

Minutes
Monthly Envoy Conference Call
Tuesday, March 16, 2021 3pm & 6pm Eastern

I. Welcome & Introductions

a. 3pm

- i. Allison Hess (UU@UN, Rochester, NY)
- ii. Anna Mone (All Souls NYC)
- iii. Peggy Montgomery (All Souls NYC)
- iv. Jeannie Lewis (San Marcos UU Fellowship, TX)
- v. Barry Lee (North Shore UU Society, LA)
- vi. Jerry Ross (First Parish in Bedford, MA)
- vii. Ron Glossop (First Unitarian Church in Alton, IL)
- viii. Dana Burch (Community Church NYC)
- ix. BJ Allen (San Marcos UU Fellowship, TX)

b. 6pm

- i. Allison Hess (UU@UN, Rochester, NY)
- ii. Terry Van Brunt (North Shore UU Society, LA)
- iii. Bill McPherson (University Unitarian Church in Seattle, WA)
- iv. Phyllis Baxter (UU Church of North Hatley, QC)
- v. Nasreen Gagner (UU Congregation of Long Beach, CA)
- vi. Markly Wilson (UU Congregation at Rock Tavern, NY)
- vii. Irvin Waller (First Unitarian of Ottawa, ON)
- viii. Janet Bendowitz (UU Congregation at Shelter Rock, NY)

II. Discussion Topics from Envoys

a. Jeannie: How did congregations handle the big freeze that hit TX and the Gulf Coast a few weeks ago?

- i. Ron, Barry: Had cold weather but not much disruption in St. Louis or LaCombe, LA
- ii. Jeannie: Want to talk about the event as an example of what congregations can do when a local disaster strikes and you need to take action. San Marcos basically never has freezing weather like that, and it lasted for about 6 days. Were without electricity for several days and without water for several days. Eventually the electricity became a rolling blackout. Jeannie managed, had saved water and bundled up, but people in the community really suffered and even froze to death. There's a homeless population of a 100-200 in the community, and the congregation arranged for donations to be immediately sent to put up homeless people in hotel rooms (no group shelters b/c COVID), and arranged for food delivered to their door 3x/day. People went out and found people and arranged to get them in hotel rooms, arranged coats, hats, and etc. Church usually has a monthly collection for a local organization – usually averaged about \$600 – for this event it came to over \$3,000 total. This is a good thing that churches can do when such things happen in the community – was very proud of the congregation. Everything came together instantly.
- iii. Ron: Must have great people in charge!

1. Yes! We have really good people in charge. Rev. Krista Weber Huang was a great leader during that time.
- iv. Peggy: How were young people involved?
 1. Young people were the ones going out to locate some of the people staying in tents (many didn't want to leave), and the older people worked on loading up coats and hats and brought them to the distribution center.
- v. Peggy: How did all this great work get publicized?
 1. The local newsletter used to have a church page every Friday, and usually Jeannie sends a description each week about the organization that receives the donation. However, that section of the local paper has been discontinued, but Jeannie's working on getting this specific effort publicized still, including a photo. It's great publicity in the community to be featured in the local paper – let people know what we do and have people visit us.
- vi. Peggy: Can we share this on the office's blog?
 1. Yes, Jeannie will send something to Allison
 2. For all Envoys to keep in mind: Please let Allison know about things your congregations are working on so that more Envoy-written articles can be shared on the UUA International Blog.
- b. Jerry: Can we get an update on Spring Seminar & recruitment?
 - i. Allison: Yes. Registration is open for a few more days and unfortunately only 3 youth (not counting the Planning Committee) so far have registered for the Seminar. Don't completely know why it's so low – probably a number of factors, not least of which is Zoom fatigue plus the fact that usually the visit to NYC is a huge draw which is obviously not part of this year's event.
 - ii. Jerry: It is very likely Zoom fatigue. Kids are spending so much time every week going to school on Zoom – the youth group in the congregation has had a very hard time getting together. Also, there's constantly an awful lot going on. That's true for everyone and especially for teens and families. The attraction of NYC is not there this year too so less motivation to join the event.
 - iii. BJ: If people are burned out on Zoom there's not much you can do. Have shared about the program on social media, but haven't talked to the minister about it
 1. Jerry: A lot of support from Ministers but very little active involvement. Less involvement from RE people this year, including senior youth advisors, and I think it reflects people's frustration – it's been a hard slog to keep youth engaged this year.
 2. Jeannie: Also think it's not just zoom fatigue, but fatigue generally of living through a year + of pandemic.
 - iv. Irvin: Have a good-sized delegation coming from Ottawa, including about 3 youth, 3 young adults, and 10 adults. One of the young adults is an Indigenous farmer and is very excited about Soul Fire Farm – will be involved in a traditional garden program on the church's campus.
 - v. Terry: Very inspired by the recent Sacred People Sacred Earth event.

