



Unitarian Universalist Women's Federation

**News
Jan 2022**

**Eat Your
Vegetables**



Topics like governance often feel like the “eat your vegetables” component of social change. With so much happening in the world, why would we spend our time thinking about our internal workings and processes? Isn’t that just navel-gazing?

Actually, how an organization conducts itself *inside* significantly shapes how they do their work *outside*. Far from navel-gazing, giving thought to how your organization handles power and decision-making is an opportunity to make sure your work is in line with your values.

As UUWF builds our work to be more inclusive, more robust, and more dynamic, we’re also thinking about how we share power, make decisions, and act as stewards of our financial resources. We’re seeing this as a learning opportunity. We want to imagine a way of doing business that values consensus and action; establishes mutual accountability; is flexible enough to be durable; and disrupts patriarchal norms.

If you’re interested in learning with us, here are a few places to start:

The Story of Jane: This [book](#) chronicles the development of an underground abortion service in Chicago. Author Laura

Ann Wiesner is the UUWF's interim executive director.

Kaplan takes a fascinating look at an amazing network of women helping women and the challenges they encountered in terms of governance and power.

Nonprofit AF: The [blog](#) of Vu Le on all things nonprofit. Funny, provocative, and wide-reaching, you can narrow your reading by using the Topics tab or conducting a simple search.

Seeds for Change: Check out the [Consensus category](#) under their Resources tab.

We the People: Consenting to a Deeper Democracy: Authors John Buck and Sharon Villines take a [deep dive](#) into sociocracy principles and practices.

We'll keep you posted as we learn, and we hope you will too!

Bye-Bye Bobby

By Ann Wiesner

UUWF Interim Executive Director

It's time to wish Robert and his Rules a fond but firm farewell.

In 1876, U.S. Army Brigadier General Henry Martyn Robert developed Robert's Rules of Order as a process for conducting meetings and making decisions, and we've been using them ever since. What qualifies an Army Brigadier General who was alive in 1876 to determine how we conduct business together today? *NOTHING*.

I guess you could say that Robert's Rules gives a meeting a reliable structure—a way to keep meetings and meeting participants on track. But I'd say that Robert's Rules are designed to deter input, silence dissent, intimidate real people who have a stake in the meeting's outcome, signal who holds the most power in the room, and establish a division between insiders and outsiders.

If you Google Robert's Rules of Order, you will find pages and pages of links to quick start guides, cheat sheets, summaries "in plain English," charts and diagrams, spreadsheets, illustrations, and lots of pictures of a gavel. But a meeting process that is this complicated isn't a process at all—it's a scare tactic and a method of tight control and gatekeeping. Not to mention, it's guaranteed to make the meeting dull.

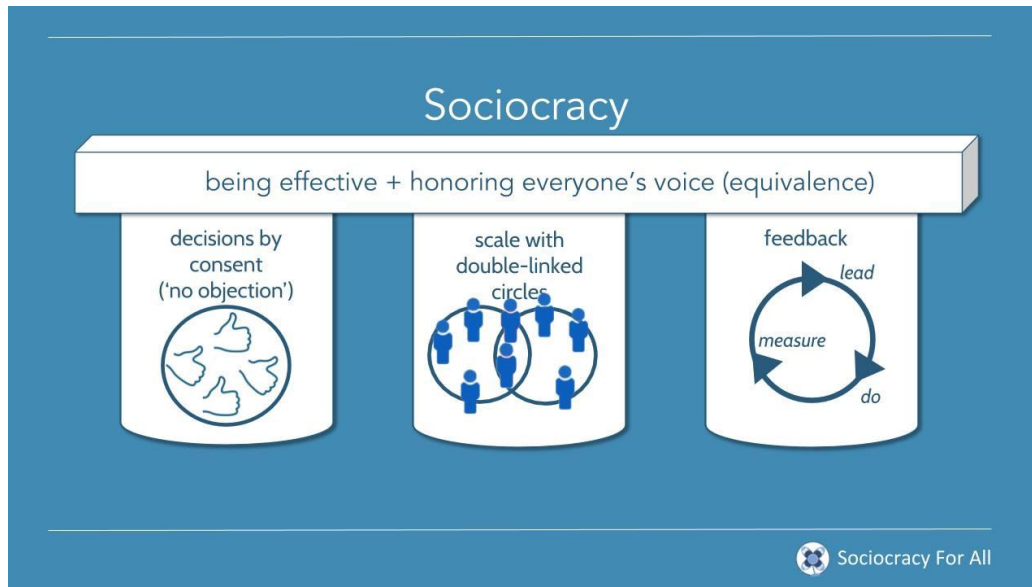
How many times have you felt embarrassed that you don't know the correct way to ask a question, make a point, or offer an idea in a meeting that follows Robert's Rules? Robert's Rules are antiquated, convoluted, and confusing. They also discourage participation from the folks who matter most—those whom the organization is supposed to serve. Many public meetings use Robert's Rules to limit public comment—my own school board limits comments to three minutes, and they tell this to each person who wishes to speak. To my knowledge, the time limitation is not directly advised in Robert's Rules, but its framework and norms make it easy to put in place, and enable those with power to stifle input from the people who elected them.

