

Dear Colleagues,

In response to the report that was recently released from the UUA Task Force on Cultural Misappropriation (below), a number of you asked for more background on the establishment of this group and its purpose. I hope the following account of events will provide more context for you.

The 2005 General Assembly in Fort Worth, TX proved difficult for UUs who are members of the People of Color community. Numerous events occurred which showed that, as a faith community gathered for General Assembly, we had failed to live up to our ideals and principles in our actions and words. As a result of those events, the UUA Board of Trustees convened a Special Review Commission, chaired by the Rev. Jose Ballester (UUA Trustee at Large), (see <http://www.uua.org/TRUS/apr06/D2a-src.pdf>) to study these events.

Events at the 2006 General Assembly suggested that we had not learned all that we might from our 2005 experiences. There were numerous reports of unequal treatment by the ushers in admitting individuals to events who did not have their badges, and of presenting spoken and written material which was discriminatory or racist. During the final plenary, a song break featuring "Thula Klezio" was presented by a group of UUMN members wearing white sneakers, in the style of Ladysmith Black Mambazo. All the presenters were white, the break was short, the dance movements of the break had not been well rehearsed, and although information on the song had been thoroughly researched and was well presented to the Plenary, there were a significant number of individuals present in the plenary hall who felt the song and its presentation had misappropriated cultural elements in a way that was hurtful. This reaction was conveyed publicly from the procedural mike on the floor of Plenary. (An account of this incident can be found online at <http://www.uua.org/ga/ga06/5030.html> and it can be viewed on the plenary webcast). Other incidents at GA also contributed to a sense that we had a way to go in finding how we could be in more authentic, loving, and understanding relationship with one another at General Assembly.

UUA Moderator Gini Courter decided that it was time to assemble leaders from organizations in the UUA who had been involved in these incidents to begin a conversation about cultural misappropriation. The meeting was arranged for September 2006 at UUA headquarters in Boston. Rev. Jason Shelton, Leon Dunkley and I represented the UUMN in this conversation. Members of the other groups are identified in the report.

Knowing that we were being called to be the voice of UUMN members in that conversation, I decided it was important to offer an opportunity for participants at the 2006 UUMN conference to come together and share their thoughts and feelings about the issue of cultural misappropriation and General Assembly. More than forty people gathered in my suite one night in St. Paul to have a conversation facilitated by our liaison, Deb Weiner. In small groups and then as a whole, we considered the questions "What are my hopes for this conversation on cultural misappropriation? What are my fears about this issue? What questions do I have about the process?" Participants were encouraged to hear one another - practicing careful active listening - and recognize that the words of the Special Review Commission were true: that this conversation was not about the UUMN or individual musicians. It was a much wider conversation. In the words of the introduction to the Commission Report:

This is not about nametags

This is about people

This is about relationships

This is about power

This is about how we treat each other

This is about communication

This is about the assumptions we make about each other

This is about human limitations and fragility

This is about how we handle conflict
This is about the myths of our accomplishments and denial of our failures
This is about entitlement across a broad spectrum and at all levels
This is about theological understanding of covenant
This is about sin, confession, penance and absolution
This is about owning our history and learning from that history
This is about creating and sustaining a religious covenanted community
This is about hope, and love, and pain, and tears, and love, and hope again
This is about never forgetting and letting go
This is about humility
This is about the future
This is about all of us.

Thanks for your questions and your attention to this work. Please let me know if you have other concerns or observations.

In faith,
Beth Norton, UUMN President

From: Gini Courter, Moderator

To: Annette Marquis for ARE Steering Committee
Rev. Manish Mishra and Rev. Danielle DiBona for DRUUMM Steering Committee
Elizabeth Norton for UU Musicians Network
Members of the Cultural (mis)Appropriation Task Force

Cc: Linda Friedman for General Assembly Planning Committee
Rev. Ken Sawyer for UUMA Executive Committee
Susan Archer for LREDA Exec
Kay Montgomery for UUA Staff Leadership Council
Elyse Reznick for District Presidents Association
UUA Board of Trustees
Jesse Jaeger for distribution to YRUU Steering Committee
Michael Tino for distribution to CUUYAN Steering Committee

Re: UUA Task Force on Cultural Misappropriation (see page 3 note on name change)

Date: October 21, 2006

From September 21 through 23, 2006, ten people representing three UU organizations, gathered in Boston to discuss a variety of issues related to cultural appropriation and misappropriation as experienced at the 2005 and 2006 General Assemblies. Those present, and the organizations they represented, were:

Rev. Manish Mishra - DRUUMM (Diverse and Revolutionary Unitarian Universalist Multicultural Ministries)

Rev. Danielle DiBona - DRUUMM
Janice Marie Johnson - DRUUMM
Karen Eng - congregational leader, formerly in DRUUMM leadership
Rev. David Takahashi Morris - ARE (Allies for Racial Equity)
Linda Friedman - ARE
Beth Norton - UUMN (Unitarian Universalist Musicians Network)
Rev. Jason Shelton - UUMN
Leon Dunkley - UUMN
Debbie Weiner, UUA staff/liaison to UUMN and member of ARE
A second UUA staff member for this task force, Rev. Sofia Craethnenn, is UUA staff liaison to DRUUMM and was unable to attend this meeting.

