

Widening the Circle of Concern

Widening the Circle of Concern: Copyright Audio Reading

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Preface

Widening the Circle of Concern: Preface Audio Reading

At a gathering convened by Unitarian Universalist Association co-presidents Rev. Sofia Betancourt, Rev. William Sinkford, and Dr. Leon Spencer in Atlanta in 2017, Unitarian Universalist leaders of color were asked to share their insights into how the Association could continue moving forward in the midst of another racially charged moment.

Among the lamentations and learnings the assembled Black people, Indigenous people, and people of color identified were these:

- Addressing the perennial problem of race in Unitarian Universalism is not broadly seen as a theological mandate.
- No shared accountability structures and processes are in place to hold people accountable for the continued harming of Black people, Indigenous people, and people of color among us.
- The diffused nature of our organizations, each with their own accountability structures, means that ignorance and aggression are experienced again and again in different leadership contexts and as leadership changes.
- Our faith seems to have no room for repentance and saying when we have failed.
- We need new definitions of competency for religious leadership, and multicultural competency has to be part of those new standards.
- We need to both learn the lessons of history and acknowledge that these are new times.
- We need to be intentional in our support of people of color in our congregations and encourage them to be connected to national and regional communities of support and others within their congregations.
- We need to center the experiences of Black people, Indigenous people, and people of color.
- Regional staff, good officers, and others key to crisis response need to be comfortable with productive conflict and multiculturally competent.
- Too few white people are engaged in intentional anti-oppression work.

- We lack a consistent analysis of how power works among us and how that power is centered around white, cisgender, heterosexual, and temporarily able-bodied people with means.
- We need resources for ritual and worship that sustain the souls of people of color and other oppressed folks in these times.

Three years later, much has changed, and much remains the same. What has changed? A responsive Association under the leadership of President Susan Frederick-Gray and a Board under the leadership of co-moderators Barb Greve and Elandria Williams have set much in motion:

- New hiring practices are documented and followed.
- Public accountability about the number of employees who are Black, Indigenous, or people of color and their positional levels is modelled.
- Plans have been developed for a Rapid Response Team to intervene when religious professionals of color encounter difficulty.
- Our General Assembly (GA) has centered the voices of Black people, Indigenous people, people of color, and also people who are gender-expansive or living with disabilities.
- The UUA leadership teams reflect more diversity and the wisdom of leaders who are Black, Indigenous, and people of color.
- More congregations are offering welcoming spaces such as a people of color caucus, reading group, or circle.
- More white people are engaged in anti-oppression work.
- Theologians among us have begun to articulate what a liberation theology could look like for Unitarian Universalists.
- The sense of urgency that was present in Atlanta—“We can’t blow this again!”—is even stronger, as those targeted by hate in our national policies have even less tolerance for it within our religious framework.

And what remains the same?

- In 2020 as in 2017, religious professionals of color struggle to maintain their jobs, and many end up deciding to leave or being asked to leave.
- Efforts to focus on equity, diversity, and inclusion are met with derision, false news, and shoddy research masquerading as truth.
- A disturbing new trend is that white leaders who openly speak out about white supremacy culture and the need for change are also finding their employment ended or affected.
- We still too often confuse social customs among us with theology.
- People of color and others targeted and endangered in this world come into our congregations seeking solace, only to discover that while our beliefs are grounding and life-giving, the ways they are practiced in too many of our communities cause harm, confusion, and pain.
- We still lack the systemic resources to support Black people, Indigenous people, people of color, and other marginalized people or an analysis of power among us.
- We continue to overlook the special gifts and intelligences of people who already know how to resist and survive in these times, when these skills are needed more and more.

What was asked for at the Atlanta gathering was a process of truth and reconciliation. The Commission on Institutional Change has served as the beginning of that process. This is a summation of *some* of our findings and recommendations. If it is received as nothing more than a document, that will be a travesty and fresh source of injury to all who participated in offering and compiling the wisdom found here. Though we have no doubt not captured all that was shared, we have made an attempt to capture that which was heard repeatedly or which seems particularly important to creating systemic change.

A Note Addressing the Pandemic

Widening the Circle of Concern: A Note Addressing the Pandemic Audio Reading

This report was completed in February 2020, prior to the global COVID-19 pandemic. Many aspects of how we are as people of faith have changed, and the economic context we assumed for this report has been altered. Yet as we reviewed the content for publication, we were all unanimous in our belief that the recommendations in this report are more relevant for a post-pandemic Unitarian Universalism, not less. This crisis has revealed the disparities that exist at all levels of well-being for Black people,

Indigenous people, and other people of color as well as for LGBTQ individuals, people living with limited economic means, and people living with disabilities. Addressing them within our faith becomes more important, not less. And while some of the recommendations do have price tags, many are about awareness and priority. We offer this report as a blueprint for how the Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations can reemerge from this time of crisis and truly live our values.

Members and Staff of the Commission on Institutional Change

Widening the Circle of Concern: Members and Staff of the Commission on Institutional Change Audio Reading

- **Rev. Leslie Takahashi**, Chair (2017-2020), serves as lead minister at Mt. Diablo Unitarian Universalist Church in Walnut Creek, California; co-author, with Rev. Chip Roush and Dr. Leon Spencer, of *The Arc of the Universe is Long: Unitarian Universalists, Anti-Racism and the Journey from Calgary* (Skinner House, 2009); and a contributor to a number of collections, including *Voices From the Margins* (Skinner House, 2012); *Centering: Navigating Race, Authenticity, and Power in Ministry* (Skinner House, 2017); *Lifting Our Voices: Readings in the Living Tradition* (UUA, 2015); and [WorshipWeb](#). She was the 2019 Berry Street lecturer.
- **Mary Byron** (2017-2020) is a member of the UUA Audit Committee and President's Council. She retired as an information technologies executive with Goldman Sachs and is now the owner of Cloud Nine Quilts in Montana.
- **Cir L'Bert, Jr.** (2018-2020) is a writer based in Akron, Ohio; a Board trustee at Unitarian Universalist Church of Akron, Ohio; and a Knight Arts Challenge Award Winner (2019) for his project, Conjure Comics, a comic book publisher focused on justice, liberation, and equity.
- **Rev. Dr. Natalie Fenimore** (2017-2020) is a member of the ministerial team at the Unitarian Universalist Congregation at Shelter Rock in Manhasset, New York. She is a former president of the Liberal Religious Educators Association and is vice president of the Starr King School for the Ministry Board of Trustees. She is author of the curriculum *Pride of Place: Affirming an African American Unitarian Universalist Identity*, co-author with Gabrielle Farrell and Jenice View of the UUA Tapestry of Faith curriculum *Windows and Mirrors*, an author of UUA Renaissance Modules, and a contributor to a number of anthologies from Skinner House Books.
- **Dr. Elias Ortega** (2017-2020) is the president of Meadville Lombard Theological School, a former member of the UUA Religious Education Credentialing Committee, and co-author of *Common Goods: Economy, Ecology, and Political Theology* (Fordham University Press, 2015).
- **Caitlin Breedlove** (2017-2018) is the former campaign director of the Standing on the Side of Love campaign (now Side with Love) at the UUA, where she served as a bridge between grassroots social movements and the denomination. She is also the former co-director of Southerners On New Ground (SONG), where for almost a decade she co-led innovative intersectional movement building work in the LGBTQ sector. Caitlin currently serves as the vice president of movement leadership at Auburn Seminary and hosts the podcast *Fortification*, which interviews movement leaders and organizers about their spiritual lives.
- **DeReau K. Farrar** (2017-2018) is director of music at First Unitarian Church of Portland, Oregon; president of the Association for Unitarian Universalist Music Ministries; and a member of the Black Lives of Unitarian Universalism Advisory Team. He has previously served Unitarian Universalist congregations in Santa Monica and Downtown Los Angeles, California, and has contributed to [WorshipWeb's Braver/Wiser](#) publication and the magazine *UU World*.
- **Rev. Marcus Fogliano, Project Manager**, brings to their work with the Commission project management experience from public housing and community organizing, as well as a background in government and nonprofit boards and commissions. They have engaged in LGBTQ advocacy and community building across Illinois. They were raised and ordained as a Jehovah's Witness engaged in deaf ministry in Central Illinois. They found Unitarian Universalism through the Unitarian Universalist Church of Bloomington-Normal in Illinois in 2012 and found their national calling to service after serving as a General Assembly delegate for the Unitarian Universalist Church of Peoria in 2016.

Acknowledgments

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So many hours of conversation and hours of testimony have occurred during these three years.

We thank all of those who participated in individual interviews or focus groups or submitted testimony. More than 1,100 participated in this way, and we are grateful for your dedication and willingness to share ideas and experiences, and often to rehash traumatic circumstances. The compilation of this data has allowed us to look for patterns and levers to ensure that our recommendations are focused on efforts that will yield the most progress toward equity, inclusion, and diversity.

A number of groups were particularly important as dialogue partners during our three years of service, including the leadership of Diverse and Revolutionary Unitarian Universalist Multicultural Ministries (DRUUMM); the Board of Trustees of the UUA (2017-2020 cohorts); the 2017 UUA co-presidents: Rev. Sofia Betancourt, Dr. Leon Spencer, and Rev. William Sinkford; UUA president Susan Frederick-Gray and executive vice president Carey McDonald; UUA leadership staff; the staff and boards of the Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association, Liberal Religious Educators Association, Association for Unitarian Universalist Music Ministries, and Unitarian Universalist Association of Membership Professionals; and the Journey Toward Wholeness Transformation Committee. Though we did not always find complete agreement in every matter, these conversations were important in the development of our work and recommendations.

We end with a special acknowledgment for those who gave of their time in 2018 to attend our Collaboratory gathering. Our thought partners were:

- Aisha Hauser
- Melvin Bray
- Annie Scott
- Barb Greve
- Carey McDonald
- Charles Du Mond
- Rev. Cheryl M. Walker
- Rev. Danielle Di Bona
- Elandria Williams
- Rev. Elizabeth Nguyen
- Hannah Hafter
- Jesse King
- Jessica York
- Rev. Kimberly Hampton
- Rev. Kimberly Quinn Johnson*
- Dr. Mark Hicks
- Rev. Melissa Carvill Ziemer
- Rev. Ranwa Hammamy
- Rev. Sherman Logan
- Rev. Dr. Sofia Betancourt
- Rev. Dr. Susan Frederick-Gray
- Taquiena Boston*
- Rev. Theresa Soto
- Dr. Takiyah Nur Amin*

Gratitude to Rev. Dr. Sofia Betancourt, Rev. Bill Sinkford, and Dr. Leon Spencer for their service, which allowed the creation of the Commission, and to co-moderators Mr. Barb Greve and Elandria Williams.

The consultations with Melvin Bray and the VISIONS team, directed by Rick Pinderhughes, informed this work. Also gratitude to Jesse King for well-timed wisdom. Special thanks to Rev. Danielle Di Bona and Julica Hermann de la Fuente for their consulting work during the data collection efforts.

We are also grateful to Mary Benard for her dedication to our impossible time line.

* These Design Team members helped in the development of the Collaboratory, from selection of attendees to determining the questions the participants would gather to answer.

Introduction

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The Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) Commission on Institutional Change is charged with supporting long-term cultural and institutional change that redeems the essential promise and ideals of Unitarian Universalism. Appointed by the UUA Board of Trustees in 2017 for a period of two years with an extension granted in 2018, the Commission was in place through June 2020.

Charge

At the New Orleans General Assembly in 2017, the UUA Board of Trustees announced and chartered the Commission on Institutional Change. The charge given was to conduct an audit of the power structures and analyze systemic racism and white supremacy culture within the Unitarian Universalist Association.