I say we move on from Robert and his Rules and make some *People's Rules*. There are plenty of ways to facilitate a meeting and get to decisions without all this gibberish. Governance, whether of a city, school district, nonprofit, or neighborhood association should be something that is easy to follow and understand (transparency), welcoming to people wanting to weigh in (constituent-focused), and clear about how decisions are made (accountability). The models that worked in the past, when the people who held the gavel were typically white men over the age of 55, aren't useful in a world being led by the New Majority—young black and brown people who are often women or nonbinary folks. They only make us less accessible, less equitable, and less effective.

Robert, you can sit down now. We'll take it from here.

Want to learn more about breaking the rules, cultivating new ways of thinking, or embracing new ways of working and leading? Here are some resources:

- [When breaking the rules is the smart thing to do](#)
- [What are you willing to give up to change the way we work?](#)
- [How to break bad management habits before they reach the next generation of leaders](#)
- [Three tips for leaders to get the future of work right](#)



Sociocracy: An alternative to hierarchy

By Rev. Nancy Reid-McKee

UUWF Vice President for Funding Programs

As part of my personal commitment toward dismantling unjust, unfair systems of oppression, I have learned the importance of listening to the challenges that people present to me. A large part of this entails questioning assumptions and norms that feel obvious to me because of my upbringing and identity.

The past few years as I have been part of the UU Women's Federation have offered me repeated opportunities to embrace some of these types of fundamental challenges. For instance, with a new understanding of gender expansion, how does a women's organization identify who it serves? And how do those of us who have been molded and enlightened by the feminist movement of the 1960s and 70s come to know how our history and empowerment have singled out white women's liberation without adequate regard to all women?

Some of my basic ways of being in the world have been shown to be inadequate assumptions of normal, best practices. Recently, this type of fundamental questioning has come up in regard to how we work together.

A huge part of working in any organization is learning how decisions are made and how leadership is structured. Churches and institutions are often guided by organizational charts that show a hierarchical structure determining who has power and authority. But just because this feels normal and logical, is it actually the best format for decision making, or is it simply familiar? I have become more uneasy with hierarchy, and wonder if the type of organizational decision making we use perpetuates inequity.

There are other governance systems that may offer non-hierarchical decision-making processes. Sociocracy is one of these. Sociocracy uses consent as a way for all voices in a group to be heard and promotes equity in decision making, which is different from equality or consensus. Instead of an organizational chart that shows lines of authority, sociocracy shows circles that include decision makers, along with sub-circles that assist in particular projects or decisions. It allows for discussion, input, and problem solving in a way not found in majority rule or consensus building.

I am not sure yet how this might work, but one of the 'rules' in sociocracy is that even if something isn't perfect, it may be good enough to try. If we are going to try to challenge ourselves in how we interact with each other and the world (and I believe it is imperative that we do), then I am willing to try a way to make decisions that creates more equity.

Right now, the UUWF is changing their mission, vision, structure, and understandings of how we are co-conspirators for justice. It is an incredible opportunity for others who want to be part of re-thinking how we do the work of loving each other into wholeness. Join us.

Congratulations to the Newest Marjorie Bowens-Wheatley Scholarship Recipients

The Marjorie Bowens-Wheatley Scholarship Fund provides direct financial support to aspirants or candidates to the Unitarian Universalist ministry, or candidates in the UUA's religious education or music leadership programs, who identify as BIPOC women. This

scholarship, established in 2009, recognizes the work of Rev. Bowens-Wheatly, a well-loved minister and mentor who worked tirelessly to raise awareness of the need for more interracial, and intercultural congregations in our UU movement.

We're delighted to introduce you to our newest recipients. To learn more about the program, or to apply for our next round of funding, [visit our website](#).



Beyssa Buil was born and raised in Miami, FL by two wonderful parents that emigrated from Cuba. At an early age, she began to observe how oppression manifested, with her father being racialized while her white mother was not. This led her to immerse herself in learning about abolitionists and social activists. She then began to participate in organizing, demonstrations and advocacy work.

Beyssa graduated with a Master's of Divinity from Meadville Lombard Theological School. She was inducted into Phi Beta Kappa, the oldest Honor's Society, and Theta Alpha Kappa, the National Honor Society for Religious Studies and Theology.

Beyssa is an endorsed Humanist Associate Chaplain, Spiritual Director, Social Activist, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Educator providing community care, chaplaincy support, and education working with individuals and organizations.

She serves on the Board of Trustees for the Unitarian Universalist for Social Justice and works with the Multiple Sclerosis Foundation supporting caregivers and individuals newly diagnosed with MS—utilizing her experience as a person living with MS to support others in their healing journey.

Currently she is completing her Buddhist Ecclesiastical Endorsement studying under Roshi Joan Halifax. Beyssa is a lifelong fighter of systems of oppression since she believes in the words of Alice Walker, "Activism is my rent for living on the planet."

