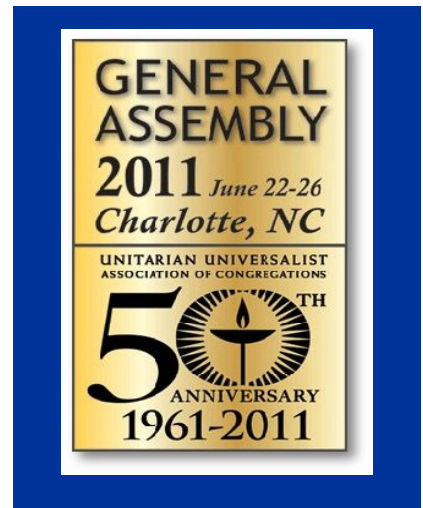


GENESEE UU SOCIETIES TOGETHER

(GUUSTO)

REPORT FROM GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2011



The 50th Anniversary Celebration of the Unitarian Universalist Association met in Charlotte NC June 22-26, beginning and ending with the ministry from Rochester NY! The Ministry Days had the Opening Sermon and Reflection from the Minister Emeritus of First Unitarian Church, **Rev. Dick Gilbert**, celebrating the 50th anniversary of his ordination. The Sunday morning Service was led by the co-Parish Ministers from First Unitarian Church, **Rev. Kaaren Anderson and Rev. Scott Tayler**.

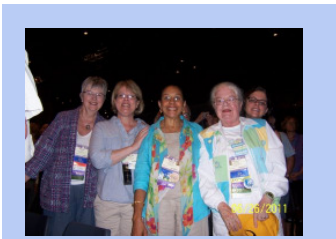
Lay people from Rochester attending GA were **Ronna Abbott, Barb De Leeuw, Dave & Linda Friedman, Jan Gartner, Linda Hazel, Mary Jones, Stephanie Ketterl, Dick & Suzanne McNamara**, and **Kathy Tew Rickey**. **Roger Thielking** (formerly of Rochester and now living in Florida) joined us.

The 50th General Assembly adopted a Statement of Conscience promoting “ethical eating” and approved 11 bylaw amendments, including one that will reduce the size of the Board of Trustees starting in 2013. Another resolution cleared Actions of Immediate Witness from the agenda of the 2012 Justice GA in Phoenix AZ but will restore them in modified form at the 2013 GA.

Reports from most of our attendees are in this booklet. Copies are available in a printed version on our Lobby Literature Rack. Also, full GA reports are available on the UUA website, uua.org.

This booklet was compiled by **Suzanne McNamara**, Denominational Affairs Chair. We hope you enjoy reading it and that you will consider coming with us to the 2012 General Assembly!





*Mary Jones (left) with
Kathy Tew Rickey, Barb
DeLeeuw, Suzanne
McNamara, and
Stephanie Ketterl*

FROM MARY JONES:

There was a wonderful celebratory atmosphere at this year's GA, with a number of programs related to our history as an association and a cake commemorating the 50th year anniversary of the creation of the UUA!

The following are some personal highlights that were just great:

- Creation of the new Unitarian Universalist Membership Professionals Association (UUAMP). We adopted bylaws, elected officers and officially launched our association dedicated to sustaining and nurturing the ministry of Membership in UU congregations and supporting UU Membership Professional staff by sharing ongoing lessons of growth, successful strategies, and ongoing solutions. *I was honored to be a part of the steering team that "birthed" this new organization!*
- The "Standing on the Side of Love" march to Marshall Park to hear speakers advocating for GLBT rights and protesting a proposed North Carolina constitutional ban on same-sex marriage. *I managed to get back to my hotel just before a drenching rainstorm soaked many of the marchers!*
- Kaaren and I, along with representatives of the First UU Church of Columbus, presented a program on "Powerful Pathways to Membership for Large Churches." First Unitarian's process for welcoming, nurturing, and integrating newcomers and new members into our church community is becoming a benchmark in our denomination. We were grateful for the opportunity to share our success stories and ideas for the future with others.
- Kaaren's and Scott's Worship Service on Sunday. I was so proud of our ministers as they "broke the mold" of the typical GA sermon, with creative pantomimes and spellbinding storytelling. The music they had selected was awesome and had the crowd of thousands clapping and swaying. This national recognition for our outstanding co-ministers is richly deserved. I couldn't help crowing a little in the elevator afterwards, as I heard people raving about the service: *"They are my ministers!"*

FROM RONNA ABBOTT:

One lecture I really enjoyed, out of many offered at General Assembly:

Before I moved to Rochester, I lived in NYC and attended All Souls and therefore, was eager to hear the Galen Guengerich lecture. He has his doctorate in theology and is an excellent speaker. His speech started out with slides of migrating birds which segued into how many people migrate from one religion to another. Half of all Americans are no longer a part of their childhood religion. They have either rejected a faith, or felt they were in a religious desert, and so religions must learn to nourish their parishioners. Many have moved away from a supernatural god. God has become an experience like beauty. God can play an active role through us, as only we can change the present.