Purpose and Goals

The Commission on Institutional Change held its first in-person meeting on August 21-22, 2017.

After two days of deliberation and consideration of the charge presented by the UUA Board of Trustees, the Commission completed a statement of its goals, guiding principles, and approach to its work.

The Commission pledged to report back to the Board and General Assembly its learnings, recommendations, and guidance for ongoing work over the next three years. The Commission articulated its commitments to:

- ground its work in theological reflection and seek the articulation of a liberating Unitarian Universalism that is anti-oppressive, multicultural, and accountable to the richness of our diverse heritage
- oversee an audit of racism within UUA practices and policies and set priorities and make recommendations for anti-oppression strategies (including hiring and personnel practices and governance structures) that will advance our progress toward Beloved Community while holding the Association accountable
- collect stories of those who have targets of harm or aggression because of racism within existing UUA culture and identify the aspects of that culture that must be dismantled to transform us into a faith for our times
- examine and document critical events and practices at all levels of the Association, congregations, and related ministries as special areas for redress and restorative justice
- illuminate the expectations placed on religious professionals who are Black, Indigenous, and people of color in the transformation of our faith
- identify promising practices for recruitment, retention, and formation of religious leadership that spans the spectrum of race, class, and age and reflects an inclusive ecclesiology

Principles to Guide Work

The Commission spent time discerning the guiding principles with which to address our work to end systemic oppression in our Association, informed by the experience we each bring to this work. These will evolve, but we begin with these premises:

- We need our practice of Unitarian Universalism and our fellow Unitarian Universalists to call us into living the fullness of the theology we inherit and proclaim.
- Transformation is needed at all levels of our Association to abandon dysfunctional cultural expressions of our theology and polity.
- The covenants that bind us together, both within our own faith and to our partners in the world, are frayed and broken by the domination of white supremacy culture among us.
- To keep Unitarian Universalism alive, we must center the voices that have been silenced or drowned out and dismantle elitist and exclusionary white privilege, which inhibits connection and creativity.
- In this effort, we should be guided by the promising spots of creativity and learning where new multicultural and multigenerational expressions of our faith are found.

A Word About Centering

The patterns and habits of white supremacy culture are often unacknowledged, unrecognized, or openly denied. When we understand how these patterns and habits affect those who hold power and especially those who are harmed by them, we then also come to understand that we can't dismantle systems of oppressive behavior without leaning into the knowledge and perspective of those most affected.

While proximity may not always guarantee expertise, it does guarantee experience, and often greater discernment due to higher personal stakes. Honoring this experience and discernment will require that we cultivate compassion. And it would help to look at the etymology of that word—*com*, meaning “with” or “together,” and “-*passion*,” derived from *pati*, which means “endure, undergo, experience.” Can we feel what another experiences?

This perspective offers us a more sensitive and sophisticated understanding of the oppressions that we are all dealing with in our work.

Some have taken the idea of “centering the leadership” of Black people, Indigenous people, and people of color and minimized it to a simple process wherein white or white-identified people express a desire for collaboration while avoiding the work that only they are in a position to do. Or even worse, they have misrepresented that suggestion to enmesh beleaguered Black people, Indigenous people, and people of color within their communities in inequitable and toxic systems of labor, responsibility, and accountability.

While we recognize that some use the suggestion to center people of color as a tactic of avoidance, we also understand that for some, the line between unequal labor dynamics and inappropriate control is occasionally unclear, especially when circumstances call for rapid action. Here, we believe that semantics can hold a great deal of guidance. When we lean into the idea of *centering* the leadership of Black people, Indigenous people, and people of color rather than *following* it (understanding that following may be necessary), we find a path. By centering, we mean a leaning toward, a prioritizing of perspective, attention to whose needs are considered and who is most affected.

Just as we can understand that the current paradigm of white dominance centers white identity and the comfort of white-identified people, we can also understand that a more just and effective system would center the comfort, safety, growth, agency, and capacity for self-realization of those who are currently most oppressed, which would have a benefit for all.

Methodology

Widening the Circle of Concern: Methodology Audio Reading

“We call on individual Unitarian Universalists to answer our call for stories of how racism has affected your experience as a Unitarian Universalist. These stories have not been widely heard, documented, or preserved, and despite a professed commitment to diverse staffing, the UUA has not maintained records of the racial composition of the religious education community. These stories are essential to documenting and synthesizing the true impact of racism in our Association, an impact that we acknowledge is real, imminent, and pre-dating even as we document its intricacies.”

—Commission on Institutional Change blog post, February 10, 2018, and February 18, 2019

Components of our work included:

- **Call for Testimony**—As one of its first acts, the Commission issued calls for testimony and examples of innovation. These calls were issued repeatedly throughout our three years of collecting data. Testimony took the form of individual interviews and submitted testimony. While many were ready to participate and provide their personal testimony, we also heard from folks unwilling to participate. Some expressed experiences too painful to be relived; others were resigned, having shared their stories at other moments of our denominational history and had their voices silenced.
- **Focus Groups**—For the first two years of our work, we convened focus groups in a variety of settings, including the 2018 and 2019 General Assemblies, regional and district meetings, meetings of professional associations, Finding Our Way Home (the annual meeting of religious professionals who are Black, Indigenous, and people of color), and online. These were designed to elicit feedback from a variety of groups. In 2019, we also extended invitations to those who had voiced concern about anti-oppression work. At the 2018 General Assembly, all participants were invited to take part in focus groups.

- **Collaboratory**—In the fall of 2018, under the leadership of consultant Melvin Bray, we convened a multi-day gathering of those who had been leading work on equity, inclusion, and diversity in the various facets of Unitarian Universalism to help set benchmarks for our work.
- **Outside Audit**—In 2019, we contracted with VISIONS, Inc., an international consultant firm, to review key documents and analyze our leadership structures, with a focus on systemic oppression.
- **Surveys**—We conducted several surveys at General Assembly, one through the GA app, which was accessible to all General Assembly participants.
- **Social Science Research Tools**—Transcripts of the testimony, focus groups, and individual interviews—over 650 pages of transcripts and eighty plus hours of audio/video interviews—were analyzed using Dedoose, a cross-platform research application for qualitative data. As our primary codes, we used the ten areas of priorities developed out of the work of the 2017 Atlanta Gathering (See Avatars on page xxiv) and the 2018 Collaborative to look for patterns and trends. In our analysis, we also kept track of emerging patterns in addition to our areas of priorities.

Confidentiality of Data

In our Board-mandated work, the Commission on Institutional change has gathered data on the direct experiences of Unitarian Universalists related to their experiences of institutional inequity, racism, cultural bias, and practices that are incompatible with our covenant and theology.

Due to the sensitive nature of these testimonies, the Board and Commission have decided to hold the recordings, documents, and other materials from public view for a period of five years. Afterward, the data will be available for academic use.

This presented a conundrum for the Commission: we felt that it was absolutely necessary to maintain the privacy and safety of those who bravely shared their testimonies, and yet we recognize the need to provide the full understanding of the effects of the institutional racism and inequity that is offered in the narratives. Attempting to manage this problem, we elected to compile composite narratives based on the testimonies provided. (See Avatars, below.)

The reenactments presented here contain events and stories based upon the testimonies given by the participants, with changes and alterations of certain details such as dates, times, and identities where appropriate, but maintaining the context, power dynamics, and impacts.

A Brief Overview

At the outset, we agreed on a commitment to ground our research and output in our lived experience. This particular approach is consistent with our theological mandate to hold our direct experience as one of the sources of Unitarian Universalism and with the Commission’s pledge to ground our work in our theological tradition. As one person put it, “We need people who are actively engaged in this work, not just cheerleading from the side.”

As a faith community, we place a high value on the free and responsible search for truth and meaning. Yet this has somehow come to be interpreted almost exclusively through an individualistic lens. We suggest that as a religious organization, bound together by choice, we operate as a collective based on principle, so that this “free and responsible” search is done within the boundaries of communities.

When discussing the impacts of systemic oppression, we also needed to center the experience of those most directly impacted as that contains the core truth of the impacts and, when aggregated, can point to the levers that are most critical—those places where change in systems will reduce harm to the most people.

We used an action-based research methodology that involved collection of materials, analysis, and two outside consultants. This process was not without its challenges. The biggest challenge was that records on Black leaders, Indigenous leaders, and leaders of color, including those who were in ministry, have been largely nonexistent or highly incomplete. We learned early in our process, as we experienced difficulties gaining access to reliable information and faced the realities of informal structures that did not always keep complete and clear records, that we needed to create an archive of data to work from—despite the fact that information on the harm done to people of color has been collected at other times following high profile incidents throughout our history. This is problematic, and another example of the historic discounting and undervaluing of the experience of people of color and other marginalized peoples within our Association.

We committed to get as much information as possible from those most affected—yet found that many Black people, Indigenous people, and people of color chose not to participate because of prior experience with information gathering that led to little change, as well as the barriers posed by the large number of people, employed and lay, whose experiences have already led them to leave our Association. Therefore, our results are probably understated.

A starting point for us was a convening hosted in Atlanta by UUA co-presidents Rev. Sofia Betancourt, Dr. Leon Spencer, and Rev. William Sinkford. This was the first convening designed to capture many of the ideas that have been readily available and yet ignored about how to combat white supremacy culture and the marginalization of Black voices, Indigenous voices, and voices of color within the many expressions of our beloved faith.

Avatars

When we issued our invitation in the fall of 2017 for testimonies from those who had been injured by a culture privileging white people within Unitarian Universalism, we quickly learned that people were reluctant to share their stories. One reason was that religious professionals feared losing their jobs or their abilities to perform their jobs, as did those who identified as white allies. Another reason was that people of color, whether professional or lay, felt that they had told their stories again and again, reliving pain and traumatic experience to no end. Over and over we heard from people who said they were no longer willing to describe the pain they experienced because, after the initial shock and reaction took place, little changed. Some described this as a form of “trauma porn,” in which those in the majority culture got a voyeuristic look into the lives of Black people, Indigenous people, and people of color; experienced deep emotions—and failed to act in any systematic way.

The fact that anonymity was required for people to feel comfortable sharing speaks to the extent of the racial divide and power imbalances. While we are using a limited number of direct quotes in this report to illustrate important points, we found a consistency of experiences. The vast majority of people of color and others from identities marginalized within Unitarian Universalism had experienced discriminatory and oppressive incidents or cultures within Unitarian Universalist circles.

Religious professionals felt these aggressions and attacks on dignity most frequently and most strongly. Those who were white had a spectrum of experiences ranging from denial that any kind of racism existed within Unitarian Universalism (“we have a 0-percent occurrence”) to those who saw clear issues with equity, inclusion, and diversity and paid a large cost professionally and socially to name them. The vast majority of people were in the middle—vaguely aware, somewhat committed, and feeling unskilled.

This report is based on more than eighty hours of audio and video recordings and more than 650 pages of documents from more than 1,100 participants. Out of this material, we created five avatars to represent the themes we saw represented in strong and consistent patterns. The avatars are composites of the testimonies that were submitted and also those that came out of the focus groups we conducted in 2017 and 2018. These avatars allow us to amplify themes of the testimony without endangering individuals’ livelihood or community connection.

Call for Personal Testimony, from the Commission on Institutional Change

The Commission on Institutional Change issued the following call after its first meeting in August, 2017, through its website and blog and through a video call that was released.

