

Reports of the Delegates from First Unitarian Portland:

General Assembly 2025: Meet the Moment

Curtis Bell - I was most happy to be a delegate to the 2025 UUA General Assembly (GA) in Baltimore from First Unitarian Church and to do so in person. As a delegate at this last GA, I voted for the Congregational Study Action Issue (CSAI) on housing and for all three of the Actions of Immediate Witness (AIW).

I like to attend the UUA General Assembly in person because I am on the board of Unitarian Universalists for Justice in the Middle East (UUJME.org) and like to help promote our organization among UUs. We always have a booth at GA where we can speak with UUs from all over the country about Palestinian human rights. We also often have programs for attendees, and often propose AIWs, CSAIs or Business Resolutions for the delegates to consider.

For example, at the 2024 UUA General Assembly in Pittsburgh that was held last Summer, we proposed an AIW with the title "Solidarity with Palestinians" which included calling for an end to US military aid to Israel until Israel ends its genocidal attack on the people of Gaza, calling for support of Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions against Israel, and calling for support among UUs for the Apartheid Free Communities program of the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC). We were most pleased that our AIW was passed by the General Assembly with 74% of the delegates voting for it.

At this last General Assembly held in Baltimore, UUJME had two programs on Israeli treatment of Palestinians and the Apartheid Free Community program founded by the American Friends Service Committee. (<https://apartheid-free.org/>). The Apartheid Free Community Program asks UU communities to sign a pledge opposing Apartheid. So far 10 UU congregations have signed the pledge and several UU organizations such as the Unitarian Universalists Service Committee have also signed. Both programs included several speakers and were recorded.

Finally, I like to attend General Assembly as it provides a unique opportunity to speak with active UUs from around the country and the leaders of the different UU organizations.

Linda Craig - I awakened on June 22, 2025, to the news that the US had bombed Iran. I felt a devastating mix of dismay, fear, and anger. Can my church and faith support me at such a painful time? Could the General Assembly Sunday Worship Service possibly respond to this moment with so little warning?

I was not disappointed. Although the Service was, no doubt, planned weeks ago, the speakers acknowledged the news. The Rev. Nicole Kirk led with, "We cannot stop the violence, but we can hold space for the grief." As I watched speaker after speaker, I was reassured that our denomination could not only provide a direction for our response but also provide solace.

The Service continued with previously planned activities, but almost every worship leader connected our values to that morning's events. The Story for All Ages reminded us that

although we are flawed, we are full of promise. The upbeat singing and dancing reminded us to respond to oppression with Revolutionary Joy.

The Unitarian Association was born in 1825, 200 years ago. Although the events of 2025 seem threatening to us in a way that is unprecedented, and there have been setbacks that, at times, seem overwhelming, our liberal faith has grown over the years, giving strength to those of us who are faithful to our values.

The gathering of Unitarian Universalists that is General Assembly (GA) never fails to bring me hope and calls me to recommit to our community of faith. Attending GA, virtually or in person, is an act of renewal.

Ethel Gullette - I joined the delegate team again this year because of the times we are living in, because it is so important to know that our faith has power, force and dedication as it confronts the challenges of the moment. Unlike last year, there was very little contentiousness or even disagreement about the matters that were before us. Nevertheless, there were difficult choices to be made. I learned a lot about some issues I had not reflected on very much before, and I was inspired by the research, advocacy, passion and caring that delegates brought to our discussions.

I was very interested in the discussions of the three Actions of Immediate Witness, all of which were adopted almost unanimously: We Declare and Affirm: Immigrants Are People Who Have Inherent Worth and Inalienable Rights; Faithful Defiance of Authoritarianism, a Call to Action: Reaffirming Our Covenants for Democracy and Freedom!; and Defending LGBTIQ Freedom Amid Funding Crisis: A Call for Global Solidarity. I was inspired personally to do more for these causes, and I do hope our congregation will choose to strengthen our witness in these areas of focus.

