

**Minutes**  
**Monthly Envoy Conference Calls**  
Tuesday, November 19, 2019 3pm and 6pm Eastern

I. Welcome & Introductions

a. 3pm

- i. Allison Hess (UN Office, NYC)
- ii. Bruce Knotts (UN Office, NYC)
- iii. Gabor Kiss (Morristown Unitarian Fellowship, NJ)
- iv. Jeannie Lewis (San Marcos UU Fellowship, TX)
- v. Barry Lee (North Shore UU Society in Lacombe, LA)
- vi. Joanne Spivey (UU Congregation of Frederick, MD)
- vii. Nora Farahat (UU Congregation of Frederick, MD)
- viii. Ron Glossop (First Unitarian Church of Alton, IL)
- ix. Janet Bendowitz (UU Cong. of Shelter Rock)
- x. Rebecca (BJ) Allen (San Marcos UU Fellowship, TX)
- xi. Marilyn Mehr (Unitarian Church of All Souls, NYC)
- xii. Sarah Pinho (First Unitarian Church of Los Angeles, CA)

b. 6pm

- i. Allison Hess (UN Office, NYC)
- ii. Bruce Knotts (UN Office, NYC)
- iii. Bill McPherson (University Unitarian Church in Seattle, WA)
- iv. Ally Brau (UU Society of Amherst, MA)
- v. Jerry Ross (First Parish in Bedford, MA)
- vi. Carroll Webber (UU Congregation of Greenville, NC)
- vii. Chris Blasman (Chalice UU Fellowship of the Conejo Valley, CA)
- viii. Peggy Montgomery (Unitarian Church of All Souls, NYC)

II. UNO Director Bruce Knotts shares updates from the UN.

- a. Yesterday, Bruce was in a meeting in DC with Religions for Peace USA. They were in the Action Center for Progressive Judaism, in the exact room where the Voting Rights and Civil Rights Acts were drafted. Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. used the center as his DC office and it remains an active and important location for racial and social justice.
  - i. UUs were founding members (along with the Union for Progressive Judaism and Risshō Kōsei-kai Buddhist organization) of Religions For Peace in 1970 and we remain an important member of that group. (Also the NGO Committee on Disarmament, Peace, and Security was started in 1970. The Committee [just launched a new website](#) with the latest edition of the Disarmament Times which is very much worth reading).
  - ii. RFP has drafted a statement on immigration and is working on one about white supremacy & racism. Would like to see all religious traditions adopt *peace* as a central issue. Without peace, it's hard to get all our other goals. Doubling down on existential threat of climate change: No way to fund climate change unless we stop funding war, military, and nuclear weapons as much as we are. Also relates to all the other justice issues: LGBTQ rights, ending white supremacy, gender equity, etc.
- b. The UN is in some difficulty at the moment. Concerned about the global spread of ethnonationalism. Trump in addressing the UN General Assembly said he hates globalists (inappropriate place to say that) and wants everyone to be a patriot.

Nationalistic patriotism is spreading around the world in Europe, Asia, South America... More and more countries that don't want to work collaboratively to solve problems. Have tried solving problems by ourselves as a planet and the more we take that approach the worse things get. The SDGs are a perfect example of how we can work together to solve problems that affect us all.

- c. The U.S. is not paying its dues and is also making it more difficult for visitors to attend UN conferences by denying visas – Member states are withholding dues from the UN in protest to the American visa withholding practice. Know they can hurt the UN and hoping that by doing so will leverage the U.S.
- d. UN is still soldiering on and operating as effectively as it can. The most effective thing we can do right now is to work with our legislators to make sure the U.S. pays its dues and allows visas to attendees of UN conferences like Commission on the Status of Women & 3<sup>rd</sup> Committee Meetings & etc. The U.S. even denied (for a time) the visa for the chief prosecutor of the International Criminal Court! This kind of behavior is not helping the work of the UN. The UN is there to help all of us to bring peace, address climate change, address health issues, and so much more.
  - i. The UN is also having to cut back on translations due to lack of funding.
- e. The interfaith work we do with RFP & Parliament of the World's Religions is important and we hope that UU congregations are doing the same thing: partnering with other faith groups locally
- f. Gabor: What happens to dues that are unpaid?
  - i. The one bit of clout the UN has (doesn't use it quickly): if you don't pay your dues for long enough they'll threaten to take your vote away. Eventually the amounts get paid because people want to use their votes. BUT the UN *wants* people to vote and participate so it's a little counterproductive but is the main leverage that the UN has.
- g. Jeannie: Like what you said about joining interfaith coalitions. SMUUF has been part of a local interfaith alliance. New one called "Central Texas Interfaith" convened recently with about 300 people there working on responding to social justice issues
- h. BJ: You said that Peace covers so many other things (if war is going on, you can't focus on good education for girls or etc.) but wondering about how animal agriculture and climate change can be incorporated into the peace conversation. Worldwide interfaith group that met in Canada served a vegan meal – that's one subtle way to show people you can have meals without harming animals & the planet.
  - i. Bruce: Yes, the Parliament of the World's Religions meeting in Toronto in Nov. last year highlighted indigenous communities, served vegan food... The UU-UNO is moving in that direction with our own events. UUA resolution on Ethical Eating which calls for a plant-based diet. The UN is calling for a vast increase in the earth's surface that is covered in natural forests and as a safe place for animals, and reducing land for animal agriculture. Need those plants for carbon absorption. Bruce happens to be a supporter of changing our UU First Principle to "all beings" to honor also animal rights.
  - ii. BJ: Film "A Prayer For Compassion" featuring Rev. John Millsbaugh. Talks about different religions' views on animal abuse & etc.
- i. BJ: If Peace is the overall goal, what are the underlying things? (How do we get people to peace and are there specific goals) BJ follows Dr. Satesh Rao who has a vision for a peaceful world

