

## GA: “Powerful, Inspirational”

By Jeff Lott

When I got on a plane June 20 to head for the 2010 Unitarian Universalist Association General Assembly (GA), I had no idea that I would spend my summer reading books about progressive religion and theology. But as August wanes and I write this report on my experience of GA, that’s what I’ve been doing. Ask me what I’ve been reading.

“GA messes with your mind,” said the late [Katie Tyson](#) of Arlington, Va., a rising young leader in Unitarian Universalism who was killed in an auto accident while returning from the 2009 GA in Salt Lake City. I heard Katie’s story during a memorial celebration at this year’s GA and I could not help but agree with her. Katie, who had just finished her freshman year at Boston University when she died, was in the process of telling her family that her long-held plan to become a UU minister might have to be accelerated—so powerful had been her experience at last year’s General Assembly.

Katie was right about GA messing with your mind. “Powerful” and “inspirational” were the first two words I wrote in my notebook, describing my first GA as I flew home from Minneapolis. In more than 20 years as a Unitarian Universalist, I’d never been to our national assembly. Why had I not attended GA before? I’m not sure, but at least now I know what I’ve been missing.

Some of the other words I wrote on the plane that night were: “musical, relational, political, energetic, friendly, religious, complex, democratic, funny, spiritual, young, old, voluntary, holy.” Yes, holy. We don’t get much of the holy in our lives these days, but singing [Carolyn McDade’s “Spirit of Life”](#) in a darkened hall with more than 3,000 other UUs put a holy lump in my throat—especially after four days of intense thought about what our movement is truly about.

Yes, movement I went to Minneapolis knowing that I am a member of our church and of a denomination, but attending GA helped me realize that I am—or at least can be—more than a churchgoer, more than a board member, and more than an everyday UU. I am—and you are too—part of a liberal religious movement that has the power to heal the world.

How? By standing on the side of love, as we did in Minneapolis when the GA suspended usual business for a couple hours so that we could march en masse to join in an [interfaith rally](#) for same-sex marriage at the Minneapolis Pride Festival—the third largest annual GLBT rally in the country. Our yellow Standing on the Side of Love shirts and signs brought home to everyone how powerful we can be when we stand together with others of like mind, living our faith in the world. With us that afternoon were members of local Lutheran, Methodist, and United Church of Christ congregations and their ministers.

If you've never been, General Assembly is an intense five-day combination of speeches, workshops, worship, music, lectures, and institutional politics. Some seem to attend for the singing, others for the thinking and learning, still others to participate in the remarkable democratic process that is so emblematic of our denomination.

Passionate debates ranged from the acceptance of a [statement of conscience](#) on peacemaking to the adoption of a new [study/action topic](#) on immigration to the tricky question of whether to hold the 2012 GA in Phoenix, Arizona. In addition, there were remarkable discussions and votes on proposed [Actions of Immediate Witness](#).

As GA began, there appeared to be a serious rift over whether to meet as planned in Arizona in 2012. The passage of SB 1070 there this spring—understood by most UUs as a highly discriminatory law that conflicts with our principle of the inherent worth and dignity of every person—caused the UUA Board of Trustees this spring to recommend a boycott of Phoenix. Yet President Peter Morales proposed an alternative plan to go to Phoenix and bear witness against the law—ton engage with the issue in the state and with the congregations and people most affected by 1070.

As a voting delegate from First Unitarian, I felt the burden of representing our congregation on this question, yet I also found myself consulting my own conscience. It looked like two competing resolutions would be brought to the assembly, but before a divisive debate could potentially split the denomination—and the board of trustees and our president—a compromise resolution was hammered out in the “mini-assembly” on this issue. It was brought to the floor on Saturday afternoon, after we all got back from bearing witness to our commitment to universal love at the Pride Festival.

Moderator Gini Courter did a magnificent job of preparing the assembly for the debate on the [compromise resolution](#). Several speakers framed the issue in terms of our commitment to nonviolence, inclusion, and being a presence in communities that are suffering. We sang, we prayed, and we thought deeply about our principles before we engaged this issue in a magnificent parliamentary debate and vote. In the end, we decided to go to Phoenix, committed to a “justice GA” that will model and demonstrate our values. I voted my conscience on this one and I plan to be there in 2012 to carry out the wishes of our church, our denomination, and our movement. Will you join me?

*For more on the 2010 General Assembly, including a photo gallery, videos, a UU World blog, and synopses of many sessions, go to*

<http://www.uua.org/events/generalassembly/2010/index.shtml>