This GA also offered the chance to adopt one of three proposed Congregational Study and Action Issues (CSAIs); upon selection of one CSAI, the GA member congregations would be encouraged and expected to devote three years of study, reflection and action to that issue. This was a new concept to me, and the process was at times difficult. Only one of three very worthy areas of focus was to be chosen. The three areas were quite different: Housing: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion; Abolition is Faith Formation; and Fat Liberation: Building Justice and Inclusion for Larger Bodies. I was quite moved by those speaking in favor of all three of these issues. It was challenging to pick just one to vote for. The voting process was challenging as well; we ended up voting twice because of some mistakes and irregularities. Finally, Abolition is Faith Formation was chosen, and I am excited to explore how we can best study this issue in our congregation. I think it will challenge and enlighten us.

Aside from voting, I enjoyed the spirit of the meetings. The support and real effort to embody diversity, equity and inclusion were palpable. The dedication of so many people to our faith was inspiring. The music was uplifting, as were many of the words. I'm glad I was a part of it.

Leslie Pohl-Kosbau - The AUA (American Unitarian Association) is 200 years old. One of the many celebrations at the 2025 General Assembly (GA), we recognized the formation of the Association through William Ellery Channing's 90-minute Baltimore sermon, a foundation for organizing Unitarians of "moral character" in 1819 and 1825. A fact that I did not know was that individuals could belong to the Association, but that congregations were first allowed in the AUA in 1884.

Most of the General Assembly business was voting in the Congregational Study and Action Issues (CSAI) single study question for the next several years, and the Actions of Immediate Witness for this year. Abolition is the CSAI, which will be studied by congregations in "waves". First is the study year, then developing changes for the second, followed by a vote in the third year, and then the fourth year is "implementation".

Two new Moderators were elected. I was especially pleased to see that Larry Ladd and Paula Cole Jones received awards and recognition.

The Actions of Immediate Witness are Immigrants are People, Defiance of Authoritarianism, and Defending LGBTIQ people. All these social justice declarations may be used by congregations and the Unitarian Universalist Association in taking positions within and without our faith.

I must say that being a "business only delegate" is not as satisfying as being a whole program delegate or being at GA in person. I did attend all the sessions and voted according to my conscience. Next year's GA is online only. Then, in 2027 it will be in San Jose and online. I am always energized and find hope in the future of our faith when being with our creative professional staff and lay leaders.

Cathy Tortorici - At General Assembly (GA) 2025 of the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA), participants engage in worship, witness, learning, connection, and democratic policymaking. This GA modeled the beloved community in its dedication to inclusivity. Care Teams supported both in-person and online attendees. Sign language interpreters were available for all sessions. Speakers described their appearance to aid those with special needs. Mistakes during sessions were acknowledged and corrected. GA 2025 also marked the bicentennial of the Unitarian Association's formation in May 1825, with a wonderful presentation that brought the legacy of William Ellery Channing into clearer focus. Channing's positive redefinition of Unitarianism continues to inspire UUs to explore our identity, connection to the broader world, and commitment to justice and humanity.

One of the most touching moments during GA was the presentation of the *Award for Distinguished Service to the Cause of Unitarian Universalism* to Dr. Paula Cole-Jones. Paula's transformative work, particularly through her leadership with *ADORE – A Dialogue on Race and Ethnicity* and the Transformation Team at All Souls Unitarian in Washington, DC, had a

profound impact on me and that church. I worked with Paula on that team, which reaffirmed the Board of Trustees use of policy governance, embedded the "community of communities" concept into church operations, and paved the way for restorative right relations and implementing the 8th Principle. Paula exemplifies what it means to "meet the moment."

There were three Actions of Immediate Witness (AIW) passed at this GA. An AIW is a statement about a significant action, event, or development in the world that support UU action, expressing the conscience and authority of the delegates at the GA at which it is passed. The AIWs that were affirmed:

- **We Declare and Affirm: Immigrants Are People Who Have Inherent Worth and Inalienable Rights** - Recent authoritarian actions in the US (e.g., mass deportations, family separations, erosion of due process) represent moral and democratic failures that demand a response. This AIW asks UUs to commit act, including public witness, developing community partnerships, and legislative engagement.
- **Faithful Defiance of Authoritarianism, a Call to Action: Reaffirming Our Covenants for Democracy and Freedom** - This AIW affirmed the need for democratic action, recognizing current threats to justice, equity, democratic institutions, and the rule of law. This AIW asks UUs to uphold civil society (e.g., peaceful/principled resistance, engaging in national/local movements for justice, inclusion, and democracy).
- **Defending LGBTIQ Freedom Amid Funding Crisis: A Call for Global Solidarity** - This AIW asks UUs to organize, advocate, witness and fundraise for, and learn about issues impacting the LGBTIQ (i.e., lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and queer community). Examples of actions include contributing funding to local/global human rights campaigns; integrating justice for local and global LGBTIQ communities into congregational actions; speaking out in writing and through our voices to support the LGBTIQ community; and hosting educational forums on the local/global state of LGBTIQ rights.

GA participants also selected one Congregational Study/Action Issue (CSAI). After three years of study, the final CSAI will consist of an in-depth UU position on the issue and UUA Statement of Conscience to provide implementation mechanisms. This year's CSAI is **Abolition, Transformation, and Faith Formation** (<https://www.questformeaning.org/wp3/full-csai-proposal/>). The term "abolition" highlights the significance of this CSAI. Abolition is an action that has historically been taken by our faith tradition. Abolition names how punitive systems of oppression, (especially the prison-industrial complex), harms people at the intersections of race, class, disability, gender identity, mental health, immigration status, and allows for building restorative systems that respond to harm with accountability.

During the discussion of these actions, UU was described as **an institution; a faith; and a movement**. After examining these actions and attending GA, I realized that that the work done and the beliefs held as UUs do embody these words – institution, faith, movement. This is a powerful message to bring to First Unitarian Portland for our work.

Arthur Ungar, Denomination Relations Committee Chair - There were 1,882 delegates from 592 congregations (just over half of our congregations), with 3270 total attendees. Delegates include ministers and religious education professionals. Others attended for the workshops and events including the Service of the Living Tradition, Ware Lecture and Sunday worship. Because Business Only delegates can now attend online without cost, money is no longer a barrier. We had 11 out of our 16 allowed delegates, including two on-site in Baltimore.

The UUA bylaws say: “General Assemblies shall make overall policy for carrying out the purposes of the Association and shall direct and control its affairs.” This year we had a minor bylaw change, resolutions of social action, and the election of Moderator, Trustees and Nominating Committee. All but the Moderator were nominated by the Nominating Committee without opposition. The Nominating Committee proposed two candidates for Moderator, one of which is a two-person team that was elected. It is possible to be nominated by petition, but no one did so.

The UUA budget was presented at a hearing, but no changes were suggested. I doubt that many delegates looked at the budget. There were reports from the President, the Moderator, the UU Service Committee, the Beacon Press, the Women’s Federation and others.

The GA expresses its policies in bylaws, resolutions, and elections. Bylaws are presented by the Board, elections other than President and Moderator are generally uncontested, and only resolutions come from the congregations.

This year there were workshops presented at the same time as some of the business sessions, so delegates had to choose. At one point the proceedings were delayed so that delegates attending workshops could participate in the discussion of resolutions.

Jim Whitefish - Unfortunately on Sunday I missed the closing worship, being on my way to an unexpected stay at Johns Hopkins and only just back in Portland last Saturday, so this report will be short. Being a very new UU I was deeply impressed with the dedication, fairness and commitment of UU’s, especially around the discussion of AIW’s and CSAI’s.

The whole process was totally new to me and the topics chosen are so important in this time. As a delegate I truly appreciated being able to vote virtually and was happy with the outcomes. The exhibit hall was an educational experience in itself - for a smaller denomination, UU’s are involved in so many areas! I had discussions with folks all the way from Addiction Ministries to fellow Humanists and lots in between.

It was inspiring to see so many LGBTQ+ folks not just attending but leading workshops.

The new virtual hymnal is a fantastic idea, and I look forward to seeing it in use. I thought the worship services amazing, and the speakers were the best. Alas, I feel I was more observer than participant. I had made my reservation long before all this illness "drama" came into my life. It was a valuable experience, and I'm very glad I was able to attend.