1. Irvin is interested to learn more about this program. Very involved in interfaith programs locally. (Allison will follow up after finding the video)

III. Congregational Programs

- a. BJ: Bill Gates has said that to address climate change the top 7 richest countries need to consume 100% plant-based (or synthetic meat) food. IPCC numbers show we need address animal agriculture even before fossil fuels.
 - i. All are invited to SMUUF Religious Education Program at 9:30am Central Time on March 28 will be focused on regenerative farming. BJ will share the link to the event with Allison for sharing.
- b. Dana: All are also invited: This Thursday evening 7-9pm Eastern Time 3/18 to an event organized by the UN Global Affairs program from Community Church. Focused on the Ethiopian region of Tigray. Will feature Diplomats offering perspective on that humanitarian crisis in Tigray.
- c. Terry: Congregation just formed an organization called Heart of the Matter with committees focused on poverty, criminal justice, and education. This area considers itself an “escape from New Orleans” and represses all perceptions of poverty. Working on addressing issues with local Sheriffs – asked about law enforcement in schools and the sheriff came back with a “Scared Straight” program which gives kids a sense of what it’s like in prison (!) – this is actually perpetuating the school to prison pipeline.
- d. Nasreen: at UUCLB working on implementing the 8th Principle. Will vote for it on May 23rd and it is likely it will pass and will be adopted. However, Nasreen’s skeptical re: is it going to work – or are we going to just have one more thing like the Black Lives Matter banner but violence/discrimination is still happening against the Black community. Questioning self, congregation, and society: what will be the behavioral change of each congregant? Will it be 8th Principle in action? Or 8th Principle in name only? Concern about white people in the community who have said they’re in support of Black Lives Matter: when things happen they just go their own way without really counting Black people, Indigenous people, people of color in and weighing *their* value as much as they weigh their own people. When you sacrifice including everybody in collaborative decision-making in favor of expediency, you can’t truly say the congregation is inclusive and welcoming.
 - i. Terry: Hardest challenge is getting people to understand their privilege in a very deep way.
 - ii. Markly: This is the time for us not to accept what is unacceptable. Time to point out what they’re doing wrong – if not now, when? Help them to prove that they think Black lives actually matter, hold their hands to the fire. Markly is using this approach in his environment and it seems to be slowly effective. Everyone must accept that discomfort is part of it.

IV. Questions and discussion re: UU@UN and United Nations initiatives

- a. Dana: What should we know about the UU@UN operating virtually in the future with no more physical office at the Church Center for the UN?
 - i. Allison: Office has operated virtually in the past year with great success. Once meetings return to in-person in and around the UN we will join the other NGOs who work at the UN but don’t have a physical office, though we are very

grateful to have a home-base at Community Church, a 20-minute walk from the UN!

ii. Dana: CCNY feels very honored.

