

International Unitarian/Universalist and Free Church Collaboration

A New Vision

from

International Council of Unitarians & Universalists

AND

Unitarian Universalist Partner Church Council

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Letter of Introduction

Dear UUPCC and ICUU members and supporters,

Over the past six months, the International Unitarian/Universalist Collaboration Group, made up of representatives of the International Council of Unitarians and Universalists (ICUU) and the Unitarian Universalist Partner Church Council (UUPCC), has been meeting to explore whether and how our organizations might evolve into a more collaborative way of working and a more sustainable institutional structure for our organizations. During this time, the team has explored and assessed the historic work and current efforts of both organisations, seeking to measure our collective impact according to our missions and visions. The unprecedented global crises have only hastened already existing realities and made our endeavors toward greater collaboration more timely and necessary.

We propose the establishment of a new single organisation that would more effectively take forward the shared values of ICUU and UUPCC in its work.

Mindful of, and encouraged by, all those who have faithfully worked to bring us to this moment, while embracing the new realities breaking in all around us, realities in which diverse settings and expectations are increasingly the norm;

We covenanted in friendship, commitment, and accountability with each other and the groups we represent to imagine a new community of U/U internationalism built on a foundation of respect, equality, openness, trust, and partnership;

We entered into this process with a willingness to question assumptions and to be open to new practices, beginning with the premise in all our work that the values of U/U are at the core of who we are;

We are held together in faithful discernment, centered in the aspirations of our organizations.

In this spirit, we share with you our report with a proposal for change. In it you will find an articulation of the values we hope to carry into this new beginning.

We hope you will read this report with hope and curiosity.

There is background information, details on the process of the International Collaboration Group, available in this report.

In Faith,

International U/U Collaboration Group Co-Conveners

Morgan McLean, UUPCC Board Chair [morganmclean@gmail.com]

Derek McAuley, ICUU Vice President [dmcauley123@gmail.com]

1. The Proposal

What We Propose

We concluded, following extensive conversation and consideration of options, that the future of U/U international collaboration pointed toward the creation of a new organisation that would more effectively embody our shared values in its work.

Each organization is aware that in creating something new, we will need to bring forward those aspects of our separate organizations that have been our foundations for decades, while letting go of that which does not align with the new vision. This transformation will not be easy and will include more complicated decisions as we progress, however both organisations believe this to be an exciting and viable way forward to ensure our efforts in serving the U/U and Free Church global faith communities. We believe that while there will be fundamental changes to our organizations, we have been given an opportunity to imagine a future that addresses the transitions our world is beginning to witness.

The new organization would seek to deliver on the new vision we identify in more detail later in this report. This process would ultimately result in the current organisations legally dissolving themselves, in accordance with their governing documents.

Values Behind the Proposal

It is the Groups' assertion that U/U international collaboration needs to be based on shared values. The Group identified core shared values that we believe speak to our time and should underpin what we will do going forward:

Shared Values

- Radical hospitality and welcome
- The importance of community and a sense of belonging
- Transcendence—meaning that we are called into a larger sense of ourselves
- A commitment to learn and to act in ways that build a better world in the here and now
- Honesty as we navigate theological and political differences as well as uneven power dynamics across the U/U world

Shared Vision

The Group concluded that this work should be grounded in the aspirational visions of both organizations. In particular, the visions that shaped the origins as well as the work of the ICUU and the UUPCC over the past twenty plus years:

- Mutual relationship
- Connecting and networking across the global Unitarian/Universalist and Free Church community
- Sharing practices and learnings across the global U/U community

We envision these same visions guiding a more collaborative future.

2. The Issues at Hand

Why a New Way

The values discussion brought many underlying issues to the surface. The Group wondered how far the current structures of international U/U collaboration enable, or indeed impede, putting these values into practice. We want to be clear: Creating a new organisation is not simply about replacing the current organizations, but about transcending them and allowing them to evolve into something better prepared to sustainably meet the needs and hopes of our global faith communities—not only today, but into tomorrow. This new organization will aim to embrace the best practices and aspirations of our current organizations and to take on innovative opportunities in inspiring ways, striving for greater impact and effectiveness.