*Ronna Abbott,
carrying our Church's
banner, in the Banner Parade*

Galen spoke of the Hardy novel *Jude the Obscure* as a story about people's reaction to change. If one is absolutely free than one is separate from everything. And to be free of everything is to not exist. We need others to exist. Freedom is the opportunity to migrate.

He also spoke of the growth of the spiritual quest as opposed to the religious quest (which involves dogma and an institution). Religion is the collection of traditions: a way of life; its stories; symbols; rituals; music; buildings. Spirituality has its focus on the individual, not the mission. The Heritage Foundation set up the Focus on the Family, which is its mission. Does our UU faith have a unified mission?

The above was the gist of the first lecture; it continued the second day with solutions for our UU faith.

Please go to the GA website (uua.org) to listen to the original as I know this paragraph hasn't done the lecture justice.

FROM: STEPHANIE KETTERL

My first experience at GA was definitely a good one! While in Charlotte, I was able to fully immerse myself in workshops, singing, and conversation with fellow UUs. The experience was very affirming in that I was able to compare what we do in Rochester with what is going on around the country. I took lots of notes on how to make our church a better place for staff, congregants, and newcomers.

Did you know that in North Carolina proposals to ban marriage equality, as well as civil unions or any legal relationship between same-sex couples, have been introduced and could reach the ballot in November?! North Carolina has not written discrimination against GLBT families into its state constitution.

My most memorable experience during GA was the Act of Public Witness on the afternoon of Friday, June 24th. It was an amazing sight to see thousands of people in yellow shirts walking to a downtown park. The magnitude of the experience didn't really hit me until I saw four news crews, police on every corner and a circling helicopter! In the crowd, I was standing next to a lesbian couple from the area (not affiliated with the large group of UUs or GA). While I was on the ground getting kisses and love from their adorable pit-bull mix puppy, the women inquired: *Where are all of these people coming from!?* They were in awe over how the people continued to arrive and how much support was being given to the GLBT community. It was in that moment I knew we making a difference, standing up for the rights of the GLBT community in North Carolina.



Stephanie Ketterl (right), along with Mary Jones, Kathy Tew Rickey and Dick McNamara, enjoy the music!

FROM: DAVE FRIEDMAN

As UUA Trustee from the District, I will report on GA 2011 to our church Board. I report my appreciation for the delegates at GA voting the bylaws' changes recommended by the UUA Board, in particular the provisions for restructuring the UUA Board into a smaller (14-member), more nimble and effective configuration with clearer accountability to congregations.

It was a moment of pride to stand with the outgoing and incoming trustees from the Metro NY District to present a Responsive Resolution, which the body adopted, to commend the NY Legislature for passing the marriage equality legislation.

And did I say that our parish ministers, Scott and Kaaren, rocked?!!

FROM: LINDA HAZEL

It's hard to choose the greatest moments for me at GA since there were a number of them!
Certainly these were some of them:

- Singing in the 170 member choir on Sunday morning with our ministers, Kaaren and Scott in charge of preaching the service had to be one of the high points.
- Sitting up there before thousands of people and singing with the energy that was generated by that size group was wonderful for me.
- And I was so proud to see the response that the attendees gave (a standing ovation) for Kaaren's sermon and Scott's playful Opening Words, knowing that these are my ministers.
- Then there was the Ware Lecture by Karen Armstrong, *The Challenge of Compassion*, which was so riveting and inspiring that I had to go out and get one of her books and am currently reading it. After sitting all day in plenaries and workshops, she was so engaging that I wished she could go on and on, not stopping after just an hour, because I knew she had so much to impart.
- There were also some workshops that I enjoyed enough that I want to get MP3s of them.
- One of the greatest things about GA is, as I remember it being the first time I attended GA, being involved, whether in the business meetings or in the workshops, with people who discuss differing sides of issues with civil and respectful discourse and constant awareness of dealing in right relations with each other and speaking from love.

I left wanting to keep that way of interacting upon my return home.

FROM: DICK MCNAMARA

I was particularly stimulated by the programs put on by the HUUmanists:

- The idea that religion is to help us understand and deal with change or the unknown.
- This change or evolution is occurring in all phases of life, faster now than ever.
- That our religion should help us understand how we are evolving socially scientifically and interpersonally.
- That our religion is stuck in too many ways of the past and not evolving to meet the onrush of our ever-evolving world.

FROM: JAN GARTNER

This was an especially fun and busy General Assembly for me. Because I was starting a new job at the UUA the following week, a lot of my activities related to my new role, in which I'll be helping UU religious educators and musicians with professional growth and transitions.