Angeline Jackson is an LGBTQ human rights activist, HIV/AIDS educator, and the former Executive Director of Quality of Citizenship Jamaica. She holds a Bachelor of Arts in Management from Antioch University and a Master in Business Administration from National University (formerly John F. Kennedy University). In 2015, President Barack Obama recognized Angeline as one of Jamaica's remarkable young leaders at the Town Hall for Youth in Kingston Jamaica.



Angeline became involved in human rights activism in 2006 and has since become an out lesbian activist standing up for visibility, working with noted attorney and human rights activist Maurice Tomlinson and others in Jamaica and the US. She is a 2014 graduate of the International Emerging Leaders program at the Los Angeles LGBT Center. In the same year, she received the Hero Award from Saint Paul's Foundation for International Reconciliation for her work on LGBTQ rights in Jamaica, the 2016 Troy Perry Medal of Pride award, and the Florida Youth Pride Coalition Icon Award in 2017.

Angeline is a second-year seminarian at Meadville Lombard Theological School where she is studying for a Master in Divinity as the Christianson Family Scholar. She serves as co-president on the school's Student Advisory Council and serves Neighborhood Unitarian Universalist Church in Pasadena, Los Angeles, CA, as their Ministerial Intern. Angeline is an upcoming author (*Funny Gyal: My Fight Against Homophobia in Jamaica*) and continues her LGBTQ work through a small church ministry (Communities of Restoration) and as an expert witness on asylum cases for LGBTQ Jamaicans.



Karen Olaoya (she/her) is a lifelong UU and Georgia native who started her journey in the UU community as a nursery caregiver, then moved on to other positions as Director of Religious Education and Congregational Administrator. She holds a Bachelors of Arts in Art and Sociology from Mercer University, Masters in Nonprofit Leadership and Management from Arizona State University and is an MDiv student at Starr King School for the Ministry with a focus on Chaplaincy for her future work as a death & grief doula. She also serves on the Board of Trustees for the Unitarian Universalist Association. JeKaren lives in Winter Park, FL with her schnauzer mix, Maysee Moon.

Ebony Peace is a spiritual entrepreneur with two ministries: Sunstone Chapel and Innovative Spirit. She is a lifelong UU from Silver Spring, Maryland.

She holds a B.A. in Sociology (Law & Society minor) from Sweet Briar College and a M.S. in Strategic Human Resources and Organization Development from Johns Hopkins University's Carey Business School. She will graduate from Meadville Lombard Theological School with a Master of Arts in Leadership Studies (MALS) in Summer 2022. She is currently completing an internship at All Souls Unitarian in Washington DC as part of her seminary studies where she is focusing on adult spiritual development, social justice, and worship arts.

She has a professional background as an applied sociologist practicing in human resources, coaching, and facilitation. Ebony is a former adjunct instructor who taught 20 different college and graduate courses for over 5 years in Business and General Education.

In her spare time, she enjoys writing poetry and stories. Ebony's "Blessing of the Emotional Support Animals" was published by Skinner House Books in the 2021 inSpirit anthology edited by Meg Riley. Her poem, "Lynching Version



2.0" was published by Skinner House Books in *BLUU Notes: An Anthology of Love, Justice, and Liberation* edited by Rev. Mykal Slack and Takiyah Nur Amin.



QuianaDena Perkins is a first-year seminarian at Starr King School for the Ministry. She also serves the UU-Ann Arbor as the Coordinator of Congregational Life. She is the mother of two teens. In her free time, she loves nature photography and creative writing.

Vanessa Williams is completing her final year as a Master of Divinity student at Meadville Lombard Theological School. She is intern minister for the three-church collaborative of Maine (Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Castine; Unitarian Universalist Church of Ellsworth; and Unitarian Universalist Church of Belfast) for the 2021-22 year.

Vanessa was born in Clarion, PA, and raised outside of Boston, MA. She is a biracial, first generation, African American woman who identifies as disabled, living with multiple sclerosis. She has a BA from Smith College, majoring in Sociology and Philosophy, and a MS from Wheelock College in Organizational Leadership in Higher Education.

She currently lives in Downeast Maine with her significant other, James Williams Jr., and their 7-year-old daughter Amelie. Vanessa focuses her energies on her family, ministry, and social justice work; she is a leader of a local activist group Black Spirit 4 Life, which works to uplift black joy and promote social justice in the community and broader world.



A 30-Year Friendship



by Joyce Holmen

I've been thinking of my friend Ellen Spencer. She and I met at the UUWF Biennial in Vancouver, BC, when we were the "Representative Young Women." It was 1982 and I was 31. We laughed over that designation, reveled in the large circles of amazing women around the room whom we looked up to, and became friends.

We shared our love of feminism and of being administrators—she for the UUWF for many years, me for my congregation, the UU Community Church of Santa Monica, for a decade. We'd be in touch occasionally, and have a long visit in person whenever I could make it to a Biennial and GA. Our last visit was at GA in Louisville, and we toyed with the idea of my joining her for a trip to Europe.

[Editor's note, former UUWF Executive Administrator Ellen Spencer passed away in January, 2021.]

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Unitarian Universalist Women's Federation

advancing justice for women and girls and promoting their spiritual growth

www.uuwf.org

Contact us: uuwf@uuwf.org