The Commission on Institutional Change requests personal accounts and stories about how racism has affected individuals and groups within Unitarian Universalism at the personal, institutional, or systemic levels. It is seeking to document incidents that occurred between individual Unitarian Universalists, within a congregational or Associational setting, or as a result of white-centeredness embedded within the greater Unitarian Universalist culture. Within this context, the Commission asks you to respond to the following questions with specific examples:

- In what ways have you or your group or community been hurt by current racist and culturally biased attitudes and practices within Unitarian Universalism?
- In what ways have we, as a faith community, been living outside of our values and commitments?

This process of collecting personal accounts and stories was ongoing from the end of GA 2018 until September 2019. A stream of testimonies flowed in too late to be included in the gathering but were included in our data collection.

Terminology

This report uses several terms to identify Black, Indigenous, and people of color, for the purpose of avoiding reductive, institutional language that erases those whose very survival is dependent on visibility and inclusion.

The term *people of color* is used as this has been the accepted standard within Unitarian Universalism. We also use *Black people*, *Indigenous people*, and *people of color* to acknowledge the stark reality of worldwide anti-Blackness, as well as the experience of many Indigenous people who may suffer vast intersectional oppression both from global white domination and other people of color in their own lands (and often, the system of racism exacerbates existing inequalities between people of color and Indigenous people).

Black/African refers to those of African descent. Black is a political term utilized in response to the prevailing system of white domination.

Indigenous is a term referring to those who, though they are the original inhabitants of their land, have been attacked, subjugated, colonized, forcibly removed, systematically oppressed, etc.

People of color refers to all those who fall outside the white dominant identity, including multiracial people.

A great deal of nuance, intersectional experience, and range of identity exists within these phrases.

We also acknowledge that these phrases are responses to an existing structure of oppression.

In quoted text, we have left language as in the original except when that language is our own. In the process of preparing this report, we have come to understand that some of the language we have used before in our public statements has been ableist and have removed it here. However, in quoting the work of others, we have decided to let it stand rather than present others' words inaccurately.

Call for Promising Practices, from the Commission on Institutional Change

The Commission issued this call through our website, public presentations, and social media outlets:

The Commission on Institutional Change is seeking stories and examples of best practices in the service of antiracism in UU congregations and communities.

- If you have been doing something in the field of antiracism that you think is going well, we'd like to hear about it. This might include:
- justice work grounded in accountable relationships with organizations led by and serving people of color
- providing space, child-care, or logistical support to movements led by and serving people of color
- partnering on grassroots local organizing campaigns
- multiracial staff teams serving congregations effectively for more than three years
- family ministries and/or religious education programming especially targeted to and serving congregants of color, both adults and children/youth
- multiculturally sensitive pastoral care programs
- a proven track record of financial partnership and fundraising for movements led by or serving people of color

Ask yourself:

- What has been the new learning to emerge as far as diversity, equity, and inclusion?
- How do you measure success?
- What has been the struggle? For what were you unprepared and what did you learn?

Trends

Widening the Circle of Concern: Trends Audio Reading

The world around us is different than it was a decade ago. Or even five years ago. The question is, how will our “living tradition” keep up with the times? What choices will we make—or fail to make—and how will that affect the relevancy and the survival of our faith?

Here are some of the realities in which our faith exists as we enter into 2020:

- Our nation is moving away from institutional religion. According to the Pew Research Center:
 - Fewer people are participating in religious communities.
 - Emerging generations report higher rates of people not affiliated with institutional forms of religion, especially Christianity (those known as the nones because they have checked the “none” box when asked about religious affiliation). [1]
 - Increasingly, younger generations are the ones exiting religious institutions. While Unitarian Universalists often look at the slightly increasing number of people who identify as atheists and those who identify as not religious as an opportunity for us, some of the reasons appear to be tied to the nature of religious institutions as much as changing beliefs.
- Unitarian Universalism is not immune: we too are losing congregations and have many teetering on the edge of collapse. While we typically refer to 1,000 congregations, in truth we now have 819 congregations that would meet the standard to become a congregation today.
- As institutional religion declines, more who enter our doors are not refugees from other faiths but are experiencing faith communities for the first time through our faith and are seeking spiritual ground.
- The demographics of our nation have changed, and with them expectations around cultural competency:
 - We have seen an increase in the percentage of the population that is non-white. In California, Hawaii, Nevada, New Mexico, and Texas, white people are already not the majority. A US Bureau of the Census report that showed non-Hispanic white people as a minority by the year 2044 has been thought to lead to a dramatic political reaction. [2]
 - A growing number of people marry outside of their racial group, so the percentage of people who are multiracial is expected to increase significantly by the next Census count.
 - The globalization of economies and these demographic trends means more people are exposed to cultural competency expectations in schools and in the workplace, with many seeing competency as a necessary part of doing business in the twenty-first century. [3]
- New generations face a much bleaker future than those who are now at the end of their careers or in retirement:
 - Lack of opportunity is felt most by new generations, and this trend will be exacerbated by disinvestment in schools, rising cost of health care, etc.
 - Income inequality affects younger people disproportionately. New generations no longer expect to achieve a higher quality of life than those before them.
 - A new level of despair caused by climate change, increased awareness of the problems of the world, the opioid addiction epidemic, and other trends brings more people into our congregations and communities who are seeking a sustaining faith.

In the face of these trends, we face some critical divides among us:

- Since the mid-twentieth century, more Unitarian Universalists are “come-inners” than birthright Unitarian Universalists. Many of those who came in during the 1960s-1980s were interested in getting away from religious practices that they felt were nonrational, demeaning, or illogical. The attraction of our faith was what it was not—non-creedal, non-hierarchical—and the emphasis was on personal freedom. In recent decades, more of those entering our doors have been attracted by our beliefs and their interest has been in the tenets of our faith.
- Some among us believe we can continue the practices that have been most prevalent in Unitarian Universalism without change. Others feel it is critical for us to change; many of these tend to be younger or identify as Black, Indigenous, or people of color or hold other identities that are marginalized in UU community, such as gender-expansive.
- Some believe that work to promote equity, inclusion, and diversity is optional and tangential to our faith. Others believe it is a form of spiritual practice among us necessary to live out our faith.

What puts extra pressure on these divides? A number of factors increase the tension and division:

- Since the early decades of the twentieth century, we have not invested in developing the theological resources that could have allowed us to have a vocabulary of faith to meet these troubling times.
- Our faith, as with almost all institutions in our nation, rests on a culture whose economic structures depend on the annihilation of Indigenous peoples and the enslavement of Africans forcibly relocated and enslaved.
- Despite periodic and episodic attempts to address this legacy and to address personal bias, we have not sustained these efforts and now find many of our congregational practices lacking in the standards of multicultural competency found in many workplaces.
- Our emphasis on hyper-individualism and the legacy of the consolidation of Unitarian and Universalism have led to a culture of mistrust that is augmented when difference is in play. Women and gay, lesbian, bisexual, gender-expansive, and disabled adults have all struggled as have Black people, Indigenous people, and people of color who have sought to lend their gifts.
- We do not have effective ways of dealing with conflict, tending to avoid it until it explodes. These explosions are often then covered up. This conflict-avoidant culture is now dangerous in an age of new interpersonal norms and the magnifying impacts of social media.

In consideration of these trends, we say,

- In a world where people can understand more about one another because of the way the Internet allows us to enter one another's lives, cultural competency is increasingly expected. Our theological legacy has long put us on the forefront of advocacy and prophetic action to widen the circle of concern for marginalized groups, and yet without a focus on addressing today's issues of inclusion, we are woefully unprepared to live our values.
- We have spent time comparing our religious wounds rather than healing them. As a result, we have often operated from a least-common-denominator approach rather than one linked to our highest values as a people of faith. Our time as a haven or social club for those disaffected by other religions has passed. In these searing times of political division, climate change, economic polarization, and global strife, people need a sustaining faith.
- Economic and demographic trends alone would require us to look anew at efforts to promote equity, inclusion, and diversity—and we also have a theological imperative to do so.
- We continue to attract a greater diversity of people and to retain a very small percentage of those who do not match the resourced, white, aging majority within our congregation.
- We witness a growing and cavernous gap between generations exacerbated by lack of investment in technologies and methodologies that can help us understand and better comprehend generational differences.
- As with other predominantly white institutions, we have failed to acknowledge the extent to which the resources that have built our institutions were amassed at the expense of people of color, especially Indigenous and Black people.
- The unfinished—and interrupted—work on race within Unitarian Universalism has marred our ability to move forward at a time when accountability, multicultural awareness, and inclusive language are becoming the new normal in the larger world.
- Engagement in this type of development is deep spiritual and faithful work that allows for growth and change.
- We need change at the personal and interpersonal levels, and most of all we need to make systemic changes that can be ongoing and lasting.
- The newer generations in our nation are increasingly at risk according to many reports, including the 2019 World Happiness Report, which singled out a dramatic and disturbing decline in health and happiness, especially for younger US citizens. [4]

Our deliberations to date have convinced us of this: *What is at stake is nothing less than the future of our faith.*

Theology

Widening the Circle of Concern: Theology Audio Reading

“We are on a journey toward redemption. We have lived a year filled with lamentation... with the strength of generations, the failures of the everyday, and the deep-down gritty messiness that is the promise of our salvation. There is inherent goodness that exists between and among us. I want to honor the weary, ragged miracle that is our living tradition.”

—Rev. Dr. Sofia Betancourt, Service of the Living Tradition, 2018

“Such ambiguity and a concomitant tentativeness in articulating what we are about religiously is presently perhaps our greatest liability and the greatest obstacle to Unitarian Universalism achieving the fulfillment of its potential as an empowering and

liberating faith for the twenty-first century. The fear that any such articulation somehow threatens the integrity or right of conscience of any individual is institutionally disabling and must be overcome by mutual trust and a sense of common purpose, the belief that we are joined together in religious association for more than merely instrumental reasons.”

—Rev. Earl Holt, Commission on Appraisal presentation to the 2005 General Assembly

“The faith of free persons must tangibly make them free in a community of human dignity and equal justice.”

—James Luther Adams, *A Faith for the Free*

“Liberation theology speaks to the ‘underside of history’ and offers perspectives on issues, such as poverty and oppression, that we might otherwise miss. This is especially important as we respond to social problems. To be in solidarity with those who are oppressed requires empathy and imagination.”

—Rev. Dr. Paul Rasor, *Faith Without Certainty*

The Joy in the Spiritual Work, by Mary Byron

Commission on Institutional Change Guiding Principle: To keep Unitarian Universalism alive, we must privilege the voices that have been silenced or drowned out and dismantle elitist and exclusionary white privilege, which inhibits connection and creativity.

My UU faith has been an important part of the spiritual journey of my life. I believe in our Principles and our way of expressing them publicly, advocating for the world of justice, equity, and compassion we know is possible. And we know this world is not yet here, which calls us into doing the work that is needed to create it.

This is one part of why I do antiracism work. It may be a simple statement to say my faith calls me into action, and it is sometimes not so easy to live. As a white person, I have needed to do a lot of deep spiritual work on myself. Unlearning the ideas of supremacy that I have absorbed from our culture is so much harder than learning about injustice, yet I know we won’t move away from our comfort in white supremacy until we unlearn and dismantle it in our lives. Arundhati Roy said,

The trouble is that once you see it, you can’t unsee it. And once you’ve seen it, keeping quiet, saying nothing, becomes as political an act as speaking out. There’s no innocence. Either way, you’re accountable.

When I moved past claiming my innocence in building these systems and denying their racist intent to see them, really see how they operate, I couldn’t unsee their injustice. It is in the news every day, everywhere.