In this remarkable two-day meeting, we shared our concerns, our hurts, our hopes for our faith together. People were honest and truthful. Our discussion was wide-ranging and deep.

Among the questions we discussed were these:

- Does an individual at GA speak as an individual or as part of a community?

Individuals who have concerns at GA currently have one key avenue for redress of concerns - the procedural microphone in the plenary hall, or groups of other individuals who they can gather to hear their concerns. Is that what we (collectively) want, and does it serve the needs of both the individual and the community at large?

- What do we ask of worship leaders at GA and how might it change the ways in which we organize, conceptualize, and carry out worship?

At GA, leading worship for 4,000 people puts worship leaders and worshippers in an environment that is not "what we ordinarily do." It's convention worship. Because of this, the things we take for granted at home in worship settings aren't in play at GA, and so we are called to develop new ways of being together as a community. Much as we try, it's inevitable that we will miss something. And missing something means that we will hurt someone when we didn't mean to. In a covenanted home community we are able to bring that to each other and we find ways to love each other...how, in this very large setting, do we do that and make that space safe?

- We gather together in community at GA about three times. At our opening, our closing, and at our Sunday worship service and the Service of the Living Tradition. How do we educate people around how to be together? How is plenary different, and (still) how can we be in covenanted relationship with one another even in a non-worship setting?

- We need to find ways to be in dialogue. Saying "it wasn't about you" isn't about being in dialogue. Sometimes, all you can say is, "I'm sorry." We also recognized that there are words that we sometimes use to end conversations. If you say you feel 'unsafe,' the conversation can't go any further. 'Cultural appropriation' is another term that stops dialogue. How do we stay in dialogue, in respect and love?

- We need to hold hands hard and not let go: In this faith, we are trying to create a community that hasn't existed. A multi-faith, multi-racial experience. There is no handbook. What do you do and how do you relate to one another when you are in uncharted territory and there is no road map? How can we live a covenant of caring? Such behaviors are likely to help us feel more safe. At the same time, we recognize that some piece of our religious work is figuring out how to live at risk: not to pretend that there is some safe haven we are all going to get to it, but how we can take risks together because we value what we can do together.

- This is about being together with humility, courage, leadership, generosity, and love. We need, as a community, to figure out how to remain humble, remain courageous, how to best lead, how to keep healthy our generosity and love.

- The phenomenon of GA - with more than 500 congregations represented, thousands of people present at one time - is extraordinary. And there is potential for things to go significantly wrong, and significantly right. Can we change our response mechanisms? When someone says 'there is something wrong here' and so they go for the procedural microphone, a sense of urgency is created. Can we lower urgency without lowering importance and offer people a response mechanism that will help them get their needs addressed but not escalate a situation?

- In doing this work together, we recognized that there were people not in the room from groups who had asked to be represented in the meeting, but we also recognized that the group gathered - these representatives - needed to discuss the issues that had occurred and try and develop some common understandings and language for unpacking other issues before more people were brought in to the conversation.

NOTE FROM GINI:

THIS CONSULTATION DID NOT DISCUSS THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE TERMS "APPROPRIATION" AND "MISAPPROPRIATION". THE TWO TERMS WERE USED INTERCHANGEABLY DURING OUR MEETING. WHEN I PRESENTED MY ORAL REPORT TO THE UUA BOARD IN OCTOBER, TAMARA PAYNE-ALEX (TRUSTEE AT LARGE) AND REV. TRACEY ROBINSON-HARRIS (DIRECTOR, CONGREGATIONAL SERVICES) BOTH INQUIRED ABOUT THE USE OF THE TERMS, AND ENCOURAGED THE TEAM TO USE MISAPPROPRIATION RATHER THAN APPROPRIATION FOR TWO REASONS:

1. OUR SOURCES CALL US TO APPROPRIATE USE OF MATERIALS FROM MANY CULTURES AND SOURCES. USING THESE MATERIALS APPROPRIATELY IS A SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE.
2. THE TERM APPROPRIATION DENIES THE DIVERSITY WITHIN UNITARIAN UNIVERSALISM. FOR EXAMPLE, WHEN WE CALL THE USE OF A SPIRITUAL IN A WORSHIP SERVICE "APPROPRIATION", WE FURTHER MARGINALIZE AFRICAN AMERICAN UUs BY DENYING THEIR PRESENCE IN THE CONGREGATION AND WITHIN UNITARIAN UNIVERSALISM.

