

Safe Practices during Difficult Dialogues at GA

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The 2024 UUA General Assembly (GA) navigated several significant decisions at the Business meetings. GA 2024 was totally online and put into practice lessons learned from previous virtual and hybrid assemblies. The team responsible for planning and implementing GA demonstrated that they are part of a collaborative learning organization, willing to acknowledge mistakes and accept feedback. There were marked improvements in 2024 as compared to the 2023 hybrid assembly, and the Co-Moderators promised continuous improvement based on delegate feedback.

The team of UUA Board members serving as session moderators (aka “the mod squad”), all volunteers, did an impressive job supporting civil discourse amid strong and divergent viewpoints. Each session opened with a reminder of ground rules and guidelines for self-regulation. Session moderators stated the specific expectations for debate and adhered to them. There were breaks built into the schedule - remember we were all sitting in front of computer screens for hours at a time! - as well as a few unplanned breaks to cool the rhetoric. Process observers made suggestions and comments; erroneous information was identified and corrected. Chaplains and affinity groups were available for processing and discussion.

The 2024 GA exemplified the reality that a group of UUs can actively disagree and that the process can be messy and sometimes hurtful. Our elected denominational leaders are committed, passionate people who care deeply about the future of our UU faith, its member congregations, and each one of us. We know that UUs don't always agree on every point,

nor should we! But we can learn how to disagree in ways that don't cause harm.

Safe practices for having difficult conversations include:

- establish ground rules and covenantal agreements;
- utilize process observers;
- interrupt harmful speech;
- institute calming breaks;
- acknowledge mistakes promptly;
- provide the opportunity to reflect on what has occurred in safety and with support.

As PUUC members we will be discussing a variety of important priorities over the next few years. I hope we remember to listen as well as speak, attend to the emotional impact of our words, build relationships even when we disagree, and keep our larger goals in mind. I hope we can weave a stronger spiritual community that truly demonstrates the core value of LOVE, which is central to our faith. Certainly our UUA leadership modeled all of this during the 2024 GA. If they can succeed with over 2000 delegates, we can too!