

Canadian Unitarian Council
Active Democracy Congregational Workshop and Survey
January 4, 2012

Introduction:

In 2005 the Canadian Unitarian Council passed a resolution on democracy which can be found at <http://cuc.ca/archive/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/DemocracyResolutions2005.pdf> that encouraged “the CUC Board to be leaders in, and advocates for, adopting democratic and transparent procedures in CUC internal affairs; recognizing the need for the Board to speak with one voice, once decisions have been taken”. In 2010 the Council passed a second resolution which can be found at [http://cuc.ca/active-democracy-task-force/appointing the Active Democracy Study Group](http://cuc.ca/active-democracy-task-force/appointing-the-Active-Democracy-Study-Group).

The focus of this exploration with congregations is to bring clarity to those resolutions and develop recommendations to present to the Council. We seek your input regarding: what congregations would like to be consulted about; how frequently; how decisions should be made; and who should make them. We have devised a questionnaire divided into four sections:

- Who are our Stakeholders and how should they participate?
- What are the best practices for selection of Delegates to the CUC Annual Meeting?
- How can Electronic participation and voting in meetings contribute to our democratic processes?
- How and where do we make decisions?

For information on how to use this material – in a congregational workshop, an online discussion or as an individual - please review the document “**Instructions for Facilitators and Organisers**” included with this package.

Data from these consultations will form the basis of a Report to the 2012 CUC Annual Meeting.

Some Background Information

The **Canadian Unitarian Council** is composed of member societies and a few individual, associate and honorary members. **The delegates** of the member societies (and delegates acting on behalf of individual members) elect the **Board of Trustees**, which is charged with the management of the affairs of the CUC. The Board is responsible for the mission and vision of the CUC; it oversees the work of the Council as it is carried out by staff and volunteers.

In practice, the relationship between Board and Council needs to be reciprocal. Both Board and Council make decisions. For the relationship between the two to be healthy, there must be an underlying sense of trust, fostered by a clear understanding of roles and meaningful communication.

QUESTIONNAIRE I

Canadian Unitarian Council (CUC) Stakeholders

Background and Issues:

CUC's legal owners are defined by its bylaws as its member congregations and individual members. CUC's board commits itself to operate in the long-term best interests of all its legal and moral owners through consultation with them and regular accounting to them.

In addition to its legal owners, the CUC has other stakeholders:

- **CUC's moral owners** are defined by the board as UU youth; young adults; ministers; religious educators; lay chaplains; and social responsibility groups.
- In addition, the CUC has **Associate Members** including Canadian Unitarians for Social Justice, Canadian UU Historical Society, UU Ministers of Canada, Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association, Unitarian Universalist Retired Ministers and Partners Association, Unitarian Universalist Partner Church Council and the Canadian UU Women's Federation.

All of the foregoing together could be described as CUC Stakeholders.

Moral Owners and Members of Associate Member Groups

Most of the individuals who are moral owners or belong to associate member groups are also members of member congregations but some are not. The latter include most youth, some young adults (e.g. in campus groups or currently unaffiliated), some ministers, and some religious educators.

Of these, some are not members of member congregations by choice, others, such as youth, because of congregational policy. In the case of youth, legislation governing member societies in most provinces allows youth to be members of congregations, in some cases with limitations. In the case of young adults, many are not members of any congregation due to frequent moves from city to city.

Each member congregation has a vote at CUC annual meetings through a specified number of delegates, and to the extent that individual moral owners and associate members are members of congregations, this gives them a legal voice.

Some Restrictions on Moral Owners and Associate Members:

The moral owners and associate members listed do not appoint delegates or have a legal voice in CUC affairs in their own right.

Meeting rules allow serving and retired ministers the same rights to speak at a Council meeting as delegates, however:

- Serving Ministers not listed as one of their congregation's official delegates, do not have a vote.
- Of note: **The Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA)** provides that in addition to each of its member congregations having a specified number of delegates, each congregation is also entitled to be represented by its minister(s) and minister emeritus(a) and credentialed religious education director. Community ministers associated with a congregation also have a vote. Associate Members are each entitled to two delegates. There is also the parallel Canadian precedent of political parties giving automatic delegate status at federal political conventions to all seated members of parliament.