Keeping quiet, doing nothing, isn’t an option for me in a faith that proclaims that we respect the inherent worth and dignity of all people. There is no dignity in economic, housing, justice, immigration, environmental, and education systems that create such inequitable outcomes. White people built these and white people are required to dismantle these unjust, inequitable, and cruel systems, to completely transform them. I knew I couldn’t do this transformational work unless I was willing to get uncomfortable, to start by acknowledging my role in our systems and the ways I participate in upholding our dominant white culture—conflict avoidance, assuming that good intentions are enough, denial, tokenism, white savior behavior.... It is hard to see these things in myself, but I need to see it and change it in order to live into the Principles I believe. This is a part of my spiritual practice. I practice humility and forgiveness for myself and my community as a spiritual work when we engage in dismantling white supremacist systems. I recognize I am going to make mistakes and I also know how I will acknowledge them and try to repair the harms. I try not to let the fear stop me and to stay curious about when and where my discomfort arises. Every time I make a new discovery about my thinking that releases limiting thoughts and behavior, I feel more free, and that is also spiritual work.

I also do this work because I find such joy in the community of people engaged here. The guiding principle above speaks to how white supremacy culture inhibits connection and creativity. Breaking down my personal barriers and connecting with people is liberation for my heart. Superiority feeds our egos and it shrinks our hearts, and I don’t want to live in a small-hearted world. My joy comes from belonging in a community with big-hearted, creative, welcoming people. Working with people of imagination and with a willingness to come together to build a more just and generous faith community is life-affirming. Learning from the variety of lived experiences and perspectives of people in different communities and congregations enlarges my dreams of what is possible and grounds them in what is necessary.

Lastly, I do this work because I am so curious about what we might yet build together. My fellow commissioner, Reverend Dr. Natalie Fenimore, speaks of dreaming of a Unitarian Universalism that does not yet exist. None of us knows what transforming

our congregations into truly multicultural expressions of our faith will be. I relish the opportunity to create something new and this is what keeps me in this work with you.

Background and Trends

Unitarian Universalism is a living faith tradition. From its origins in Unitarian and Universalist forms of Christianity,* we have to expand our foundations into an expansive faith community tied together not by dogma but by covenantal relations. Today, Unitarian Universalism lives in our diversity in thought, belief, and practice. We hold the “many/and” of a vast range of practices, beliefs, and theological understandings. It can be said that contemporary Unitarian Universalism as lived, and as a living tradition, has two commitments: freedom of belief and its orientation toward inclusion, interdependence, and justice. These two commitments have shaped our faith tradition in positive ways and also led to some problematic dynamics.

We have a deep and rich history, with religious ancestors who literally gave of their life energies and life forces to allow us the privileges we enjoy today, freedom of belief, the task to search for truth and meaning, and the work to bring more justice into the world. Both Unitarians and Universalists were considered heretics by the Christian mainstreams of their times. The word heretic means able to choose and, if our traditions have anything in common, it is exercising choice in the search for deeper understanding and faithfulness. Yet the choice is the means, and the tenets of Universalism and Unitarianism the legacy to be held close.

Freedom of belief promotes diversity of thought in our communities and fuels the responsible search for truth and meaning that leads toward beloved community. This freedom encourages exploration and experimentation, lending creativity and innovation to our communities. Yet over the decades since the consolidation of Unitarians and Universalists, an overemphasis on individual exploration and experience as the primary, if not sole center of religious experience developed. This centering of the individual decenters the communal as a locus of theological exploration. One of the unintended consequences has been the atomized individualism of the search for truth and meaning without accountability to its impact in communities. This has a correlation with the ways in which justice priorities and practices are lived in congregations. Justice-seeking practices of Unitarian Universalists are often not grounded on spiritual or ritual principles; instead justice-seeking takes the place of ritual and religious life. Justice practices cannot be used as surrogates for deepening our spiritual lives.

Nevertheless, amidst the diversity of the theologies represented in our congregations, justice work has been a proxy for what we believe in some congregations, while in other congregations, engagement with the intellect, debate, and social ties have been the substitute. Our justice work without theological resources and spiritual practices leads us down the path of burn out. Many of us have come to this faith seeking an alternative faith home and drawn by its actions in the world. Yet we don't often work to heal from our religious past. Those most harmed by the divisive and stressful times we live in are in need of faith tenets that can hold us fast in confusing times and help us make ethical and values-based choices about how to engage. The status quo within our world today reinforces a system in which some are treated as “greater than” and others as “less than.” This status quo is also reflected in our congregations and denominational lives. To counter this takes more than good intent; it takes a faithful commitment to a different way of being, accountability to our broader community and the world we seek to engage.

Among the original Universalist “heresies” were the ideas that Universalists should work to establish the Kingdom of God in this life and that a loving God would not condemn a portion of humanity to eternal damnation. That mandate, in the context of an increasingly divided world, calls upon us to address issues of equity, inclusion, and diversity.

In the Unitarian tradition, we have the tradition of discerning truth based on facts, reasoning, and investigation. Our religious ancestors believed not only in the ability of each of us to discover our own truth but also in the ability to find real truth in the contexts of our lives as well as in sacred texts and scriptures. This is the basis for our commitment to non-creedalism and aversion to dogma. It is also what calls on us to look at the issues of this time. The word religion comes from the same base as the word *ligament*, something that binds together. To be religious is to be clear about what you are bound to in the way that a ligament holds muscle to the bone. The needed ties in our time involve our ability to see ourselves as truly interdependent.

The Fellowship movement within Unitarian Universalism birthed many new communities—and also obscured our religious inheritance. Consider these words from Holley Ulbrich, author of *The Fellowship Movement: A Growth Strategy and Its Legacy*:

The positive view maintains that the congregations planted as lay-led fellowships between 1948 and 1967 saved Unitarianism from near extinction and converted a regional religious movement into a truly national one. Along with growing the denomination, fellowships brought innovation, vitality, and lay leadership into a religious community greatly in need of fresh air.... At the other end of the spectrum is the view that the fellowship movement spawned small, introverted, even hostile groups

that did not want to grow or welcome newcomers, did not identify with the larger denomination, and represented Unitarian Universalism in ways that did not reflect the larger movement's self-understanding. [5]

This has led many to believe that the only theological value we have is freedom to "believe anything we want," and thus reject any engagement within community that challenges preconceptions. This flies in the face of our theological history and those spiritual ancestors who sacrificed much to leave us a tradition that values both freedom and commitment.

The original Humanist Manifesto, a foundational document for humanism, also supports this inquiry. The fourth point of this manifesto states, "Humanism recognizes that man's religious culture and civilization, as clearly depicted by anthropology and history, are the product of a gradual development due to his interaction with his natural environment and with his social heritage. The individual born into a particular culture is largely molded by that culture." The tenth point reads, "In the place of the old attitudes involved in worship and prayer the humanist finds his religious emotions expressed in a heightened sense of personal life and in a cooperative effort to promote social well-being." The fifteenth and last point states,

We assert that humanism will: (a) affirm life rather than deny it; (b) seek to elicit the possibilities of life, not flee from them; and (c) endeavor to establish the conditions of a satisfactory life for all, not merely for the few. By this positive morale and intention humanism will be guided, and from this perspective and alignment the techniques and efforts of humanism will flow. [6]

In *Articulating Your UU Faith*, Barbara Wells ten Hove and Jaco ten Hove identify the first and seventh Principles of Unitarian Universalism as the "pillar Principles." [7] The first and seventh Principles affirm to covenant and promote "the inherent worth and dignity of all" and the fact that we all live in an "interdependent web of existence." Many of the people of color and other marginalized people with whom we were in dialogue mentioned these two Principles as the ground for their belief that work for equity, diversity, and inclusion is religious work for us as Unitarian Universalists. As one white antiracist advocate put it, "When we're dehumanizing someone else or making someone else 'less than,' we are making ourselves 'less than' as well, dehumanizing ourselves."

We rarely seek to return to the literal Unitarianism or Universalism of the seventeenth century except in the broadest sense. That is because the influx of other voices, including the early women ministers, Transcendentalists, humanists, feminists, and people from earth-centered and other traditions have enhanced our faith. In the same way, embracing diversity, equity, and inclusion and the spiritual disciplines they require will further enrich us.

Continued learning and evolution should be the goal of all of us as Unitarian Universalists. In 2019, in understanding our ordained ministry as "learning" not "learned," we moved from "final" to "full" fellowship, a positive change that acknowledges the oft-ignored truism that we all must evolve or die.

We are a faith that has not been investing enough in theology, theological schools, or theologians, at a time when many who would bring new life and vitality to our communities are looking for guiding principles.

In an age when so many struggle to find meaning, a community formed through a set of commonly held beliefs can form a stronger bond than one formed through antipathy toward rejected beliefs.

Because we have not updated our theology, the history we know privileges the dominant culture and those voices that were preserved in our history and written record. We now have a chance to embrace a more inclusive and accurate history.

We have theologians—and historians—among us whose work could give us a different frame. However, without investment in theology, theological resources to support these times are not available.

We need to recognize, in the words of Rev. Dr. Sofia Betancourt:

We are the theological inheritors of teachings on universal salvation. There is no winnowing out of the supposedly unworthy that can be named sacred among us. It is our very Universalism that is at stake when we turn away from the impact that our institutions have on the same communities and groups that society encourages us to dehumanize and make small. [8]

Many who have engaged in this work have found it to be spiritually deepening and liberating. As one white accomplice put it, "A Unitarian Universalism rooted in its theological traditions has no choice but to engage in practices of inclusion, diversity, and equity. A renewed focus on our theological history and its actors, including the actions and teachings of the leaders of color whose

voices have been largely erased can help make this clear. This clarity and the ability to see the liberatory charge of our heritage should be the basis of activities.”

Centering Theology: A Conversation about Faith, Race, and Liberation, Part 1, by Rev. Dr. Sofia Betancourt

The following is excerpted from a workshop presentation at the 2018 General Assembly

I am aware that we have recently been gifted with deep reflections on the lived experiences of UUs of color, both lay and religious professionals, that we can engage as rich source material for theological exploration in the work of liberation. I am talking about *Centering: Navigating Race, Authenticity, and Power in Ministry*, which was one of our Common Read books this year, as well as *Unitarian Universalists of Color: Stories of Struggle, Courage, Love and Faith*. These two collections of writings on the lives of UUs of color offer important themes on the work of becoming more whole in our communities of faith. I hope we will take [James] Cone’s liberatory method seriously and begin re-engaging our living tradition with new voices at the center as we move forward.

But as my example, I am going to engage another sacred text. This is from a sermon by Paloma Callo, one of our fierce youth who participated in the UUA’s Summer Seminary program in 2016. I had the privilege of hearing her and other youth preach at the First Unitarian Church of Oakland that summer, and her words still resonate with me today because they speak to the kind of method that Cone asks of us, with the lived experience of a youth of color moving into her own leadership and authority in our beloved communities. Paloma’s sermon describes us as a whole, healing, and broken people... also as a whole, healing, and broken faith, and as a whole, healing, and broken world. And she asks, “How do I inherit this broken world with grace?” As she talks about the work of finding place in our religious communities and in our structures of leadership, she also asks us to call into the center of voices of authority those who are already here among us but whose youth voices, queer voices, trans, and gender-nonconforming voices, or voices of color are not given room to tell their full stories. I would add lived experiences of disability and various class identities to this list, among others.