My position includes overseeing our Religious Education Credentialing Program, so a number of my colleagues made appointments with me to talk about entering the program; those were rich conversations from which I learned a lot. I co-led a session to familiarize religious educators with credentialing program benefits and requirements at LREDA (Liberal Religious Educators Association) Professional Day, met with program mentors over breakfast, and had a dinner with leaders of both the Mentoring and Credentialing Committees. I'm also supporting religious educator transitions through the newly-formed Guild of Interim Religious Educators and was pleased to meet with their leadership to plan next steps and envision longer-term efforts.

On the music side, there was a delightful gathering of Credentialing Committee members with newly credentialed musicians and current candidates. I was also thrilled to co-lead "Learning Together, Musically!" with friends from the UU Musicians Network. This highly-participatory workshop (lots of singing and drumming) explored ways of integrating music and learning in worship and religious education ministries.

I especially enjoyed the two big worship services. At the Service of the Living Tradition, Rev. Michael Schuler preached brilliantly about trust and authority as they relate to supporting our professional leadership. And I had a front row seat for Sunday morning worship with Scott and Kaaren – a joyful, inspiring service! The music throughout GA was outstanding: a diversity of styles, all artfully performed, contributed to the power and passion of the worship experiences.



*Jan Gartner (right) with "Learning Together Musically" Workshop Co-Leaders **Donna Fisher, Dale Brook, and Kathy Smith***

ELLEN ASPROOTH, OFFSITE DELEGATE (ONE OF 49 IN AN EXPERIMENT THIS YEAR):

When I've attended GA in the past, I've found the experience challenging, thought-provoking, and exhausting. As an off-site delegate this year, I was expecting very little of that – and I was wrong.

I agreed to ask for off-site delegate status because I think our association needs a way to involve more congregations in decision-making. From that point of view, the experiment looked like a success: arrangements for off-site delegates to view and participate in debate and to vote (those votes were tallied, but not counted, this year) were carefully made and ran smoothly.

For the rest:

Who knew I would be completely wiped out at the end of four days on the computer and phone? Minimal work and family commitments kept me from parts of two plenaries; otherwise I was able to block out the three to six hours a day asked of delegates. I wasn't walking miles to and from workshops and plenaries, but I wasn't eating meals prepared by others, I wasn't away from laundry, work and family requests – I wasn't away. And did I say I wasn't walking?

When I've been at GA in person, I've spent most of my time in workshops and meetings. This year, without those options, I listened to almost all the plenary sessions and I was pleasantly surprised. The discussion was primarily just that, rather than a series of prepared speeches, and the sarcasm, which I think is our worst fault in discourse, was limited.

I don't generally enjoy speeches, but the best part of this GA-at-home was hearing reports by **Bruce Knotts**, Executive Director of the UU United Nations Office; **Bill Schulz**, President of the UU Service Committee, and **Peter Morales**, President of the UUA. These brief reviews of significant work being done on immigration, GLBT rights, worker justice and many other critical issues blew me away. The speakers' moving stories of efforts in the name of Unitarian Universalism – in my name – reminded me of why I am a Unitarian Universalist and they challenged me to a greater personal commitment to this work.

As an off-site delegate I saw GA through a different lens, but found it not so different from my earlier, in-person experiences. I'm glad I did it.

(Editor's Note: Off-site delegates will be allowed to participate next year, and their votes will be counted.)

- Suzanne McNamara, Editor

GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2012 **JUNE 20-24, PHOENIX, ARIZONA**

"We are not a religious tradition with a creed, but a religious movement that has always wedded social justice work to theology."
- James Luther Adams

Beyond Business as Usual

General Assembly (GA) 2012 will have as a prime objective raising the capacity of all our congregations to engage with community based partners to do effective advocacy and witness.

- Workshops will focus on justice issues, including topics such as the spiritual foundations of justice work, the theology of social justice, as well as a more tactical focus on organizing.
- All participants will be afforded opportunities to experience social justice through service, witness, and reflection.
- There will be hands-on projects working directly with Arizona partner organizations. We expect work to be in areas of voter registration as well as in direct human services.
- Congregations will learn to assess their strengths and weaknesses and learn skills for social justice work according to their region, congregation size and resources.
- Both the hours and the pace of programming will be different from other GAs. We expect to have major worship services and speakers in the middle of the day when it is hottest, and community engagement in the morning and evening hours.

Our time together next June, be it in worship, education, outreach or reflection sessions, will offer opportunities for deepened understanding of our religious call to justice and human rights, for profound transformation, and for building capacity in congregations, regardless of size or geographic location, to become more engaged in this work.

[Note: This info was copied from <http://www.uua.org/ga/index.shtml>.]

For more information on GA 2011 or GA 2012, please visit [uua.org](http://www.uua.org).

You'll be glad that you did!