

REPORT - COMMITTEE ON MALE MEMBERSHIP

March 18, 2015

Background

At its second Annual Meeting in Calgary in 2013, the question of accepting membership applications from men was raised, and a committee struck to consider this possibility and to put forward its recommendations.

The Committee examined the following categories for men as members.

- 1) **Friend** of the CUUWA – with the right to attend meetings as an observer, but without the right to participate or vote unless the Chair and those in attendance agreed;
- 2) **Associate** members - having possibly signed a statement of support for the principles, but with limited right to participate in discussions, and no right to vote or belong to committees; and
- 3) Refusal to accept men as friend or associate, or as attendees at meetings.

DISCUSSION OF THESE ALTERNATIVES:

“FRIEND”: No doubt there are many male Unitarians and Universalists who have serious interest in women’s equality, and who desire to work with us toward its achievement. CUUWA does not need to entertain membership from men in order to hear from them in meetings. Many of our congregations have “Friend” as a category of participation in the congregational life, and this category does not appear in the congregational by-laws. Men wishing to show support could be welcomed as Friends and be able to attend and listen to the proceedings. However, we recommend some controls on this participation. This change would also not require a By-law amendment.

“ASSOCIATE”: If a category of Associate members is created that includes men, male candidates would, under the current by-law (see below) have to pay an annual fee, and would be entitled to vote at a meeting. Associate membership could also be time-limited, say for a year, as a form of provisional membership, and there could still be certain types of discussions limited to full members only. However, this would affect female associates as well as male. Male applicants could also be required or requested to write a written response to the following: "As a man wishing to be a member of CUUWA, what do you feel you could contribute to the organization that would be significant?" (A reply of 'giving the male perspective' would not be adequate.)

If “Associate” membership is chosen, with a desire to require male associates to pay fees as well, there would have to be a change to Bylaw 2 on Membership.

Clause 2 (b) now reads:

b) Associate members are individuals who support the principles of the CUUWA and who pay the annual fee. They are entitled to vote at a meeting.

It would have to be reworded somewhat like the following:

“b) Associate members are individuals who support the principles of the CUUWA. Female associate members will pay an annual fee, the amount to be fixed by the Council. They are entitled to vote at a meeting. Male associate members will pay an annual fee as established by the Council, but are not entitled to vote at a meeting. Male Associate Members may not be elected or appointed to the Council, or CUUWA committees except by the Council.

REJECT men as participants or members: No attendance or participation in meetings. Our By-law on membership (section 2) does not specifically state that members must be female. However, Council could adopt a policy that membership applications from men would not be accepted. A further step could be that requests to attend meetings would be refused.

GENERAL CONCERNS EXPRESSED ABOUT MEN TAKING PART IN PROCEEDINGS:

Males present in meetings in any capacity could possibly assert themselves in a manner that is not appropriate for the organization, because it is about focusing on the female perspective in the historical sea of male perspectives.

The CUUWA was founded specifically for women for all of the obvious reasons expressed in our By-laws: to promote the interests of women and matters of interest to women, given our existence in a male honouring and focussed society.

While we agree that Unitarian Universalist congregations are welcoming of everyone, the Committee believes that the focus of attention for our organization should remain on women. Further, as noted by Cynthia Tucker in *Prophetic Sisterhood* *, “..attitudes have not changed nearly as much as the numbers of women ordained might suggest” (p. 8). And keeping this in mind, many women joining a women’s organization would likely not have the expectation of male membership.

It is also common knowledge that the presence of a man can change the dynamics of the room. Many women may feel that men have less of an understanding of the issues, and view their input as irrelevant or unwanted. Some members may self-censor in the presence of men. However, men’s input and support may be insightful at times. It also might provide a learning situation for them. Father with daughters are often quite open to furthering their knowledge about women’s perspectives.

Removing the eligibility to vote could prevent most of the concern. Male members sitting in a meeting could have their say, [subject to the condition that the meeting chair {and a show of hands by those present} indicate approval]. We no doubt have sufficient numbers of assertive female members to prevent any inappropriate conversation or swaying of votes.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE COMMITTEE

Council should create a new category of “Friend” of the CUUWA. The membership should ratify this decision at the AGM. This will address any concern about a perceived discrimination between associate women, who can vote and participate, and associate men who cannot do either. Allowing male Friends to speak at meetings, but only when permitted, is a suitable compromise for the issue. It reaches out to those to want more inclusion, while allowing a limitation if the chair and/or members gathered feel it is necessary. The chair will have a final decision. ‘Friends’ seems an acceptable compromise between acceptance and rejection regarding membership and attendance. The meeting chair could still ask for a show of hands to restrict a certain meeting to females and/or members only.

* *Prophetic Sisterhood: liberal women ministers of the frontier, 1880-1930*, Cynthia Grant Tucker. Authors Choice Press, San Jose, 1990.