Paloma calls us to be sanctuaries where telling our full stories, and engaging one another’s healing and one another’s pain can guide us into a new way of being. She insists that “only when we come to bear witness to the cracked and shattered pieces can we begin to help heal what has been broken.” Drawing on Paloma’s voice leads me to say that our first Principle calls us to learn a language of resilience and liberation in response to the pain of this world we have inherited, so that we might find wholeness and grace in our brokenness. A Universalist theology of liberation in the present day centers our capacity to be sanctuaries of radical truth telling and abundant compassion so that the all-embracing love at the center of our tradition can serve to make all of us more whole.

I wonder what symbols, messages, Principles, or experiences are most central to your deep understanding of Unitarian Universalism? During World War II, the flaming chalice promised protection on the journey toward freedom. What does this symbol offer to the liberation of those most driven to the margins of Unitarian Universalism today?

Centering Theology: A Conversation About Faith, Race, and Liberation, Part 4, by Dr. Elías Ortega

The following is excerpted from a theological presentation at the 2018 General Assembly

If we believe in collective salvation, we must also believe in collective sacrifice. It is powerful that our faith community is working to reclaim this sacred practice... and claiming what is meant to be sacred in personal sacrifice without the power of we is the very thing that desecrates the practice.

That belief in collective salvation means there cannot be small groups of UUs whose personal sacrifice we depend on every time to move us forward as a collective whole. That kind of hierarchical membership undermines the very inherent worth and dignity that we lift in our first Principle. Living into the Power of We [the theme of the 2019 General Assembly] holds us accountable to repairing the legacy of theological harm we have perpetrated against some in our community.... Even in the face of oppression, suffering, and the legacy of white supremacy culture in the world, we believe that there is a way forward. We aspire to transform and be transformed by love and justice, and to take a cue from disability justice activist Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, who details how often we draw resources for resistance from systemic oppression. To affirm the Power of We as a faith community,

we need to strengthen ways for our people to draw nourishment and strength from this faith. We must fashion ourselves into a faithful people who draw wisdom from our inherited tradition. This is not an individual task but a collective practice.

Recommendation

Re-engaging with our theological legacy and its use today will both ground our efforts to welcome all who are drawn to our faith and provide resources for resilience for Unitarian Universalists in these difficult times.

The idea that “you can believe anything you want and be a Unitarian Universalist” is not valid. We have a theological container within which one can hold a wide range of beliefs about God, about how to practice one’s faith, and about how to live. Because we live at the intersection of multiple traditions, defining this container is essential. Because much of the preserved theological work is from white theologians and scholars, we also need to re-engage that work through contemporary lenses.

- **Action:** Center the theological work of Black scholars, Indigenous scholars, and scholars of color, both professional and lay, whose knowledge is resonant for our times.
- **Action:** Provide more resources for lay leaders who wish to engage in theological conversation.
- **Action:** Equip our theological schools to engage in the work of continued education.
- **Action:** Form collaboration between our theological schools, Association of congregations, and professional associations to develop resources for professionally applicable theological training.

Recommendation

Reinterpretation of our theological legacies in these times should be liberatory and articulate our commitment to affirming and welcoming those who have been marginalized in our larger society and within our communities and organizations.

As we stated in our blog post of September 18, 2019, our analysis suggests we need to articulate a theology of liberation, experimentation, and innovation grounded in our Unitarian Universalist Principles and Sources of inspiration. Developing a shared theology that centers on helping to unearth, manifest, and point the way toward liberation along with experimentation that strives for our collective flourishing. This theology will also call us to be accountable to the legacies of our past deeds and to work for an equitable future. This will lay the groundwork for our work around truth, transformation, and reparations. [9]

Author, scholar, and teacher Sharon Welch notes that from an ethical perspective, we are called to liberate ourselves from bias, stating that a theology of liberation frees us from not seeing bias or privileged systems and allows us to see the threats of white violence.

Attendance and participation at the 2019 Harper-Jordan Symposium sponsored by Black Lives of UU (BLUU) Collaborative speaks to the hunger for these kinds of opportunities. Registration for this event surpassed BLUU’s expectations, with religious professionals and lay people alike in attendance. A liberatory interpretation of our theology, such as that articulated at the BLUU symposium, will yield joyous, exuberant, and emotion-affirming worship and faith development.

We must also acknowledge the gradual disinvestment in our future as our two remaining theological schools face waning financial resources. Reestablishing such funding would acknowledge the importance of theological development within a Unitarian Universalist context; funding should be directed toward those scholars doing work in these fields, especially with a liberatory lens and is important because of the financial struggles of our remaining Unitarian Universalist schools. Such revitalized schools could also aid in continuing education. With new technologies, webinars, short courses, and seminars will be a source of revenue for theological schools and a joint venture between those with the greatest degree of Unitarian Universalist scholarship should be explored.

- **Action:** Resource multigenerational efforts within Black/Indigenous/people of color communities to develop rituals of healing and other worship materials to be used in congregations, regions, and national gatherings.
- **Action:** Direct resources toward UU theological schools and scholars engaged in theological exploration focused on an understanding of the need for the affirmation and protection of all.
- **Action:** Provide ministers, religious educators, and other religious professionals with access to continuing education that helps them take in and teach new theological concepts.

Recommendation

Acknowledgment of anti-oppression work as a theological mandate is essential. We need to resurrect, research, document, and teach the words of Black people, Indigenous people, people of color, LGBTQ individuals, women, and others who have been largely lost though their presence has been with us throughout history. These constitute a valuable tool for our times.

With the growing number of children of color and multiracial children in our nation, this becomes more critical since observing one's own identity mirrored in community leadership is essential to keeping people involved.

We call on individual white Unitarian Universalists to engage in deep spiritual discernment, including engagement with our need to examine the dominant white-centered culture of our congregations.

- **Action:** Further incorporate and reclaim accounts of Universalist, Unitarian, and Unitarian Universalist leaders of color and Indigenous descent in Tapestry of Faith resources to serve a more diverse children and youth population.
- **Action:** Encourage collaboration between the Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association, Association for Unitarian Universalist Music Ministries, and Liberal Religious Educators Association on a virtual library of resources for liberatory worship anchored in cross-cultural competency.
- **Action:** Develop standards for ethical cross-cultural uses of worship materials from other traditions, and those previously developed by the Council for Cross-Cultural Engagement should be updated and discussed by religious professional associations.

Recommendation

Education about the covenantal nature of our faith will allow communities to support and nurture one another as the overall US climate becomes more hostile to and disinterested in a life of faith.

Returning to the practice of honoring covenant is essential in the world in which we find ourselves. The divisions between generations, between economic levels, and between people of different races, ethnicities, abilities, sexual orientations, and gender identities are unprecedented. If we remember that we are a covenantal faith, we have a better chance of surviving the changing perceptions and attitudes about religion and faith in our nation.

- **Action:** Provide support from regions to prioritize developing congregational covenants tied to mission and goals and including aspirations for equity, inclusion, and diversity.
- **Action:** Spread promising practices around addressing disruptive people and microaggressions as a barrier to covenantal community.
- **Action:** Develop resources for training on engagement with, rather than avoidance of, conflict as a part of change and transformation.

Take-aways

- Our faith traditions as Unitarians and Universalists require us to address equity, inclusion, and diversity issues.
- *Faith* and *covenant* are not dirty words.
- If freedom and individualism are our most important values, we have little to offer in these times.
- These times require a liberatory faith that invites us each into the spiritual work of empathy and healing.
- Justice making is not a substitute for a coherent theology, and faithful justice making requires a liberatory theology.
- An articulation of what is commonly believed among us need not result in a creedal test for membership or involvement in our communities.
- Too many Unitarian Universalists do not know what saving and liberatory truths can be found within their faith tradition.
- We need to put greater emphasis on what it means to be bound to one another in an interdependent web and in keeping with our covenantal tradition.
- A greater emphasis on the theological basis for our work for diversity, equity, and inclusion will help us to make decisions about the forms of this work most appropriate for our individual and shared faith lives.

* It is important to recognize that faith traditions are rarely singular. Multiple sources inspire, give shape, and help spur innovation through the people who practice them.

Governance

“I just want to be personal tonight because I come from a Black people for four hundred years terrorized, traumatized, stigmatized, but the best of our tradition is what? Generating the love supreme of a John Coltrane, the love ethic of a Martin Luther King Jr., the love sensibility of a Frederick Douglass and an Ida B. Wells-Barnett, and in the music of a Stevie Wonder. What is it about these people that in the face of being terrorized, they continuously dish the love? That’s partly what Charleston is all about. Those folk don’t come from the sky. They come out of a tradition, fundamentally committed to love in the end, no matter what the situation is.”

—Dr. Cornel West, 2015 Ware Lecture

“In truth, the simple, transparent, potent idea of the free church has had to be, time and time and time again, reconceived, reconstructed in human imagination, from memories of the tradition so obscured, or twisted and bent out of shape over time, as to be—sometimes—almost gone from the world.”

—Rev. Alice Blair Wesley, 2000 Minns Lecture

Background and Trends

When we talk about governance, we are talking about power. When we talk about power combined with prejudice and the centering of the dominant group and their ways of being and doing, we are talking about oppression.

And we know this: our Association is paying the price for not having consistently addressed the structural oppression built into our systems. Our Association’s governance system, devised as part of a politicized compromise when the American Unitarian Association and the Universalist Church of America consolidated, is complex. While in other times this might have been frustrating, in a time when congregationally based forms of religious life are growing more expensive and less attractive to new generations, this will hinder our faith’s ability to be agile. Simply filling the positions needed to make our governance system run has become more and more difficult in these conflictual times. A partially completed move toward regionalization has hindered the efficacy of our governance. As a result, we have an overly complex and confusing system that prioritizes checks and balances over shared work toward mission.

Agility, flexibility, and innovation, along with a clear focus on mission, will be an important aspect of faith-based organizations that hope to survive the rapidly changing religious landscape in the United States. [11] As we heard from the many who have abandoned our faith as lay or professional leaders because of our inability to articulate and implement a faith-based approach to our anti-oppression work, we are losing resources vital to the continuation of Unitarian Universalist communities.

Numerous studies have talked about the ways in which our Association’s structure has evolved, sometimes without intention, over time:

- “Leadership [within the Universalist Church of America] was geographically scattered, with inadequate communication, and often working with overlapping job descriptions and goals. Occasional efforts to centralize and streamline Universalist governance floundered on inadequate financial support or fear of concentrating authority in one person or group.... The decline of Universalism had alarmed many to the point of calls for greater central authority and responsibility.” [12]
- “The American Unitarian Association (AUA) had a modest bureaucratic organization that relied on central authority and control of its staff to accomplish its mission. In 1865, a national convention of Unitarian churches founded the National Conference of Unitarian and Other Christian Churches as a forum for consultation and denominational policy making. Over sixty years, the bureaucratic organization came to be recognized as the central ecclesiastical body as well, thereby establishing a strong center that benefited the denomination.” [13]
- “Excellence requires a system-wide commitment to continuing education and thoughtful training. At present, delegates and the congregations that authorize their attendance at GA have no requirements regarding preparation. There is no serious intent to understand the business coming before the plenary body, much less to debate the issues in a congregational setting.” [14]

- “Over the years, General Assemblies have assumed many more purposes than the conduct of Association business. There is little clarity or consensus about what constitutes the business of the Association, what policies carry out its purposes, and how a General Assembly directs and controls its affairs. It is questionable how well the delegate body represents and is accountable to member congregations.” [15]

This structure amplifies tensions and problems among groups and also allows issues such as the need for consistent anti-oppressive work to bounce from one body to another. The perception that we are having the same conversation over and over again may have validity because it can be difficult to resolve issues or make progress.