AS MODERATOR, I HAD THE PRIVILEGE OF CALLING THE CULTURAL APPROPRIATION CONSULTATION TOGETHER, AND NAMING IT. HAD ANOTHER MEMBER OF THE TEAM

CALLED THIS CONSULTATION, THEY MAY HAVE CALLED IT THE CULTURAL MISAPPROPRIATION CONSULTATION. THIS SECOND DRAFT USES THE TERM "MISAPPROPRIATION"; PARTICIPANTS IN THE CONSULTATION ARE ASKED TO REVIEW THIS USE AND PROVIDE FEEDBACK IF THEY ARE CONCERNED.

We began to focus on a set of practices and structures for living at risk together at General Assembly, and the beginnings of a discernment process for when people begin to see that they are involved in multi-cultural engagement. We agreed that we wanted to focus on, in Gini's words, "relationships that have integrity and some grace"..

This discussion led us to focus on ideas that might help us, and on practices that would serve us.

Ideas:

- the first page of the GA program book might have a covenant in it - developed by this task force and others working with this issue - and an invitation to all attending to GA to enter into that with us, on your own..

- ...and out on a wall outside the plenary hall, there would be a very large copy of that document, and many lines for people to sign it...We acknowledge that we are trying to force the relationship of the individual in the community. We know there are still some folks who are going to be individuals who are out there, but we want to try and encourage it.

- What about a Ribbon? Tattoo? Beads? Something tangible, so that all who sign the covenant are given something to signify their commitment to this process.

More ideas followed later.

We broke into three working groups, and one developed a definition that resonated with us all:

Cultural misappropriation (also called **cultural appropriation**) is the term given to the set of injuries marked by:

- using music, reading, symbols, ritual, or iconography of a group without a willingness to engage in their struggle and/or story and connecting their struggle and/or story with our own (UU and community).
- the use of cultural practices as bait rather than as an organic part of our cultural experience
- an unwillingness to respect the community of origin or dishonoring the refusal of a community to share
- disrespect or casual engagement with a practice.
- unwillingness to share the pain caused by intentional or unintentional misuse.

We encourage people to engage with the REACH packet handouts/check lists on this subject by Jacqui James, and another prepared by Judith Frediani, both on the UUA website (<http://www.uua.org/actions/responsive/06racism/>).

Another group discussed issues of covenant and community. We recognized that there were things that could be done, pre-GA and at GA, that would help us all. These included:

Pre/Post-GA/Ongoing:

- Build bridges between UUMN, DRUUMM, ARE: common membership/recruiting; leadership in these organizations need to be in relationship with one another
- Training in introduction of songs: the UUMN's certification program includes a curriculum on song leading; this could be shared more widely. Additionally a call could be issued to UUMN membership to add material on music introductions which would be placed on the Singing The Journey website (<http://www.uua.org/publications/music/>).
- Offer AR/AO Training for UUMN: This can hopefully be offered at the UUMN Clearwater 07 annual conference for professional development training; additional segments can be offered at a plenary session and at workshops. ARE and DRUUMM members can be brought into facilitated conversations - several of the consultation participants are planning to attend the UUMN conference and will be involved with this process.
- How can we make this "all of ours"? This concept needs further development to ground the work more deeply in all our organizations.
- LUUNA: How can this organization be brought into the work we're discussing? We hope to work with Sofia Craethnenn to engage this process.
- Honoring /covenanting with music leaders in our congregations: music leaders need to have a deeply integrated relationship with other worship leaders in our congregations. Where we don't hold hands and stick together, the process fails.

Strengthening the Health of the GA Community:

- Go forward with the covenant (referenced earlier in this document) made by leadership, shared with/invite delegates to participate.
- Share this covenant at orientations, UU University, Youth/YA orientation; YRUU gatherings.
- Focus on holding the spiritual base throughout GA:
Have spirit/centering breaks, not song breaks, during plenary
Have a chalice lighting at each session to lift up the theme of gathered community
Have a chalice lighting at every workshop (battery/symbolic) to reinforce the idea that this is a gathering of the spirit (GA and all its programs)

Preparing for reactions:

- Have a conversation with YRUU about how to get concerns addressed and heard.
- Have a group of chaplains, lay and ordained, with stoles in the plenary hall so they are easily identified - announce who they are at the beginning of each plenary and where they will be stationed.
- Have additional trained people (who don't have stoles) who will be responsible to the larger community.
- Have a group of people - likely representing the groups at this consultation
- available at a table at the front of the plenary hall so that people with concerns speak with before the concerned person goes to the procedural mike.
- UUU education opportunity? We would like to contact Harlan Limpert and Terasa Cooley, asking them if there is an opportunity to have a track on how we are spiritually in community together). Janice Marie Johnson will draft and distribute.

