

## GENERAL ASSEMBLY (GA) EXPERIENCE

Board President, Colleen Beale's Reflection on GA

I have been downtown many times, and I have been to many conventions over the years as well. I thought I knew what to expect, and luckily I was very mistaken. As I walked in from the sweltering heat off of College Street and felt the cool burst of air as I opened the door into the Charlotte Convention Center for the 50<sup>th</sup> annual General Assembly, I knew I was in for a very different and wonderful experience.

This was my first GA, and my first exposure to such a large gathering of UU's. Being in the midst of thousands of UU's reminded me of the first March on Washington I attended many years ago. Walking into a crowd of people who are all individually unique but bonded together in a common goal is a very moving and powerful experience. That feeling that you are a part of something bigger than yourself, a place of instant friends, and a welcoming community made of people from many different places.

I attended as a delegate, and was a part of the voting experience and also attended many sessions. It was truly amazing seeing so many people hold up their pink voting cards in unison and witnessing the organized chaos of so many UU's debating and voting and getting things done!

The sessions I attended were just as impressive. I attended the Policy Governance Sessions and other sessions that I was personally interested in. Here are some of the sessions, and activities I attended:

- Crossing Paths: Transgender Welcome and Ministry
- Governance 101: Power in Your Congregation
- Leveraging Your Experience in Policy Governance
- Toward a Religious Education for People of Color – The Sophia Fahs Lecture
- Accountability and Assessment Connected to Values and Mission
- Standing on the Side of Love Rally
- Plenary (Delegate Voting) Sessions
- Service of the Living Tradition
- Ware Lecture: “The Challenge of Compassion”
- 50 Years of UU Music
- Morning Worship
- Sunday Worship
- Opening and Closing Celebrations

I am very grateful for being able to experience the General Assembly this year as an attendee and a delegate. I came out of the experience with a greater understanding and appreciation of the larger UU community, many ideas, and a more solid base to support my personal faith and spiritual growth. This is something I hope I can be a part of for many, many years to come.

Here is to a year of Living Generously,  
Colleen Beale  
UUCB Board Chair

## GENERAL ASSEMBLY REMEMBLY...

GA Wrap-Up from Barbara Busey

You've heard a lot about General Assembly by now... How it was amazing, inspiring, exhausting... I want to share a few more wrap-up comments before 2011 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary GA fades into the sunset.

I was a volunteer at GA. My job was to stand in the middle of the Charlotte Convention Center and hold a sign that read: "Ask me." Wow. I fielded thousands of questions over five days—and it was the most gratifying job I've ever had.

Other highlights for me besides being able to attend sessions and the inspiring "Standing on the Side of Love" rally:

- I was giving directions to a woman, when a man walked up to the table beside us to make reservations at a restaurant. When he gave his name, the woman stopped talking to me, turned around and said, "Are you the 'Sam Smith' who was a pastor at such and such church in someplace, Michigan?" (Sorry, I didn't catch all the names...) But when the man said yes, the woman introduced herself and said, "You married my husband and me in that church 25 years ago!" And right before my eyes, I watched this amazing reunion as the woman called her husband over and the minister called his wife over and they greeted each other with hugs and tears after all these many years!
- I met two men who had grown up together somewhere in the Northeast, lost touch after childhood and went their separate ways—and reconnected at this GA after over 40 years!
- One of my personal jaw-dropping moments was when a young woman took the stage at one of the large services to talk about "Right Relations." She was poised and articulate and gracious. When she introduced herself, I about fell out of my chair. Those of you who have been members here since at least the mid-90s surely remember David Morris, the untimely death of his wife Jessie Garner, and their little girl, Garner... The young woman on the stage was that "little girl," Garner Takahashi Morris!

I wasn't the only one who found so much to be excited about in the presence of all those UUs. All of our church delegates came away feeling energized and inspired. In fact, they have committed to meet regularly in the coming year in preparation for the 2012 GA in Phoenix! Following this article are quotes from several of them about their GA experience.

One other item of note: our UUCB B&B was a great success! Over 15 UUCB members hosted over 30 UUs from across the country and raised \$5,130 for our Social Justice efforts! Thanks to the B&B Coordinator Marsha Kelly, and to our members who opened up their homes: Vivian Brenner, Sage and Dale Brook, Jennifer Embs, Suzanne and Thad Clements, Barbara Conrad, Mark and Cindy Fox, Don and Marilou Freund, Bill and Carol Gay, Nancy and Rich Greene, Jane and Bob Gorman, Judy Jones, Gloria Kuczminski, Sheila and Jim Lay, Kaarin Leach, Felicia Lee, Carolyn Sax, Diane St. John.

One final shout-out and a gargantuan expression of gratitude to Cindy Fox, whose years of experiences with other General Assemblies made her an ideal Coordinator of all the GA Planning for our church. In addition, our other key volunteer coordinators were Kimberly Melton, Courtney McLaughlin, and Steve and Michelle Reines.