We were interested that a constellation of the submitted testimonies mentioned a need for Unitarian Universalists to study our polity again. Without explicit articulation, perhaps as part of the bylaws-mandated reviews, we have developed a mythology about how we are governed that claims the complete autonomy of both congregations and individuals within congregations. This is not what the Cambridge Platform, upon which our polity is based, states.

As one observer put it,

It seems like we as a denomination have to relearn the Cambridge Platform and understand that our congregational polity does not allow us to just do whatever we want. That there is a relationship between each congregation and the larger movement... and this idea that the UUA can't tell us what to do is bologna. We are in a voluntary relationship with each other and [the UUA] doesn't have to tell us what to do, but then maybe we shouldn't be a UU church anymore if we aren't willing to commit to things and work together.

And another:

We have to come to an understanding of the word polity. And our kind of clinging to the word polity [to mean] each congregation can do whatever it wants. They can call the ministers it wants and whatever... There is such a hardcore individualism that even colors the way we think about polity, which is a little bit more about the individuals coming into and being accountable and in collaboration with the other individual congregations; that's actually what polity was supposed to do.

We are also past due for a restatement of what is “commonly believed among us” and that articulation should recognize both the interdependence that climate change has brought into stark relief and the need for continued work to repair the frictions and fractions amid the human family.

In an increasingly competitive nonprofit environment, the organizations that are going to thrive are those that have a clear sense of mission. The UUA defined its operational mission in 2018 and will engage in a wider mission and goals process pending this report. Critical to moving forth will be meaningful engagement with congregations.

In addition, volunteerism patterns are shifting with fewer people giving more hours. [16] Many congregations and other UU organizations at the Associational and other levels have encountered increased problems as younger volunteers are less likely to take on longer-term institutional commitments. This is problematic as they have more experience within settings that are multicultural or committed to those values and are critical to addressing the oppression within our systems.

Recommendations about UUA Bylaws, from VISIONS, Inc.

The consultants who reviewed the UUA Bylaws recommended attention to these areas:

1. Section C-13.4. Autonomy. Each district or region shall be autonomous and shall be controlled by its own member congregations to the extent consistent with the promotion of the welfare and interests of the Association as a whole and of its member congregations; How does UUA define ‘consistent with the welfare and interests of the Association’? Is this a place to emphasize that the welfare and interests are including a more explicit move towards dismantling systems of power and privilege?
2. Inclusion bylaw—how does the UUA interpret this? Might acknowledging inequity, white supremacy culture and addressing it be added here?

1. If congregations do not adhere to the inclusion bylaw, what might be a consequence?
 3. Line 137—Associate membership consideration— board may adopt rules for this; is this an opportunity to be clear about what additional inclusion and equity should look like if wanting to be accepted?
 4. Additional option to include the following:
 1. One potential issue with adding diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) statements in the Bylaws is the possible need for changes to the Bylaws to be reported to an outside (state) state agency. While bylaws can be changed, it is likely that statements reflecting the evolving DEI issues and concerns will change more frequently. As a result, it may be more utilitarian to create a policy related to DEI, then refer to the separate policy from the bylaws. Such a reference could include:

The UUA and the Board are committed to incorporating the values of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in the governance and operations of this corporation. These values are (or shall be) included in a DEI policy adopted by the Board (NEO Law Group. August 2018).

Professional Associations Lauded for Promising Practice, from VISIONS, Inc.

The VISIONS report lauded the language of inclusion in the LREDA and UUMA bylaws, which reflect a diversity, equity, and inclusion lens and commitment to countering oppression.

- **Liberal Religious Education Bylaws**—Note: Named in its preamble is the commitment to antiracism and there are several places accounting for the impact of structural ‘isms’; it might be consistent to add in its purpose section how the commitment to antiracism might be manifest; for example, wouldn’t accounting for structurally racist obstacles (recruiting and admission, needed changes in curriculum, etc.) that currently exist in the education process be considered furthering ‘the interest of quality liberal religious education?’ It also might be useful to explicitly state that LREDA is leading UUA in learning about and addressing the impact of white supremacy culture on the UUA as a whole and on the communities you serve.
- **Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association**—*The UUMA Guidelines* do not appear to have statements that reflect an intention/commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion or an anti-oppression approach; focus group data spoke to the significant need for addressing white supremacy culture and developing an anti-oppression lens in a more active way by many in the UUA, the need for this being addressed in practice and in language is important.

The Bylaws and Constitution of the Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association did have relevant language and additions that covered anti-oppression intention and practices:

- ARTICLE 1—MISSION AND VISION, Section 1:
The mission of the UUMA is to nurture excellence in ministry through collegiality, continuing education and collaboration and shared commitment to antiracist, anti-oppressive, multicultural practice.

While the *UUA Governance Manual* document *Global Governance Commitment (Government Process): UUA Governance Manual Section Three* is more general and does not have language that reflects an equity lens nor connects to anti-oppression intentionality and commitment, the sub-document *UUA G 1.0 Ends for the UUA: Governance Manual Section* clearly and adequately covers it.

Restructuring the Moderator and President Positions, by the Commission on Governance

The following is from “The Final Report of the Commission on Governance of the Unitarian Universalist Association” (April 24, 1993).

Viewed historically, the most dramatic departure we could take in altering our governance would be to alter greatly the role of the President; removing from that position the direct implementation of program, and combining the position with the role of moderator. It would be dramatic because the Unitarian model of a strong Presidency has dominated the 20 th century like no other aspect of our governance.

What impact would such a change have on the Board? The advocates of the combined President/Moderator role proposed in 1990 have argued that such an approach would create a hired staff leader and program implementer who was more directly accountable to the Board; that would free up the new elected President/Moderator position to concentrate on vision, Board leadership, policy-making, and public roles.

The Commission on Governance Recommendations

- *Recommendation 1:* Combining the President and Moderator into a single elected office, President.
- *Recommendation 2:* Board-appointed Executive Director to be the chief executive officer, directly accountable to the Board of Trustees.
- *Recommendation 4:* A new Standing Presidential Nominating Committee
- *Recommendation 6:* The Board elects its own chair through a suitable process of its own design.
- *Recommendation 10:* Current “working groups” of the Board periodically and systematically evaluated.

All recommendations from the Final Report of the UUA’s Commission on Governance warrant consideration and can be accessed as a PDF included in the [UUA Board of Trustees October 2014 Packet](#)

We Are Not Alone in This Work

- [*Presbyterian Church \(USA\) Committee on Racism, Truth, and Reconciliation*](#)

The Special Committee on Racism Truth and Reconciliation was created by the 222nd General Assembly (2016) as a special commission and reconstituted as a special committee by the 223rd General Assembly (2018).

Despite the commitment of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to dismantle racism, racism still exists even within the church’s own structures. This is not for the lack of policies, reports, strategies, anti-racism training, cultural proficiency workshops, and actions to disrupt white supremacy culture. The work and struggle against the sin of racism must continue so that we can be faithful to God’s intention for the church and for humanity.

- [*The Episcopal Church*](#)

The Context

- Rooted in The Jesus Movement: The ongoing community of people centered on following Jesus into loving, liberating, life-giving relationship with God (evangelism), with each other (reconciliation), and with creation (environmental stewardship);
- Called forth by General Convention Resolution C019 (Establish Response to Systemic Injustice);
- • Crafted by the leaders of the House of Bishops and House of Deputies—Presiding Bishop Michael Curry, House of Deputies President Gay Clark Jennings, House of Bishops Vice President Mary Gray Reeves and (now former Vice President) Dean Wolfe, and House of Deputies Vice President Byron Rushing and Secretary Michael Barlowe—with staff and many partners;
- Frames a multi-year journey as part of a long-term, multi-generation commitment
- Moves beyond the United States and beyond black and white, to consider racism in many nations, among many races, ethnicities and cultures;
- Deploys \$2 million allocated by General Convention, along with other resources
- Designed to support, complement, and amplify local, diocesan, provincial and network efforts.

The Long-Term Commitment

Becoming Beloved Community represents not so much a set of programs as a journey, a set of interrelated commitments around which Episcopalians may organize our many efforts to respond to racial injustice and grow a community of reconcilers, justice-makers, and healers. The labyrinth may be an even more useful image for engaging the vision. On the road toward reconciliation and healing, we move around corners and double back into quadrants we have visited before, each time discovering new revelation and challenge.

- [*Disciples of Christ Reconciliation Ministry*](#)

We seek to become an anti-racist, multi-cultural region that is a fully inclusive, transformed church, where racial and cultural differences are seen as assets. Reconciliation Ministry is a ministry of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). Its aim is the formation of leadership to facilitate the long-term process of collective identity transformation within the Disciples community. Although its ministry focuses on the eradication of systemic racism, it is clear that this task cannot be accomplished without the transformation of individual lives and the fostering of dialogue among people. The mission of Reconciliation is to nurture the wholeness of the church by dismantling systemic racism and other oppressive structures toward becoming a church that demonstrates true community, deep Christian spirituality, and passion for

justice. This ministry is accomplished through organizing, education, and advocacy.

The Mid-America Region Anti-Racism/Pro-Reconciliation (AR/PR) Team was formed in 1999. The team has led presentations and workshops at congregations throughout the Region including Assemblies, Elder Institutes, regional youth events, African American Convocation, Racial Justice summits, regional board meetings and in congregations!

The team's first Regional Training event was held in April 2006. There, a large number of those who attended formed their own area interest groups that have contributed to our Regional Training model. Mid-America presently offers AR/PR 1.0 which focuses on naming and educating on systemic racism and inequities, AR/PR 2.0 which takes next steps in organizing and activism, and soon AR/PR 3.0 which will focus on Intersectionality.

Informal Structures Privilege Those in Power

The Commission on Institutional Change published this blog post on April 25, 2019.

In our work as the Commission on Institutional Change, we have found that an area in need of analysis is that of over-reliance on informal structures to carry out governance work, whether at the local, regional, or denominational level. Informal structures rely on social relationships and thus tend to privilege people from the dominant culture in a community or organization. In the interest of not being “bureaucratic,” we leave structures informal because “we all know and trust one another.”

Informal structures also sometimes bypass adopted procedures, ratified policies, and accepted governance agreements. Personal relationships are central to the work of organizations yet should not be used instead of sound governance structures. When informal structures are prioritized, the end result is that those in power benefit from decision-making processes and arrangements that not only benefit their perspectives but also are taken to be normal practices.

As we seek to add more and diverse voices into leadership among us, reliance on informal structures can mean that new people cannot figure out how to contribute. If the way to get something done is to know the “right” people, then this can perpetuate a narrower circle of leadership.

Informal structures create opportunities for hurt, discrimination, incomplete recounting of institutional history, and can result in selective institutional memory. They fall short of our commitments to justice, equity, and compassion among us as well as our commitment to democratic processes. When used as the predominant way of operating, informal structures undermine the mission, goals, and work of organizations.

They also create difficulties when working toward transformation because they are taken to be part of the system in and of themselves; thus, they are not seen for what they really are, shortcuts to right governance. One sign of an informal structure can be when someone says the process or policy is not written down because “that is the way we have always done it.”

Sometimes organizations have policies written however that are not followed, replaced instead by informal agreements. When problems arise due to these informal structures, the first instinct of folks involved in and responsible for the concerns and conflicts is most often to call for a change of policies and structures, instead of addressing their own sidestepping of agreements, which opened the path to the problems they face. In many cases, an analysis of whether or not policies and procedures in place were actually followed is warranted before calling for their suspension and revision.

Our point here is not to suggest that having governance based on written policies and more formal decision making is a panacea. Policies need to be tended to, regularly reviewed, and revised and modified in consideration of an organization's evolving goals, mission, strategy, and stakeholders.