Youth Participation:

Changes in federal law may make it impossible for a youth member to have a board vote, and at present, Board insurance does not cover youth members. Currently the Youth Observer to the Board is a non-voting member, but their perspectives and contributions are taken into consideration by other board members. However, we can still pursue creative ways to increase youth involvement in decision making.

Attendance at 2011 CUC Meeting by Members and Ministers

At the 2011 CUC annual meeting, there was the potential for congregations and Individual Members to appoint 139 delegates, however only 105 attended. The potential number would increase if Ministers or others were given delegate status in their own right. There are currently 32 ministers serving congregations and ministers emeritus(a) and 13 active community ministers in Canada. One of the potential issues with giving ministers delegate status is that it would result in a heavier weighting of delegates for congregations with ministers versus those without.

Questions Relating to CUC Stakeholders

1. To what extent should stakeholders (rather than just voting members) have an influence on CUC decisions?
2. Should Associate Members be entitled to delegates at Council meetings? If not, should they have the same right to speak as delegates?
3. Should Ministers have automatic delegate status in addition to each congregation's delegate allocation?
4. Should credentialed religious educators have automatic delegate status in addition to each congregation's delegate allocation?
5. a. Would you be in favour of other groups having the ability to appoint one or two delegates to the Annual Meeting including
 - Youth Yes/No
 - Young Adults Yes/No
 - Lay Chaplains Yes/No
 - Music Directors Yes/No

- b. If no, should their representatives have the same right to speak as delegates (for each)?
6. Unitarian Universalist Ministers of Canada (UUMOC) currently have an Observer who attends Board meetings but has no vote and is not a Board member (similar to the Youth Observer to the Board). Should UUMOC be formally represented on the CUC Board?

QUESTIONNAIRE II

Selection of Delegates to CUC Annual Meetings

Background Information and Issues

The role of the delegates to the Annual Meeting is central to our democratic process. Thus the selection of delegates is directly related to the fairness and transparency of the way the CUC does business.

In a sense, the single most influential action that delegates take at an annual meeting is the action to elect the Board of Trustees, yet—with a couple of notable exceptions--this is rarely a topic of discussion.

- Board positions are rarely contested & are presented as a slate to be elected all together in one vote (slate is selected by the Nominating Committee who are themselves usually appointed by acclamation)
- Board members are elected for a term, not for a particular office/portfolio
- Members of the Board choose who will be President, not the delegates

The Rights and Responsibilities of Delegates to CUC AGMs:

- a. The Delegates elect the Board.
- b. The Delegates may also vote on resolutions and policies which become binding on the Board if they are passed.
- c. Which particular issues should be decided by delegates is less clear, as seen in recent controversies over whether or not the delegates at the Annual Meeting vote on the budget.

Considerations regarding who gets chosen as a delegate

If the delegates chosen do not represent the wishes of the congregations that they represent, the work of the CUC is compromised. The discussions and decisions taken, and proposals made will only be as authentic as the delegates make it. Thus the consultation process depends on how well congregations choose and mandate their delegates--by having in place:

- a. Selection policies and procedures;
- b. Procedures for preparing delegates to reflect the will of congregations and methods for canvassing the congregation on issues to be discussed and voted on at the AGM;
- c. Feedback mechanisms on the outcomes of AGM to keep up an ongoing conversation between the members and the CUC Board.
- d. Method for providing continuity between delegates as they change over

Barriers to Delegate Representation of Congregations

- a. Funding emerges as a strong impediment to the selection of wider constituencies. Congregations that are unable to fund delegates especially in years when AGMs are a plane ride away, may have to depend on those who offer to pay their own way to the conference. To what extent can this compromise:
 - The delegates' sense of responsibility to the congregation?

- The congregation's need to make demands on the delegates to participate in a mandate and to carry out delegate responsibilities that reflect the wishes of the congregation?
 - The constituent choices of who represents the congregation? This tends to skew representation in terms of the affluent, the middle and senior members, while leaving out youth, young adults, young parents, the working poor, and those who depend on social assistance.
- b. Delegates not undertaking their responsibilities by:
- Focusing on the attractions of the location
 - Failing to attend meetings and to vote; or not being informed of their congregations wishes when they vote
 - Not offering feedback and continuity to home congregations.

