

Since our appointment in January, the Accountability Group for Phoenix 2012 has continued to monitor and interact with a number of players involved in the implementation of this General Assembly including the General Assembly Planning Committee, the Unitarian Universalist Association staff and the UUA Board. Our monthly meetings have been spent identifying and responding to issues of concern including messaging about General Assembly, feedback on specific elements, and active identification of critical issues to be addressed. The advisory and watchdog role that we have can easily become adversarial—we have tried to approach our work in the spirit of the common agenda of ensuring that the shared mission of a successful “Justice General Assembly” is the common beacon towards which we reach.

ISSUES OF CONCERN: A number of issues are of foremost concern as we approach this General Assembly.

Lack of Clarity Around Decision-Making: While the collaboration and cooperation of the many parties involved in creating a General Assembly has been heartening to see, a basic lack of clarity remains about who will be making key decisions about General Assembly. We are now thoroughly respectful of the amazing method in which a General Assembly occurs and immensely responsible for those who navigate through this process on an annual basis. That said, we believe that an additional coordinating frame is needed to deal with the sensitivities and accountability issues around this particular General Assembly, such as a coordinating process, to avoid unnecessary missteps in a complex situation.

Confusion Between The “Justice General Assembly” and “General Assembly Reform”: While it is inevitable that some aspects of what might happen at the 2012 Justice General Assembly may affect or inform future General Assemblies, we believe strongly that actions taken for this General Assembly should be in the service of its particular mission and that any changes should be clearly stated as applying only to this General Assembly. Efforts to deal with perennial trouble spots in the General Assembly process through this General Assembly only heightens the concern and tensions already surrounding this General Assembly.

Confusion over Actions of Immediate Witness: At the January meeting, we supported the efforts of the General Assembly Planning Committee and the UUA Board to suspend Actions of Immediate Witness. However, in the ensuing debates around this issue, it is clear that 1) this effort is being seen as part of an effort to “reform” by eliminating these for all General Assemblies and 2) that this issue has become linked to the issue of Board restructuring. As to the issue of the AIWs for 2012, we would make these points:

- Actions of Immediate Witness bind us to a long process of “doing business” which is out of keeping with the particular focus of this General Assembly.
- The witness we will be doing through our attendance and the actions taken at the 2012 General Assembly are themselves an embodied “action of immediate witness.” In addition, we will no doubt be summoning media attention and other resources to make them more widely known.
- “Justice” for the purposes of this General Assembly cannot mean addressing everything that is unjust, as important as that myriad of causes is to our greater cause. Our work for a justice GA is an effort to be in relationship to people struggling against unjust, oppressive, dehumanizing laws and practices and we can do this best through witness, service and education informed by their agenda, not ours.
- Of particular concern is the general ignorance and the anger towards Latina/Latinos that divisive discussions such as the one over the AIWs could bring out, as well as the possibility of scapegoating.

Importance of Multigenerational Programming: One perennial issue has been the cost and expense of providing children's activities at General Assemblies. We had been told child care and children's programming might be eliminated from GA 2012—but have been told that plans are now being made to address this. Again, we do not believe that the Justice GA should be the time for general reforms OR to eliminate accessibility for groups, namely families. We are heartened by the interest in this General Assembly by young adults in particular and the need this may create for attention to the needs of young families.

Accountability to Partner Organizations: It is unclear to us how we are being held accountable to the partner organizations in Arizona by whose invitation, such as it was, we were called to violate a boycott. While we have no doubt that individuals have these relationships, we are concerned that clear channels of institutional accountability be established. Being in relationship with these groups was one of the charges given to us by the Board and we are happy to play a role. However we become increasingly convinced that this is a critical piece that must be attended to before further planning for the Justice GA continues. We have invited Ken Brown, district executive from the Southwest District, to be on some of our calls to help us stay in the loop, however, this is clearly not sufficient. In our charge, we were asked to ally “historically marginalized groups and local groups working on immigration issues” and we believe it is time to probably past time that we begin that important work.

Accessibility: On the ground work needs to begin with the organizations that we represent to ensure that this General Assembly meets the charge to be a Justice General Assembly. The groups we represent are all giving up a lot to make this a Justice GA. We hope there will be a way to invite individual Unitarian Universalists and congregations to be in solidarity with us and therefore in solidarity with the sacrifice of accessibility and assurance we are making for the larger work of justice.

Criteria –and Timetable—for Planning Activities At GA 2012: Developing a decision framework for establishing what witness, educational and worship activities are appropriate for a Justice General Assembly) is the critical next step. (Please note: we are avoiding the use of the word “programming” as it implies expectations of the more familiar grid, program book, etcetera.) Of particular concern is a tendency to assume that we have to make decisions hastily so that we can meet the production schedule for the program book. We believe strongly that having effective partnerships is more important and appropriate for this General Assembly than having a glossy program. And, in fact, in general, that what gets priority for funding may need to be reexamined for this one General Assembly. Our conversations to date have suggested the following criteria which we have shared with the GA Planning Committee and the UUA Staff. Our initial cut at what sorts of activities would be appropriate include those which:

- Directly focused on human and civil rights issues in Arizona;
- Directly increase the ability of congregations to work on and commit to continued work on these immigration and the related human and civil rights issues in their home communities;
- Engage with our own history of anti-oppressive, engaging people at different levels of engagement and which acknowledges different ways of knowing and different abilities; as this affects our ability to be effective and accountable partners with marginalized populations;
- Are accountable to and/or are requested by the partner organizations in Arizona whose boycott we violated to be there;
- Meet and advance the needs of those served by the partner organizations;

- Celebrate our theological imperative to work for justice and connects our work with renewal and recommitment to our religious heritage; or
- Acknowledge the intersections of oppressions which allow injustices such as those in Arizona and other states to be perpetrated.

Resources for Congregational Preparation: A huge amount of material has been prepared to assist congregations in preparing for General Assembly 2012 and that is commendable and very helpful. In general however, they do not 1) capture the human stories that make the call to Phoenix most compelling and 2) do not include tools to allow people to have meaningful, appropriate and respectful dialogues around racial, cultural and other forms of difference.

ACTION NEEDED: We may be in the position to ask the Board to appoint new members to fill unfilled or vacating slots.

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Thank you for all your leadership in this area and for your continued trust in us to fulfill the roles in our charge, reiterated here for the in-coming Board members:

**MOVED (January 2011):**

In accordance with the 2010 General Assembly Business Resolution, “Phoenix General Assembly 2012” and the UUA Board’s October 2010 “Statement of Purpose for GA 2012,” to charge the 2012 General Assembly Accountability Group as follows:

**The 2012 General Assembly Accountability Group, in relationship with:**

- The UUA Board of Trustees;
- The UUA Administration;
- The General Assembly Planning Committee; and
- Our external partners, particularly Arizonan community groups;

And with the motivating knowledge that our presence in Arizona is a breach of the boycott invoked by many of those same external partners,

**Is charged with holding the Association accountable to:**

- Fulfilling the justice and witness focus of the 2012 General Assembly for which our Association is violating a boycott;
- Increasing accessibility and a sense of sanctuary at the 2012 General Assembly, especially for groups historically marginalized in the Association, including youth and young adults;
- Addressing barriers to and ensuring opportunities for participation by people with historically marginalized identities;
- Allying with historically marginalized groups and local groups working on immigration issues.
- Honoring our moral commitment to build the capacity of congregations to work on the longer-term issues of human and civil rights illustrated in Arizona.