- i. Bruce: Big fan of Naomi Klein's book "This Changes Everything" need to get away from our disposable culture where we throw things away that are reusable. Also have a similar attitude towards people. Need to adopt an attitude of conservation towards things, people, and animals: everything has value and should be treating our resources right. Indigenous people can be our teachers since they know how to use resources more gently towards the earth in a more sustainable fashion which also has to do with treating each other with compassion. Never looking at someone as worthless or disposable.
  - ii. Allison: The UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are also our guide for working towards a more peaceful, just, and sustainable planet. Of the 17 goals, they're all mutually supportive and address many different aspects to healing our world: accountable institutions, access to water & sanitation, reducing inequality....
  - iii. Bruce: Also, today is World Toilet Day
    - 1. Allison: Toilet Day is a perfect example of the intersecting nature of these issues: access to toilets & proper sanitation impacts environmental & human health, animal/ plant life, general well-being....
    - 2. Jeannie: Recently learned about toilet paper from [Who Gives A Crap](#): uses recycled forest-friendly paper & gives profits to places without access to proper sanitation
  - iv. BJ: Suggested 7 transformations that we can go through (e.g. from normalized violence to normalized non-violence) [www.climatehealers.org](http://www.climatehealers.org)
- j. Ron: Quite aware of the global problems we've been talking about but there's another one we need to focus on which is conflict within our human community. Need to focus on human rights for everyone and on world citizenship overriding national citizenship. Recognize that loyalty to national government must be subordinate to concern for the welfare of the *global* community. Get everyone, esp. young people, to think of themselves as citizens of the *world*. Also need to be aware of how English linguistic dominance is making life more difficult for non-English speakers. Ron encourages learning Esperanto, the global language.
  - i. Bruce: one thing all of you can do to help young people understand that they are part of a global community is by sending them to attend our Intergenerational Spring Seminar!
  - ii. Agree with Ron about colonialism of English language. One consequence of countries not paying their dues is that the UN can't offer translation services as much as it used to/is supposed to (main sessions are supposed to be translated into all 6 UN languages). Translators are expensive. Bruce has a good friend in Argentina – would like to have all these documents & sessions translated into Spanish to be circulated in Argentina. Could do it cheaper with students but the UN wants to make sure everything is perfect. This is a time when perfection is the enemy of the good.
  - iii. Ron: Duolingo is an easy way to learn Esperanto if you already know English
- k. Peggy: How's the new U.S. Ambassador to the UN?
  - i. Bruce: has a good friend in the State Department who claims that we'll like the new ambassador Kelly Knight Craft better than Nikki Haley – she's an improvement over Nikki Haley – so we're hopeful. Under prior Ambassadors we received invitations to the U.S. mission but those stopped under Haley – hoping they'll pick back up. Want to have good communications with the U.S. Mission.

Bruce heard yesterday from USAID reps in the meeting with Religions For Peace USA and we've heard from a number of Intelligence & Foreign Service Officers during the televised impeachment hearings. FSOs are working hard for the good of the world despite whatever's happening in the White House (hurrah for Foreign Service Officers!)