Some congregations have some of the following policies, procedures and practices regarding delegate choice:

- a. Only considering accrediting delegates who make contributions to the congregation in non monetary ways of participation and who are active in identified groups in the congregation.
- b. Holding congregational consultation meetings that delegates attend on the issues to be discussed at the CUC meetings so delegates can take a pulse of the congregations on these issues.
- c. Asking delegates to make a financial pledge to the congregation as a requirement of accreditation.
- d. Holding fund raising events to send a member of an underrepresented group.
- e. Providing some financial incentives such as payment of registration fees for the conference or cheque exchanges to provide a tax receipt for expenses

Scenarios to consider:

- A. An unemployed student member wishes to be a delegate to the Annual Meeting. She is active in the young adult community but unable to afford to pay her own way to the Annual Meeting and there is no funding available. The dilemma: how does she participate in the work and contribute her voice?
- B. The Minister finds that the number of well-qualified members in terms of contributions to the life of the congregation exceeds the number of delegates allotted to the congregation, unless she/he gives up her position and vote. The dilemma: she/he would like to support increased participation in the work of the CUC by members of the congregation but would also like to participate him/herself in the work of the Annual Meeting and to have a vote. (Also see Stakeholders Questionnaire)
- C. It is June. A member hears about a budget vote at the Annual Meeting a month ago, and is concerned about what happened. Who can they talk to? Do they know who their delegates are? Do the delegates have a responsibility to the congregation after the Annual Meeting?

Questions on Delegate Selection

7. How would you recommend that congregations select and support delegates?
8. Delegates are the point of contact between their congregation and the Annual Meeting. What can be done to change the culture of the Canadian Unitarian Council so that delegates can become true representatives of their congregations? (Consider practices in the congregation, at the annual meeting, and at the Board level).
9. What would motivate you to become a delegate?

QUESTIONNAIRE III

Electronic Voting and Participation

As UU's we are committed to **equity, democracy, and environmental sustainability**, as stated in our 7 Principles.

Introduction:

- **Electronic voting/participation is an equity issue** because it is expensive to travel to and attend our Annual Meetings. Congregations are often not able to sponsor their delegates monetarily, so it is usually the individuals who have the means to attend the Annual Meeting, that are ultimately asked to act as delegates (also see Delegates Questionnaire). This means that our current system is often excluding the voices of individuals with limited means, which may foster an elitist, classist and ageist situation.
- **Electronic voting/participation is a democratic issue** because democracy means giving everyone a voice. Currently some member societies do not have a voice because they do not consistently have delegates. In order to do democracy well, all our constituents must be fairly represented.
- **Electronic voting/participation is an environmental issue**, because it is unsustainable to have hundreds of us travelling long distances across the country every year to attend the Annual Meeting, relying heavily on air and car travel. We can reduce our carbon footprint by reducing the number of people travelling to the Annual Meeting every year.

Background Information:

Technologically, society has reached a point where electronic voting is no longer in its infancy. Improvements in electronic communications are leading to greater accessibility and lower costs. The ways to achieve real-time discussion and electronic voting are expanding every day.

The Unitarian Universalist Association in the U.S. has already begun exploring implementing electronic voting and participation in their General Assembly. This past June saw a pilot project with 49 participants from all over the country. We can continue to learn from their experiences, while taking our Canadian context into account.

Our major challenge is acceptance of a new experience in how we govern ourselves

- There may be some hesitation and uneasy feelings around giving up our current voting process and face-to-face discussion.
- For many, the experience of being at an Annual Meeting and meeting the other delegates and attendees is more important than the accessibility of electronic voting.

These feelings will have to be taken into account and addressed. We hope that congregational workshops will discuss this aspect in depth and share their concerns and suggestions with us.

Three main elements of an electronic off-site voting system which need to be addressed:

- Viewing/listening to the discussions
- Participating in discussions
- Casting a vote

There are a number of ways to address each of these issues, and our challenge is to find the combination that works best for us, given our financial situation, the numbers of delegates we expect, and the technology we have available.

Electronic Voting Questions:

10. How do you feel about participating electronically as a delegate at an Annual Meeting, if you could hear and participate in the discussion and vote on the resolutions?
11. Are the benefits of more accessible, equitable participation worth the costs of less face-to-face interaction?
12. Would you be willing to participate electronically in an Annual Meeting?
13. How would you feel about attending an Annual Meeting where some participants were off-site?