I've been a UU for over 15 years, but had never been to a GA before. I can now say with awe and reverence that attending GA was one of the milestone moments in my faith journey. It made me proud and grateful to be a member of this progressive faith. We at the UUC are in very good company!

## DELEGATE REFLECTIONS FROM GENERAL ASSEMBLY

“The pageantry is O.K. but to me the important part is what the Association is saying. Statements are made through statements of ethical conscience, actions of immediate witness, and resolutions. I believe the by-laws ask that each congregation report on how well they have addressed the statement of ethical conscience within their congregation through the coming year.” --**Larry Bennett**

“GA Choir was fantastic fun. The rest of GA was a wonderful experience with interesting workshops, thoughtful lectures, and the chance to share notes about congregations across the country.” (GA Choir was fantastic) --**Rich Greene**

"As a first time GA-attender, I couldn't help but be overwhelmed and overjoyed by the number of Unitarians there were in the entire country. I tend to think only in terms of our Charlotte congregation, to feel isolated and uniquely liberal in a city situated in the infamous Bible Belt. To realize that we are far from alone was more than I could have ever asked for or expected...especially while having such a good time!" --**Jessica Coates**

“Here’s what I loved about GA: the powerful sense of connection with so many UU’s. Even when I’d leave the Convention Center and walk the streets at lunch time, I would see other people wearing their GA badges and know that I could walk up to these people I’d never met and feel comfortable talking to them. We UU’s are such a minority in numbers, but for a few days I got to feel like I was part of a huge network. I also loved hearing fascinating speakers and so many other things, but my impressions above are what will stick with me. {My husband} Bill wasn’t a delegate, but he did attend one day plus more. He said the Standing on the Side of Love rally made him feel really PROUD to be a UU.” --**Carol Gay**

“Here's my two-cents worth, in two comments (one cent each): Most remembered quote: ‘This place is not so much a Big Tent as *an Encampment with Many Tents.*’ Nothing like a stroll through the exhibition hall at GA to bring that observation home. As a new member, I was both excited and a little threatened by the diversity of spiritual paths represented. I immersed myself in UU history, and kept my bookmark with the Seven Principles handy. It was interesting to discover there is a bit of an “issue” around our large, successful congregation participating in denominational activities outside of our church, outside of Charlotte. For me it’s a no-brainer, we owe it to other congregations to be active, and we will be enriched by the experience.” --**Doug Swaim**

“The best thing for me about GA was the liveliness and energy that I experienced. I really felt part of a larger community and met many new interesting and delightful people. This was my first GA and I plan on going every year I can from now on. I came away from GA away stronger spiritually and more energized. It was a wonderful experience, and I am truly looking forward to attending many more!” -----  
--**Colleen Beale**

“I'd had no idea there were so many amazing things happening within our denomination. I left informed and inspired.” --**Kelly Greene**

## GA MUSIC REFLECTION

GA Music Reflection from Jim Alexander

Earlier this year, as General Assembly started to be publicized in *Voices*, my wife (Donna Fisher) and I had occasion to discuss GA with friends and fellow music program participants here at UUCC. Many know that we attend GA every year as one of Donna's responsibilities with the UU Musicians Network is to set up and run a UUMN booth in the GA exhibit hall. I opt to help her with this effort. In the course of our conversations we would invariably say that everyone should attend GA at least once. The reasons for this recommendation are several-fold but the GA music experience stands out as a "biggie." This year's experience did not disappoint us. We both were members of the District Choir, which sang at the opening celebration, and I sang in the GA choir, which participated in the Sunday morning worship and the closing celebration.

So what was it like for me? Here are some thoughts:

- For me it is a bit breath-taking to sing in a large choir, often accompanied by a band, in front of thousands of people (all UU's by the way).
- It's great to connect with UU singers from other congregations and reconnect with those who we've come to know over the years, even though we only see them at GA.
- It is interesting to experience different choir directors and their styles. This year's conductors were a noted UU composer, a music director from one of the largest UU churches in the U.S., and a music director from a smaller UU fellowship. I was particularly struck by the latter's ability to facilitate our memorizing much of the music and really "getting into it". (The UUCC choir will be singing some of this music in future services.)
- Behind-the-scenes occurrences can be amusing (at least after the fact). Two that come to mind are my sidling back and forth while trying to establish a sightline to the conductor through the rows of singers in front of me, and, shortly before the start of the closing celebration, a somewhat panicked John Herrick asking me if I'd seen the then missing brass ensemble scheduled to play during the ceremony.

I first attended GA here in Charlotte in 1993. I sang with a small choir at the celebration of the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Universalism. Since then music has become an increasingly larger part of the GA experience and I am happy that I have had the opportunity to be a part of it.