- V. Terry: Is UU@UN addressing the lack of equitable distribution of Covid vaccines?
- a. Allison/Bill: This is not an area the UU@UN is working, but the UN absolutely is, through the WHO and Covax.
- i. About COVAX: <https://www.who.int/initiatives/act-accelerator/covax>
- ii. You can track the COVAX vaccine rollout: <https://www.gavi.org/covax-vaccine-roll-out>
- VI. Irvin: UNODC (UN Office on Drugs and Crime) holds a Crime Congress every 5 years, bringing together usually 130-140 governments. Just took place in Japan /virtually and Irvin participated. There were 3 themes: crime prevention, criminal justice, and addressing corruption. Issued a declaration at the beginning of the meeting which includes good content about being gender-based, youth-based, and more. The Faith Based Coalition on Crime Prevention that Irvin's part of is working on getting governments to actually take action – if they do, huge numbers of lives will be saved from gun violence, save huge numbers of people from domestic violence. Will see what they actually do – want to get intergovernmental organizations like World Bank and others to insist on violence prevention when they make grants. Irvin's interest is making sure cities take action. President of the UN General Assembly is hosting a summit on urban violence coming up in April – might be U.S.-centric but hoping not excessively so. Will be some side events. Some cities have committed to a specific reduction in violence.
- VII. Janet: The Fast Fashion event held in February was great! Impressed with the collaboration between UU@UN and others including Fordham University on fast fashion and sustainability. Watch the recording here: <https://www.uua.org/international-justice/events/sustainable-fashion-all>
- VIII. Irvin: What does the UU@UN have going on towards working on the SDGs? How about involvement in the High-Level Political Forum?
- a. Allison: The UU@UN has two specific focus areas within the umbrella of protecting human rights for all: climate justice and demilitarization – almost all if not all of the SDGs fit within those. Also working on a study reflection guide to help UUs and congregations engage spiritually and actively with each SDG. Have not yet started preparing for specific engagement with HLPF this summer but certainly will. That's when the UN community focuses on progress toward specific Sustainable Development Goals
- i. The HLPF in 2021 will discuss Sustainable Development Goals 1 on no poverty, 2 on zero hunger, 3 on good health and well-being, 8 on decent work and economic growth, 10 on reduced inequalities, 12 on responsible consumption and production, 13 on climate action, 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions, and 17 on partnerships in depth. The Forum will also consider the integrated, indivisible and interlinked nature of the Sustainable Development Goals.
- b. Terry: How can we tell what progress is being made towards the SDGs and if they seem to be achievable by 2030?

- i. Allison: Here's where you can find the progress on the website for each goal (e.g. SDG 16: <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal16>) click on "Progress and Info" to see the most recent assessment of how the world is doing towards achieving the targets.
- ii. Irvin: speaking of SDG16 and consideration of what's actually achievable:
 - 1. Target 16.1 is significant reductions in homicides – imminently achievable given our current knowledge and resources. BUT need a significant shift in how it's considered and addressed in each country.
 - 2. Target 16.2 is about violence against children. There's an initiative called INSPIRE with strategies for ending violence against children ([PDF document about this](#)) many African countries have a plan to significantly reduce violence against children – even have ways of measuring it – but for example in Tanzania there's huge resistance from the establishment, (like in the US, resistance to change incarceration mechanisms) don't really have support from president. Could Tanzania make significant reductions? Yes absolutely, just need funding and political will. Need awareness about solutions, and training people for implementation; if we can get to decision-makers, we can certainly achieve these goals.
 - 3. Target 5.2 re: ending violence against women is really on the agenda on this year's UN Commission on the Status of Women – will it be enacted? No. Found that violence against women in the last decade has not decreased – and that was before covid. NGO Community, civil society community has an incredible role to play in raising awareness and pointing out solutions, but we need someone who's going to be the lightning rod – Sweden, Germany serve this role in violence against children, no lightning rod in other areas of violence prevention. WHO is wonderful, and Habitat is wonderful. UNODC is a bit more moderate because they represent the police, lawyer, prison folks – that's why this year's declaration at the Crime Conference was so impressive, since it highlighted many other perspectives.
- c. Allison: Right now the United Nations & community is in the middle of the 65th Commission on the Status of Women and the NGO Forum that the UU@UN is participating in. The UU@UN is hosting two events and cosponsoring three others alongside the International Women's Convocation. The first took place this Monday 3/15 on Right to Joy for LGBTQ+ Women of Color, and details about the others coming up in the next week and a half can be found here: <https://www.uua.org/international-justice/events/csw65-ngo-forum> All are/will be recorded, just have to figure out how to make recordings available outside the NGO Forum participation platform. Stay tuned.