Structures are necessary ingredients of an organization's life. Whether we operate within a local organization, a congregation, or our work unfolds within a larger institution at one of the various ways to be engaged in denominational level work, our work takes place within structures. Structures set parameters for the work to be done within institutions. Organizational structures delineate the particular arrangements of authority and act as guides for how decisions are made.

In addition, structures determine the flow of information and power between the various levels of management. It is important that an organization has clearly defined objectives as well as strategies to meet those objectives. The particular structures that give shape to the institution's work flow out of its stated objectives and strategies.

Recommendation

The Board of Trustees and the president of the Association should articulate clear goals, plans, and measures toward a liberatory Unitarian Universalism for our times.

Our conversations, convenings, and input from more than a thousand Unitarian Universalists suggest that Unitarian Universalism must address the systemic racism within its system. The vast majority of those who responded to our call cannot live our faith without a commitment to multicultural and anti-bias practices now common in most corporate, governmental, and nonprofit workplaces. In a tradition with a first Principle affirming the inherent worth and dignity of all people, we have not articulated this explicitly as part of a statement and goals for a Unitarian Universalism that would liberate all from the weight of oppressive behaviors and structures. The Unitarian Universalist Association is required to reexamine Article 2, which states what is commonly believed among us, every decade. In 2018, the UUA Board initiated this process, but it has not been completed.

Oppressive systems and practices limit all, though the burden is borne disproportionately by those seen as less capable or important to the system because of biased impressions. Unitarian Universalism will be freed of this burden if we are able to clearly say that our goal is to create a Unitarian Universalism that can welcome the questions, gifts, and talents of all who are attracted by this faith tradition. The recommendations in this report create the framework for a plan that, if combined with measurable outcomes, could provide the architecture for a path forward.

Clear and accountable goals are the objective. As one focus group participant put it,

Younger generations of ministers are here, and it's not only our... biological age, but we're coming into ministry now and we've been in other careers and fields, and there's this desire to make us more accountable to congregations, to each other, and to the larger movement.

- **Action:** Review the regional system to see which regions are working well and address those that are not, as this structure is critical to efforts to spread best practices of diversity, equity, and inclusion.
- **Action:** Complete the Article II review as mandated by the UUA bylaws with the call for diversity, equity, and inclusion as a lens used.

- **Action:** Adopt an implementation plan toward the areas of this report with annual targets and outcomes through 2025, with an annual review of progress toward these goals, with these goals reported at General Assembly and to the congregations.
- **Action:** Articulate the tools for power analysis that enable leaders to understand and rebalance power at all levels of Unitarian Universalism. Build on the existing work of the Unitarian Universalist Association's Board of Trustees and develop a methodology that can be used at all levels of Unitarian Universalism.

Fifth Principle Project

In our research, we frequently heard the call for reform of our largest governing body, the General Assembly, particularly in regard to the unequal access to decision making that our current structure perpetuates. The Fifth Principle Task Force Report to the UUA Board of Trustees in December 2009 lays out in detail many of the challenges and potential remedies to this issue. The Task Force reports,

We have focused our meetings and this report on governance, because it is at once the primary purpose of GA and is dramatically broken. Four points buttress this contention of brokenness: GA is not really democratic in that delegates are neither representative of their congregations, other than being members, nor are they accountable to them; without subsidization of delegates, GA is economically discriminatory, and therefore generationally discriminatory; as long as GA continues as an annual event, its cost is a heavy burden to the Association and the member congregations; the GA process is not in alignment with the Board's embrace of policy governance.

The report continues,

The future of our UU movement can ill-afford to continue the ways of faux democracy and unaccountable representation that have characterized Associational governance, including the content and process of General Assembly. The Task Force believes that the status quo for General Assembly is not an option. We believe our recommendations lay out a vision for effective governance that reflects core values of our liberal faith and the imperative for bringing the leadership of member congregations and our Association together in mutually accountable relationship around matters of greatest importance to the present and future vitality of our UU movement.

The report recommends a fully sponsored, biennial delegate assembly and details the values that informed its recommendation: economic accessibility and sustainability; empowered delegates authorized to represent congregations; excellence in governance; excellence in shared leadership and ministry; multigenerational participation and decision making; and awareness and inclusiveness of antiracism/antiracist/ multicultural concerns (AR/AO/MC).

We would place particular emphasis on economic accessibility, multi-generational participation, and decision making, as well as awareness and inclusiveness of AR/AO/MC concerns as being vital to all potential governance reforms of the Association. We recommend that the Board of Trustees revisit the findings of the Fifth Principle Task Force as part of a broader governance reform agenda. You can read the [Fifth Principle Task Force report \(PDF\)](#).

Nominating Committees as Agents of Change

In the effort to bring about the Beloved Community, we often err on the side of the individual as the primary agent of change over and against systemic change. Motivated by the belief that if we, as individuals, are not racist, sexist, ableist, homophobic, biphobic, or transphobic and are willing to recognize the ways in which the accumulation of privilege for some depends on the marginalization of others, then the work of dismantling white supremacy culture is well under way.

Open hearts and minds, loving kindness, faithful fellowship, and our commitment as individual Unitarian Universalists to promote and affirm our inherent worth and dignity are indeed invaluable. Yet individual efforts do not guarantee the Beloved Community. For this, we need hard and committed work that engages the individual as well as soberly addressing the institutional dimensions of the work.

We need to keep in mind that individual Unitarian Universalists do not operate in a vacuum, but rather in institutional and cultural contexts. Our cultural context provides us with unconscious learning about who is valued and who should be heard, and undoing these is key to our survival and ability to welcome and be inclusive in our faith.

Just as institutional well-being can provide for the structure that supports our best intentions, dysfunction in our institutional structure can leave Unitarian Universalism unable to accomplish its transformational ministry in the world. Institutional structural well-being is also imperative in order to accomplish any task that requires a commitment over time—and unlearning a preference for white, male, heteronormative, cisnormative, ableist leadership is a change that requires a commitment over the long haul. Without these, new forms of leadership cannot thrive.

Our commitment to growth, learning, and institutional change requires a commitment to leadership development and support. Many of our institutional structures will be challenged to set clear goals and cast an expansive path as we journey toward the Unitarian Universalism of the future.

While many of our congregations and institutions may choose to experiment with new and different organizational structures, some basic mechanisms help ensure that institutions may always need to organize themselves in order to get things done. These mechanisms require regular maintenance to ensure their efficiency and to promote shared leadership. Key among these are mechanisms for leadership development and conscious cultivation through key structures such as nominating committees.

Nominating committees play a key role at all levels: in congregations, in the Association, and in Unitarian Universalist professional associations, camps, and conference centers. These committees determine whom we call into leadership and how they understand their commitments to work toward justice and equity. These are fundamental areas of concern during this time. We need to capture the learnings of our recent history and use them to carry our movement forward. We cannot afford another failed opportunity to transform who we currently are into the arc of who we need to be as a faith community.

When a Unitarian Universalist community has taken on the task of developing language, long-term goals, and a justice and equity informed mission, it is important not to lose momentum. It's easier to stay the course when we guide people into leadership who share the commitment to institutional change and are well supported in this goal.

Nominating committee members themselves should understand that their assignment to bring forward qualified candidates for leadership roles in our congregations and institutions means that they must commit to challenging systems of oppression with the choices that they make. They should see themselves as a part of the process of change making. If we wish for leaders who can help design more equitable systems, nominating committees should choose committee members with clear training, experience, and background in counter-oppression work and ministry. There should also be an effort to create onboarding practices that identify, develop, and equip potential nominating committee members to promote progressive organizational structures.

Informed and committed nominating committees can lay the groundwork to desegregate congregational leadership by expanding leadership diversity in historically marginalized areas like age, race, class, gender, sexual orientation, ability, and ethnicity. They can prepare members of our institutions and congregations to lead into the future by making it clear what particular education and experiences are required for Unitarian Universalist leadership, and by engaging leaders in conversations that lead to a shared systemic common analysis of Unitarian Universalist culture.

This expansion should not come about by tokenism. Sustainable and transformative change will come with transparency, open processes, understanding of roles and responsibilities, training and support, evaluations and assessments, required programs and experiences to prepare for leadership, time for study and reflection, and goal setting.

Our Unitarian Universalist belief in democracy is not based on a belief in “political democracy” alone. Our understanding of democracy is articulated in our theological belief that our congregations are places where all are entitled to be informed about and take part in governance and where we are each able to use our reason and our conscience to make decisions to support our community of faith. Furthermore, our understanding of democracy will be strengthened by the embrace of equity models in our living together. Who should lead Unitarian Universalism into its future? Maybe it should be you?

Ten years ago, a task force prepared a report for the UUA Board of Trustees about this. We would encourage all of you to read the [Fifth Principle Task Force report \(PDF\)](#).

Recommendation

Governance within the Association needs streamlining, as outdated and duplicative structures exist. The unnecessary complexity of the current Unitarian Universalist governance structures is biased toward the more privileged, who have the time and resources for extensive volunteerism.

In contrast to local and regional groups, which often operate too informally, there are too many Unitarian Universalist organizations with overly complicated leadership structures, which makes needed change difficult and slow. The UUA has too many organizations with disparate leadership, which makes the kind of change needed difficult and slow. Consolidation of the many organizational structures would allow leaders to lead with the sort of agility needed in these times of rapid change. An assessment of the number of committees and groups should be conducted as well as an assessment of the number of bodies with independent boards, as all of this results in fragmentation. The separate elections of a president and a moderator, for example, have allowed difficult issues such as work to build a more equitable, inclusive, and diverse Association to be passed around among different accountabilities.

Why does this hinder our attempts to be more equitable, inclusive, and diverse? Because each organization and structure can choose or not choose to invest in the anti-oppression work critical to meeting contemporary standards, and that makes service in the larger Unitarian Universalist frame a morass of aggressions and inconsistencies for leaders who are Black, Indigenous, people of color, or from other underrepresented groups. People of color and other marginalized people among us are often called to serve in a variety of capacities in the interest of diversity. Encountering different standards or a lack of multicultural competence in organizations promoting UU values is one of the leading reasons Black people, Indigenous people, and people of color leave Unitarian Universalism.

Many religious associations do not have separate governing boards for every kind of professional group, for the international justice arm, or for the local structures for justice or cluster work. All of these levels and separate organizations mean that each one of these organizations is a separate set of decisions or nondecisions around anti-oppression work. The result is that Black people, Indigenous people, people of color, and other marginalized peoples can experience harm at a variety of levels if a particular entity has not yet committed attention and resources to more intentional practices. Any ongoing working agreement with affiliate organizations should include a commitment to prevent racial harm.

In addition, in an era of scarce dollars for the work of our faith, we have outdated structures that can be retooled to focus more sharply on what is needed today. A more pertinent—and painful—example for the purposes of the Commission’s work is the

Journey Toward Wholeness Transformation Committee (JTWTC), which was put into place as part of the anti-oppression work of the 1990s and has continued on though the funding for training and other accountability measures once built into Associational practices are long unfunded.

Though the JTWTC has continued to attract dedicated proponents of anti-oppression work, its role is no longer clear. This is a waste of the talents and time of very dedicated people.

Collaborative effort could be more efficient and effective. A model for this is the Common Code of Ethics, which is currently being discussed among the professional associations.