Challenges of the status quo

In thinking about our current reality, we concluded that maintaining the status quo offers the following obstacles:

- The structure of two separate bodies reflect decisions made in the past that were right for the time but that are no longer as effective.
- There is duplication and overlap in what the two organisations do.
- Both organizations face issues of financial sustainability, with core spending not being met by income.
- The Covid-19 pandemic and climate change are testing both organizations' models of working.

Opportunities for something more

There is a desire for more global collaboration based on mutual support and solidarity and the new organization will aim to:

- Expand congregational partnership across more countries with active support of national bodies
- Improve our capacity to deliver development and growth
- Strengthen financial sustainability
- Use digital tools to deliver services in new and innovative ways

3. A New Vision

The Proposal for Change

The Process

In considering what this new organisation could look like and what it might accomplish, we held a facilitated workshop over two sessions and worked to address the following question:

The Question

What do we want to see in place in 5 years' time as a result of delivering a more sustainable, impactful, and effective international U/U organization to serve the global community, in line with our jointly identified shared values?

The Result

The following are the foundational elements making up the core vision we crafted in answer to that question and forming the basis for the Proposal for Change. Much of this new vision will require further effort to transform ideas into actions, hopes into new models, and dreams into reality. This is the shared vision we affirmed:

1. A community with a shared faith identity and diverse theologies
2. Culturally adaptive education and training programmes
3. Diverse, decentralized, and accountable governance and leadership structure
4. Opportunities for global engagement and inclusion
5. Strong and mutual partnerships
6. A forum for developing a global and collective voice on justice issues
7. Equitable and sustainable finances
8. A celebration of belonging to our global community

The Mission

Three common areas of focus emerged that build upon current needs identified by both organizations as well as anticipating future needs:

1. Broaden the meaning of partnership
2. Train lay and professional leaders
3. Support and empower existing and emerging groups

The Recommendations for Change

The Group made the following recommendations to the governing boards of both organizations and were accepted at their respective monthly meetings in August 2020.

- To consider and accept this report
- To agree that future partnership and relationships be based on the values as articulated in this report and to recognize the need for mutually respectful and culturally inclusive global faith community collaboration
- To create and implement a process for presenting the conclusions and recommendations of this report to their members, stakeholders, funders, and others with similar objectives, and to seek an “in principle” approval of the changes proposed through their respective decision-making structures by the end of 2020
- To put in place the necessary steps to implement the proposed changes, which are to be completed by 30 June 2021

4. Changes and Hope

Thoughts to Remember

This report was completed with a spirit of aspiration toward deepening our commitments to you and to the faiths we hold so dearly, with a heartfelt wish to live into the theology and vision we profess;

The steps reflected in this report are only the initial steps that, when continued, will reveal new opportunities to engage in self-study, learning, and transformation;

Learning from our recent history, together we can keep pace with the expectations of new generations and of living our values throughout our wider communities, bringing the best of each to the other;

We are reminded: Meaningful change is hard; and we have an opportunity to transition from what we are into what we need to be.

We thank you for having faith in our efforts. We are prepared to continue this journey with you.

Appendix

Background

Membership of the International U/U Collaboration Group

International Council of Unitarians and Universalists (ICUU):

Shelley Adams

Rev. Sara Ascher

Derek McAuley (Co-chair)

Unitarian Universalist Partner Church Council (UUPCC):

Rev. Roger Bertschausen (until 31 July 2020)

Rev. John Gibbons

Rev. Morgan McLean (co-chair)

Rev. Fred Muir (from 28 May 2020)

Unitarian Universalist Association International Office:

Rev. Alicia R. Forde

Robert Kipp (Administrative support)

ICUU Background

The ICUU Council meeting on 8 November 2019 accepted the proposal of the Executive Committee (EC) that recommendations for the long-term financial sustainability of the organisation be prepared and presented to the in-person Council meeting in Montreal in October 2020. The process and subsequent large group engagement at the Council meeting in the Netherlands reaffirmed the twenty-year-old vision for the ICUU:

“The mission of the ICUU is to empower existing and emerging member groups to sustain and grow our global faith community.”

Using this renewed mission, the Executive Committee began discussing new possibilities in December 2019, including examining ICUU's impact, exploring more culturally inclusive programming, and working with greater mutual respect.

UUPCC Background

The UUPCC Board of Directors has been evaluating its mission and considering its long-term financial sustainability of the organization since 2016.

