. The Rev. Dr. Betancourt has served Unitarian Universalism for more than two decades as a religious educator, minister, national staff member, and volunteer for many committees at the regional and national levels. She was tapped as interim co-president of the UUA in spring of 2017. She is the first out queer individual and the first woman of color elected to serve in this role. She succeeds the Rev. Dr. Susan Frederick-Gray and will officially begin her six-year term on July 10.

"Unitarian Universalism has a vital, liberating message for our time. Our nation and denomination are experiencing challenges in a time of significant division, change and radicalization," said Rev. Dr. Betancourt. "But together, I know we can serve one another, organize for justice, widen the circle of concern, collectively imagine new ways forward in community, and grow spiritually. I am looking forward to the continued work of radical inclusion, faithful witness, and the embrace of a wide range of voices and leaders for our faith."

Bylaws

One of the most high-profile matters on the business agenda this year included revisions to Article II (Principles and Purposes) of the UUA's Bylaws, which currently includes the Seven Principles and Six Sources of Our Living Tradition.

While there have been minor revisions to various parts of this version of the text over the years, the corpus of the Seven Principles and Six Sources have remained relatively unchanged since their adoption in 1985.

The world has changed considerably since then—widening social inequality, the growing effects of climate change, the emergence of the Black Lives Matter movement, the election of Donald Trump, and urgent calls to address White supremacy inside the Association itself, among other changes—prompted

the UUA Board to appoint an “Article II Study Commission” (Commission) to integrate the ongoing conversations within the Association with the new realities of our world and to lead a discernment process around our collective values, covenant, and purpose. The Board charged the Commission with reviewing, changing, or reimagining Article II of the Bylaws to “enable our UUA, our member congregations, and our covenanted communities to be a relevant and powerful force for spiritual and moral growth, healing, and justice.”

After almost three years of study and conversations, the Commission submitted their final report and proposal to the UUA Board earlier this year, and the proposal was contemplated and “preliminarily approved” by the GA delegates with over 86 percent support. Delegates also approved five amendments to the draft language. Over the coming year, the Commission will make any necessary changes to create a final draft for consideration at the 2024 GA. The final proposal will require a two thirds majority vote to be adopted.

The next year at All Souls is a time for many congregants to talk about the Article II update. If approved, the update will replace the Seven Principles and Six Sources in the UUA's bylaws with updated language about our values and inspirations, which reflects and incorporates some key elements of the existing principles while revising and adding to them. This is a substantial change, which centers antiracism and anti-oppression, much like the 8th Principle does. Many of those who attended GA are excited about helping to foster these conversations at our church, and it also presents a chance to connect with other congregations, who will consider the same language.

More about the Article II Study Commission, Article II Study Report, and the process and timeline for organizational consideration and possible adoption can be found [here](#).

Paula Cole Jones, a member of All Souls, is a member of the Article II Study Commission.

Actions of Immediate Witness

An Action of Immediate Witness (AIW) “is a statement about a significant action, event, or development in the world that necessitates immediate engagement and action among UU member congregations and

We, the member congregations of the Unitarian Universalist 10 Association, covenant to affirm and promote

The inherent worth and dignity of every person;
Justice, equity and compassion in human relations;
Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations;
A free and responsible search for truth and meaning;
The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large;
The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all;
Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.

The living tradition which we share draws from many sources:

Direct experience of that transcending mystery and wonder, affirmed in all cultures, which moves us to a renewal of the spirit and an openness to the forces which create and uphold life;

Words and deeds of prophetic people which challenge us to confront powers and structures of evil with justice, compassion and the transforming power of love;

Wisdom from the world's religions which inspires us in our ethical and spiritual life;

Jewish and Christian teachings which call us to respond to God's love by loving our neighbors as ourselves;

Humanist teachings which counsel us to heed the guidance of reason and the results of science, and warn us against idolatries of the mind and spirit;

Spiritual teachings of Earth-centered traditions which celebrate the sacred circle of life and instruct us to live in harmony with the rhythms of nature.

Grateful for the religious pluralism which enriches and ennobles our faith, we are inspired to deepen our understanding and expand our vision. As free congregations we enter into this covenant, promising to one another our mutual trust and support.

groups.” All AIW proposals must: pertain to an issue that requires immediate action; call on UUA member congregations and groups to take specific meaningful action; present an opportunity for member congregations to build partnerships and/or act in solidarity with marginalized groups beyond and within the Association; be grounded in UU theology and practice; and be crafted in anti-oppressive and inclusive language that is conducive to justice.

Three social justice resolutions or AIWs were adopted by delegates that support [protecting the rights of those who have received DACA status](#) (98 percent support), [health equity](#) (86 percent support), and [ending the planned “Cop City” training center](#) in Atlanta, Georgia (84 percent support). Congregants and church committees are encouraged to think critically of how their respective volunteer commitments and work can further support the efforts identified here.

Everyone, regardless of delegate status, had the opportunity to participate in spiritual gatherings and workshops focused on our collective work around voting rights, building inclusive communities, building nonviolent democracy movements, living sustainably, empowering young leaders, and much more.

GA 2024 will be an entirely online event, held June 20-23. GA 2025 will again be a multi-platform GA in Baltimore, Maryland, June 19-25.

Individuals who wish to learn more about GA and/or the possibility of serving as a future delegate on behalf of All Souls should contact Justis at justis_tuia@hotmail.com.