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QUESTIONNAIRE IV

How do we make decisions—who makes them?

Background

The formal decision making authority of the Canadian Unitarian Council is well articulated in the bylaws. While the Council always retains the final decision making authority, it has chosen to delegate the day-to-day running of the organization to a Board of Trustees.

The Board in turn has chosen to use the Carver policy governance model in its interaction with the executive director and staff. More information on policy governance is available at <http://cuc.ca/how-we-govern-ourselves/>. Organizations such as the CUC choose to delegate authority to a Board of Trustees largely because it is difficult, if not impossible, for the larger group to stay current with all of the issues necessary for making the decisions required for such a diverse group (both geographically and philosophically).

Over the last few years there has been a recurring voice that is looking to have someone in place to speak on behalf of Canadian Unitarians and Universalists to the public in a timely manner on significant and emerging societal issues. Exactly what that looks like and the extent to which that is desired is not clear. The system currently in place in which monitoring groups prepare letters on emerging issues to the President for signing is inconsistent and more or less invisible to the majority of UUs.

Scenarios

Below you will find three scenarios: each scenario centres on how you, our members, would like to see us do participatory democracy. A series of questions will help focus your discussion. Please do not feel constrained by the suggested questions, they are intended only to help guide your discussion, not contain it!

A. Decision Making

Recently the Board of Trustees communicated the following decision to ministers and current presidents:

"This is to let you know that after considerable discussion and deliberation during its meeting in September, the Canadian Unitarian Council has decided that the amount requested for your 2013 Annual Program Contribution will be \$99. per member. The motion, moved by Board Treasurer, was passed by consensus.

For some relevant background, the key factor is that the amount rose every year up to 2008, when the financial crisis hit. The amount has remained the same since then. Had annual minimal increases continued, the number would now be \$107.

Thank you for letting your treasurer know of this change, in advance to allow for longer term planning in your community."

Questions

14. Should an increase in the Annual Program Contribution be decided by the Board of Trustees or should it be taken to the full Council (i.e. all the delegates) for decision at the annual meeting? Why?
15. How can the Board recognise which decisions should be taken to Council for discussion and vote? Given the complexity and significance of some decisions like this, how can delegates attending an annual meeting be confident that they can make a fully informed decision in the interest of the entire organisation?

B. Consultation

The Board of Trustees has identified the provision of resources for religious exploration and spiritual growth as one of four high priority issues for the Executive Director. Currently the Executive Director is responsible for ensuring effective programs are in place.

Questions

With respect to decisions impacting CUC Religious Exploration programs (including Religious Education or Life Span Learning):

16. To what extent should consultation for Religious Exploration take place:
 - Every congregation with an RE program?
 - A sampling of congregations?
 - Other?
17. Who (individually) should be consulted?
 - selected "experts",
 - RE staff and volunteers,
 - ministers,
 - presidents,
 - other?
18. How should consultation occur? What makes you suggest what you do?
19. How should the needs of large versus smaller congregations be balanced?

C. Who Speaks for the CUC

The omnibus crime bill before government is an issue that many UU's find upsetting and against our principles. Many would like to see Canadian UU's take a formal position against this bill but we do not have a criminal justice monitoring group in place.

Spokesperson Question

20. Should there be a national spokesperson who takes a stand on behalf of Canadian Unitarians and Universalists, for emerging issues like this?
21. If not, should this be left to the discretion of each member society and each individual to address?.
22. If yes, should we strengthen the existing monitoring group process to aid in that process or create a new process all together?
23. If yes, should there be guidelines to direct this person as is currently the case for letters that the monitoring group write and have the President sign or should they be free to speak their mind?
24. If yes, who should speak on behalf of Canadian UU's (the President of the Board of Trustees, the executive director, a moderator chosen by council or someone else)?

Final Questions:

What have we missed?

25. Do you have a concern about democracy within the CUC which is not addressed here? Please provide details in your feedback questionnaire.

How can we best communicate with you?

26. What is/are your preferred method(s) of communication:
- In person
 - Facebook
 - Email
 - Skype or teleconference
 - Canada Post
 - Google docs
 - Other: _____