In October 2016, a sub-team of the UUPCC Board was tasked with monitoring the financial health of the organization while looking at long-term issues including fundraising, sustainability, and endowment.

In October 2018, an additional sub-team of the UUPCC board was formed to evaluate the vision and mission of the organization. The process reaffirmed the mission as revised in 2010:

“The mission of the Unitarian Universalist Partner Church Council is to foster and support partner relationships between UU congregations and individuals in the United States and Canada with Unitarian and Unitarian

Universalist congregations, orphanages, schools, and students in all other countries where partnering is sought and welcomed. These will be mutually beneficial, responsibly sustained, and linked by joint and mutual covenants.”

The UUPCC Board and staff also began new ways of engaging in partnership beyond the congregation-based model.

Process

The Group Task

As part of the exploration of what the future might mean, the ICUU and the UUPCC reached out to each other. They shared each organisation's vision and mission with one another, spoke about the challenges that each organization faces, and considered possible ways they might imagine international U/U relationships in new and different ways.

In recognition of the unique relationship each organization has with the Unitarian Universalist Association, we started our exploration there. The UUA's International Office has been a collaborative partner with the ICUU and UUPCC in the Joint Working Group that was reformed in 2016, comprised of the Executive Directors of the ICUU and UUPCC and the Director of the UUA International office. The UUA remains committed to its partnership with each organization and to their emerging futures. This commitment extends to supporting the legal and financial implications of creating a new future organisation. Each organization receives approximately \$60,000 annually from the Holdeen Trust administered by the UUA.

On 27 March 2020 representatives and staff of the ICUU and UUPCC met with UUA President Rev. Susan Frederick-Gray, UUA International Office Director Rev. Alicia Forde, and UUA Executive Vice President Carey McDonald to explore the potential for greater collaboration on international work. Inga Brandes of the ICUU Executive Council and Anne Greenwood of the UUPCC Board were part of these conversations. It was clear the UUA is committed to international work through the Holdeen Trust and is committed to dismantling a culture of white supremacy and ethnonationalism.

The task identified by this meeting, in consultation with the respective governing bodies of the ICUU and UUPCC, was to create a structure for new U/U International collaboration. It was agreed that Alicia Forde would continue to be part of this process in her role as Director of the UUA's International Office.

Process of the Group

The first meeting of the International U/U Collaboration Group took place on 14 April 2020 and then met on a fortnightly basis. Reports were submitted to the regular meetings of the governing bodies of the UUPCC and the ICUU. The Group worked to clarify its task and to openly explore the opportunities and challenges both organisations faced. Information on similar faith-based international organisations was reviewed. A facilitated process enabled exploration of our vision for a new future.

The developing Covid-19 pandemic cast a cloud over our work while reinforcing the need for change; the status quo is not a viable option. The world is changing and so must we if our efforts to build a thriving global U/U and Free Church community are to survive and prosper.

Next Steps in Process

We recognise that the way this proposal progresses is ultimately a matter for the formal decision-making structures of both organizations. We are committed to assisting in whatever process is decided and to offering up the learnings

that we have shared in our journey together. Fully realizing the recommendations will be a major task and will require involvement of the members and supporters across both existing bodies.

Given the level of commitment and effort this work has required, following approval of this proposal, if any volunteer members of the IU/UC Group need to take a step back from participation in the Group, we would ask the respective governing bodies to put another forward into their place.

The next steps of the Group will be to set up the new organization across the range of governance and operational activities and to plan the transition. The continued work of this group will widen the circle, as needed, to assist in addressing the critical pieces of implementation of this proposal. These additional people would likely include—but are not limited to—facilitators, consultants, and experts in transitional work of nonprofit organizations. A grant has already been received from the UU Funding Panel to support external professional advisers.

In Gratitude

We would thank everyone who has contributed to the work of the Group—especially Roger Bertschausen, who left the Group as Executive Director of the UUPCC in July. We have been encouraged by the support of UUA President Rev. Susan Frederick-Gray and UUA Executive Vice President Carey McDonald, who share our vision of a new way forward. We would also thank the UU Funding Panel for their financial support to date, through the generous award of a grant to move us forward in this work. Responsibility for this report, however, lies with the Group.