- I. Jerry: Appreciate the work the UNO does (Bruce's report is discouraging but not surprising). Going back to earlier comments about link between climate change and other social issues, militarism, and spending on armaments esp. nuclear: Appreciated comment about world religions. Jerry testified before the Massachusetts legislature yesterday pertaining to local bills (trying to get pension funds divested from nuke manufacturers). What suggestions do you have on what we can do to support the UN?
  - i. Bruce: We have an election coming up and it's disturbing to see that disarmament is not an issue and neither is support for the United Nations. The way Bruce got LGBTQ rights into the UN was by asking questions. Just keep asking people running for office (at every level) "What about the UN? What is your position on disarmament? What is your position on spending money on nuclear weapons?" Keep asking these questions and hopefully eventually journalists will be the ones asking the questions and the candidates will need to develop actual plans. Youth can be involved also in lifting these issues up; in many ways youth are already leading the way.
- III. UN Sunday feedback from Envoys – how did it go?
  - a. Jeannie: Honored to have Allison as speaker at UN Sunday service. Also had a dinner the night before and lunch afterwards. Small church and collected \$1,000 for the UU-UNO! Took a photo with congregational leaders & Allison before the service and took another one afterwards with the check. They printed both pictures in the local newspaper! Gives great street cred and recognition to the church in the community to publish these types of support the fellowship is involved in.
  - b. Janet: Very successful UN Sunday service. Personally it was a wonderful journey preparing the service from the readings to music, the whole thing was uplifting. People said to Janet before the service that the UN is ineffective and outdated, but after the service approached Janet with an open dialogue.
  - c. Sarah: New Envoy and this was the first UN Sunday service. Had a challenge with the topic since it was so huge, but got an amazing and perfect speaker. Professor at UCLA who talked about indigenous women across national borders doing activism (esp. feminist activism) including at the UN. It was so layered and intersectional and positive. Started with an indigenous prayer (speaker has indigenous roots so this was from her community) and talked about the land we are on and how women in indigenous communities are leading the conversation at the UN. Speaker also very generously donated her speaker's fee back to the church. Also Sarah's sister's saxophone quartet performed! Then the church has been very supportive after Sarah's sister's recent accident.
    - i. Sarah and her co-Envoy created a survey to learn what the congregation is interested in. Will tailor work of the Envoy team towards the congregation's interests.
  - d. Janet: Co-conducted the service with a video from the Youth Envoy which reached people that Janet's words may not have done. It was a wonderful experience to have a multigenerational-led service – and Youth Envoy was able to participate even though not physically present.

- e. Jerry: Can't say how important it's been to get youth hooked into the Envoy program (2 Youth Envoys at First Parish Bedford) This year for UN Sunday: invited last year's Senior Youth Dean Pablo deVos-Deak who did a great job speaking about the Seminar. Might face the problem of having too many young people who want to come to the Seminar this year! There's tremendous enthusiasm. One of the young people last year asked Jerry "What's the UN?" Getting that dialogue going in the youth group allowed us to get the dialogue going in the congregation as a whole for the many people who perhaps don't know much or anything about the UN.
- f. Chris: Had some of members tell their stories re: support of LGBTQ community and tied that into what's happening in the United Nations and the activities of the UU-UNO in particular to create a much higher profile for those issues. Seemed to be helpful in Chris's Fellowship to have both personal stories re: the theme and also bring in the global view.
- g. Ally: in the service talked about intersectionality & all the themes from the Seminar. It was Ally's first UN Sunday service. A lot of the planning was last minute, but it got the congregation talking about the topics a lot more than before, and many topics from the Seminar were pretty new for them. Will get started with planning much earlier next year.

#### IV. Announcements about upcoming events

- a. Intergenerational Spring Seminar "All In for Climate Justice: People, Power, Planet" registration will open on December 2<sup>nd</sup>! Dates: April 15-18, 2020 in NYC. Registration for Young Adult participants includes hostel lodging this year!
  - i. [www.uua.org/UNSpringSeminar](http://www.uua.org/UNSpringSeminar)
  - ii. Jeannie: Cost estimates for registration and lodging?
    - 1. Early registration (Dec. 2 – Jan. 20) is \$375. Regular registration (Jan. 21 – Mar. 2) is \$425.
    - 2. In order to support and encourage participation for youth and young adults, all Youth and their Sponsors as well as all Young Adult attendees have lodging at a hostel included in their registration fee. All others are required to find their own lodging.
    - 3. Planning Committee is going to be working on finding local homestay options to help lower costs for people.
      - a. Janet: can host someone as a homestay in Queens!
  - iii. BJ: Anyone heard of "Universal meals" instead of vegan? Takes out major allergens: milk, dairy, eggs, and nuts. [www.pcrm.org](http://www.pcrm.org) (no, but now we do! Good to know.)
- b. December 5<sup>th</sup>: UU-UNO is hosting "[A Climate in Crisis](#)" event on climate justice in NYC will be livestreamed – further details to come.
- c. Deadline Reminders:
  - i. Blue Ribbon deadline is March 31 <https://www.uua.org/international-justice/un/blue-ribbon>
  - ii. Dana Greeley Sermon Competition submission deadline is February 1<sup>st</sup> – sounds far away but it's closer than you think! Theme is the same as UN Sunday (Equity in Action: Gender in an Intersecting World) <https://www.uua.org/justice-programs/awards/greeley>

#### V. Adjourn