

My GA 2020 Experience: Betsy Dalton

When I joined UUCSC in 2012, I had never heard of the General Assembly and knew nothing about it, or why it was important. It wasn't until I served as a Board member, and then UUCSC Board President, that I began to understand why so many UUs looked forward to this gathering every year. As Board President, I felt I had an obligation to take part in this national/international UU gathering, even though I still really did not comprehend what it was all about. That was when the GA was taking place in Providence the last time. While, due to prior obligations, I was only able to go for 2 days, I was truly impressed and moved by the events I was able to take part in. Fast forward to 2020...

This year we all had hoped to enjoy the return of GA to Providence, however due to COVID-19 this was not to be. Instead, the GA Committee made the wise decision (at least in my view) to move the GA into the virtual world. It was certainly a "heavy lift" to do this in a matter of a few short months, but from my perspective, the results were amazing. True – we all deeply missed being with each other in person, meeting new UUs from around the country and the world, and closely experiencing GA, but in our new reality (at least for the reasonable future), virtual meetings are what we can continue to expect. I chose to volunteer to provide tech support and was selected to do editing of written transcripts for the various sessions. I learned a lot by doing this – working with a new program called Otter.ai that automatically produces words from the voices of virtual ZOOM presentations or any other voiced presentation. It's a great service, but it's not perfect, as it can often misinterpret what has been said and put up words that make no sense at all. This is why a "human touch" is needed to make the transcripts understandable. The UUA chose to use this program for accessibility reasons, so that folks who have difficulty either hearing or understanding the spoken presentations would be able to read them. This program may be something that we want to explore for UUCSC in the future.

As I edited these transcripts (by watching the generated text on the screen and listening to the presentation simultaneously) I was brought in touch with each presenter's message in great depth, which allowed me to benefit greatly from the content. Overall, I really enjoyed being a GA volunteer (even while I was recuperating from another hip replacement – yup, another one!), and I plan to

put my name in again to volunteer next year. There is so much to learn at GA, and for me, the virtual experience really worked.