Another group discussed our response when we fall out of right relationship.

These recommendations were made:

- There will be a process team/right relationship team: a group of folks who work together before GA and at GA to help in promoting relationship.
- A group of chaplains/crisis managers would be established with group representation from DRUUMM, ARE, maybe UUMN, maybe UMA, maybe LREDA, maybe youth, and these folks would be available throughout GA. The various caucuses would know who to go to and that the process isn't only coming from one constituency group.
- Process observations and reports at the end of plenary would be given as needed.
- There might also be reporting at the beginning of a plenary as well, to lift up conversations from the day before, and to allow this diverse community to be represented when there is a concern.
- People would be encouraged to stand in solidarity. "We do this together."
- We would work with folks - along the lines outlined by group #2 - to understand, if they raise a concern, whether it is an individual concern, or a community concern.
- Building on the suggestions of group #2, there would be chaplain teams from specific interest groups present at specific events, and they would be in relationship with other groups. Such chaplaincy teams would also have training in conflict management and good communication skills.

As the meeting moved toward a close, we agreed on the following Action Steps:

- Gini and Deb will put together an 'official' set of notes as a draft for the group to review.
- Deb will send out a set of rough notes.
- We need to train people in major worship and plenary leadership positions, and this informed our opinion that this group might want to meet again between now and GA. (Context might be around trainings). We probably won't have a date for a month. This group would probably include leaders for SLT, Sunday Service, Sarah Dan Jones, Worship Leaders. Bill and Barbara Hamilton-Holway, Josh Pawelek, Leon Burke, Jan Carlsson-Bull (CSW). We believe that the Planning Committee will back this request.
- We will request attendance from our groups at DRUUMM/ARE meeting in Minneapolis, Nov. 10-11. *(NB: Gini and Jason, following this meeting's adjournment, agreed to facilitate a workshop on these issues at the ARE conference).*
- We will request attendance from our groups at UUMN conference in Clearwater, FL, July 31-Aug. 5 *(Manish, Janice, and Gini have committed to be there).*

We came up with these understandings and ideas/suggestions for preparation of presenters at GA:

- No energy breaks - spirit breaks instead
- To provide flexibility, name of song should not listed in the printed agenda.
- Lots of songs, rights cleared, already in PowerPoint for use (like, 40 of them, ready to go) with selection flexible depending on what's going on
- Every song gets a context before it's sung
- Every piece of music gets grounded in the context of the larger event: this isn't just the function of the musician. It's a community function - responsibility of the liturgical team
- GA services: Here's how guidelines should be prepared, and there needs to be some kind of a covenant for service leaders. It will be essential that we have the presence during our next meeting of all GA worship participants (we need to be able to respond with a ministry to the assembled congregation). *(NB: This meeting will be held in Portland, Oregon on April 9-11).*
- Two months out or more: we need to hold a pre-GA training/orientation/anti-racism/anti-oppression consultation for worship leaders. *(NB: This consultation will be held in Portland, Oregon on April 11-12, 2007.* The following have been or will be invited to attend:
 - o - Pre-plenary workshops - Three total - two invited by Planning Committee, one by CSW - 3 speakers, 3 musicians (total: 6)
 - o - Youth worship - 1 person identified by Youth Office and Planning Committee liaison Tim Murphy (total: 2)
 - o - Service of the Living Tradition: Beth Miller, Bill or Barbara Hamilton-Holway, SoLT choir director (total: 3)
 - o - Sunday service - Josh Pawelek, Mark Slegers (total:2)
 - o - GA Music Coordinator Sarah Dan Jones
 - o - GA Choir Director Leon Burke

Music was part of our meeting. During our time together, we sang the following songs together (all from "Singing the Journey"):

Standing on the Side of Love

We Begin Again in Love

Morning Has Come

When I am Frightened

Meditation on Breathing

Oh We Give Thanks

Szekely Aldas

Ubi Caritas

How Could Anyone (at the beginning and ending of our meeting)

Blue Boat Home

Woyaya

There were phrases that came up that meant a lot to us. They included these:

"The grass is always greener but it's just as hard to mow."

"Just 'cuz the kittens are born in the oven doesn't make them biscuits"

"If there is no trust between us, why should I bother to bleed?"

"What can I put a higher premium on than my safety?"