In other areas we have huge gaps. A tragic and indefensible fact is that we have not reinstated a national youth leadership program or young adult program. While leadership and spiritual development programs for these groups do exist on a smaller scale, no national umbrella or unified programmatic approach for UUA youth or young adult programs has existed for more than ten years. These programs have been critical to supporting youth and young adults of color and to building the anti-oppression skills of white youth. Youth and young adults are already more expert than older members of our community on what it means to live in an increasingly diverse and multicultural world, and their leadership is essential to our continued work.

- **Action:** Reexamine the current governance structure and identify changes that will allow a more agile and flexible structure that can meet the challenges of a rapidly changing religious landscape. The review should include a reexamination of the recommendations around the roles of the president and the moderator that were contained in the 1993 report by the Commission on Governance, chaired by Rev. Dr. Wayne Arnason.
- **Action:** Form an alliance of UU organizations, including professional associations and affiliated groups, committed to creating equitable, inclusive, and diverse practices to allow learning, collaboration, and development of a common set of standards.
- **Action:** Establish covenantal agreements with affiliate organizations that also understand the need for accountability, adaptability, collaboration, faith grounding, and continued education toward equity, diversity, and inclusion.
- **Action:** Repurpose the resources of the JTWTC toward the anti-oppression goals of this report. (The JTWTC should not be disbanded *until* a new structure is approved.)
- **Action:** Provide an expanded opportunity for youth and young adult leadership development and programming at the Associational level, with a grounding in equity, inclusion, and diversity and responsive to the challenges these generations face today.

Recommendation

Misconceptions about the nature of our congregational polity should be addressed as they are used to empower individual ministers and lay leaders to maintain a stagnant and exclusionary status quo.

Most institutional forms of Unitarian Universalism are congregational, which means emphasis is on a white-dominated culture and institutional practices. These can be seen as the only right way of being together and do not allow space for those from other experiences to lend their leadership and gifts. Those who would call us to more fully live into a liberatory faith are often cited as troubled or troublesome.

Relationships within our faith communities should be respectful and supportive rather than grounded in a culture of critique and a bias toward gadflies and outliers. Too often we make decisions based on what generates the least conflict within the majority culture, and what allows conformity to continue. Tools for encouraging constructive conflict and understanding that our living tradition requires us to always be living into new ways of being are important.

- **Action:** Promote a more accurate understanding about what congregational polity is, especially its covenantal nature and its relationship with our belief in the inherent worth and dignity of people and their ability to participate in decision making through a values frame.
- **Action:** Audit leadership experiences, including online spaces tooled for accessibility across income levels, and make strategies for equity, inclusion, and diversity a part of these, as well as accurate information about the covenantal nature of congregational polity. Make practical education in anti-oppression work part of all UUA regional gatherings.
- **Action:** Incorporate principles of covenant into anti-oppression work across all UU organizations.

Take-aways

- While at the local and regional level, our structures can be too informal, perpetuating a club-like mentality of leadership, our overly complex governance system makes change difficult.
- Change, agility, and innovation are needed for Unitarian Universalism to survive.
- Black people, Indigenous people, and people of color encounter ignorance and aggression in many Unitarian Universalist organizations, and the lack of a common commitment to anti-oppression and multicultural work makes such service hazardous.
- We have a history of disbanding bodies and then not reinstating them, as happened with our continental youth and young adult programs. We must address this need.
- We need a congregational polity that serves us rather than blocks progress.
- We need covenantal understandings among all affiliated Unitarian Universalist organizations about the need for equality, inclusion, and diversity initiatives.
- We need to refocus the resources we have on critical areas of leadership that lead to more inclusive and equitable practices.

Lay Leader of Color Avatar

- Mallory Ramesh
- Board member of congregation
- age 35
- Indian
- queer
- social activist

I joined my local UU church after meeting some UUs at a Black Lives Matter rally after a local unarmed Black man was killed.

The UUs I met were members of a church in a nearby city, so I did some online research and picked my home church because they had information about becoming a Welcoming Congregation on their website.

After a couple of months of attending service and a book club, the minister asked me to join the Board. I thought this was kind of rushed. At the book club, I'd noticed that whenever any question about people of color came up, I was the one everybody turned to look at. I'm Indian. It was funny considering that my suggestion that we add pronouns to our nametags was dismissed by the woman heading the LGBTQ Council, even though I am also queer. I thought I could do some good as a Board member so I agreed. Despite reluctance by some established church leaders, we participated in the White Supremacy Teach-In, though even then, our involvement was limited to a single service and reflection.

At the following Board meeting, I inquired about how we planned to implement the recommendations from the Teach-in, adopting the eighth Principle and doing a church-wide racism audit. Our outgoing settled minister shut down the conversation and suggested it would be more appropriate to bring up the issue with our interim minister. When I did so at the following meeting, the interim minister said she wanted to wait until she'd gotten to know the congregation.

The next month, our interim said again that she wanted more time.

At the following meeting, the issue was pushed to the end of the agenda, and when another issue turned into a long discussion, the majority of the Board members decided it was too late to discuss anything else and voted to table the meeting.

Leading up to the next meeting, I wrote two emails to our Board secretary asking for the issue to be placed on the meeting agenda. Both emails were ignored before they finally responded to the third.

At the meeting, I decided to bring up my concerns with how the recommendations had been handled, especially considering that the adoption of a practice regarding environmental justice had passed easily and with no similar delays.

The Board secretary, a white woman, immediately centered herself and her own discomfort, framing the situation as an attack on herself by me. The issue was left unresolved at the end of the meeting. It was extremely uncomfortable for me.

During this period, my relationship with the Board members in question soured, and several church members engaged in a whisper campaign against me, seemingly targeting my social justice views, with one member joking that I had “issued a fatwa” against mentioning US presidents in sermons after I’d related complaints about an Independence Day reflection.

Unwilling to encounter this on Sunday mornings, I stopped attending. Though I finished my Board term,

I missed meetings. I dropped out of the book club and no longer attend anything at the congregation.

Congregations and Communities

“Indeed our survival and liberation depend upon our recognition of the truth when it is spoken and lived by the people. If we cannot recognize the truth, then it cannot liberate us from untruth. To know the truth is to appropriate it, for it is not mainly reflection and theory. Truth is divine action entering our lives and creating the human action of liberation.”

—attributed to James Cone, God of the Oppressed

“Church is a place where you get to practice what it means to be human.”

—attributed to James Luther Adams

“When your rage is choking you, it is best to say nothing.”

—Octavia E. Butler, Fledgling

Background and Trends

Many of our congregations are in trouble, with dwindling membership, participation, and financial contributions. A factor that contributes to this decline is our inability to address issues of inclusion, equity, and diversity. We start this section with two assertions: first, that real-time, face-to-face congregations matter, even with all the challenges to maintain them and in a time when “church-going” is less valued by many in younger generations. [17] Though we see how much can be accomplished virtually, we also see the value of face-to-face experiences, which are much more accessible, especially for those with limited technological skills and financial resources. And second, that we will also need to support alternative and often virtual communities in order to ensure the survival of communal associations, especially for younger Unitarian Universalists of color and those living in areas where less mainstream identities are less common.

As one of our first actions, the Commission on Institutional Change called upon the newly elected UUA president, Rev. Dr. Susan Frederick-Gray, to release an analysis of the decline of the number of congregations over the past decade.

This analysis served to underscore the importance of large-scale systemic change to ensure the survival of our faith tradition. An annual report of these numbers and the trends they mask (toward growth in certain regions or in congregations of a certain size) can help Unitarian Universalist leaders prevent us from going through the devolution experienced by mainstream and evangelical communities.

Reports continue to indicate that multicultural congregations are on the rise and that progressive-minded working-age adults expect the basic practices of equity, inclusion, and diversity that many of our congregations currently lack. [18]

And the testimonials collected show that congregations may not know about the experiences that people of color have within their walls because Black people, Indigenous people, and people of color have experienced a lack of safety when honest. Consider these excerpts from submitted testimony:

- “In a city that is predominantly people of color, your church did not have any speakers of color in 2017 (other than you). Your church had no interfaith or interracial services with actual Black people honoring Dr. King or Black History Month in 2017. For January (2018), instead of a service honoring Dr. King, your white minister will have a series of sermons on “other forms of discrimination.” You try to get the church to at least have guest musicians of color from time to time, but instead, an all-white band is hired without any suggestion to them to diversify on occasion.... Your church Board does not have a person of color or even someone from a multiracial family. The all-white Board is selected by an all-white nominating committee, which in turn selects the all-white Board, year after year. While at least two other UU churches in town display a Black Lives Matter banner, your church does not have plans or any timeline about openly or even

meekly or subtly expressing solidarity with thousands of people of color who drive past your church every day. When the Social Justice Committee raises the issue, they are told that the congregation needs to be eased into it over an indefinite period of time.”

- “I wish more of my people looked like me. For that reason, I fear that I may always feel a little bit like an outsider. I will explain it to you in the following way. It is quite obvious to me that the UU setting is a sanctuary for gay, lesbian, transgender, and bisexual people. It is not as obvious that it is for people of color.”
- “I am an African-American woman who has been a UU for over 30 years, much of it spent in leadership positions at the congregational, district, regional, and national levels. What is recounted here are instances of microaggressions at the local, regional, and national levels. Some examples: (1) The number of times white people clutched their purses closer when I sat next to them at General Assembly. (2) A retired UU professional who asked my advice about what I thought of a skit about *Driving Miss Daisy* as part of the entertainment for our stewardship campaign kickoff event. (The campaign’s theme was “Driving The Dream.”) (3) I have played a major role in our church’s annual auction for several years. During the entertainment portion of three auctions: a) a church leader played *Jump Jim Crow* on a banjo, along with other members of her family. When challenged she justified her actions on the basis of historical accuracy. I had to press the minister to intervene and mediate between us. b) During the bidding on a vacation in Puerto Rico, a member inquired about the capacity and another member shouted out—it was Puerto Rico, so there could be 22 to a room. c) At an auction themed around the 60s, there was no mention of Motown or any traditional aspect of black culture. (I was invited to participate in a parody of Aretha Franklin. The white singer asked to take the lead had the good sense to beg off.) 5) At my very first meeting of a now dissolved district board, a minister made a joke about 4/5 of a person. No one challenged him. During another district gathering involving a tour, a member of the host congregation who was acting as a docent asked me if I’d ever tried wearing a yoke that was being displayed. I left the premises. The professional leader spoke with the person, who cried. All of the other members of the gathering said nothing. 6) On my first visit to a Sunday Service at my church of nineteen years, I was met on the front deck by a member asking if she could help me. What she obviously meant was that I must be in the wrong place. I continue as a member of both a brick and mortar church and the CLF. I’m determined to sit at the table, and not below the salt! But, O, how I need the healing spaces provided by BLUU and other explicitly black or POC spaces to heal from these events. I could go on...”

Our Association needs to develop and support leadership that brings needed change, but more often than not, it is not easy for congregational leaders who wish to participate in efforts to make our congregations more diverse, inclusive, and equitable. Not only are these leaders asked to take on change—never popular among established groups—around one of the most tricky subjects in United States culture, racial tensions, but we have also asked them to do it without the 44Commission on Institutional Change consistent support of our Association. This is important because of the way our expectations are changing, as this focus group participant shared:

We’ve gone from focusing on diversity, just trying to get diverse people into the congregation, to inclusion, which is to find ways to, you know, welcome and include diverse people in our congregation, to a greater understanding: that it’s not enough to welcome people into our playgrounds, our congregation. We need to focus on racial equity and really, really seek out the voices of those who have not been present in our congregation, people from marginalized groups, especially in terms of race, and really begin to co-create with people from those marginalized groups to create a new kind of culture.

Rev. Dr. Gordon McKeeman, who served as president of Starr King School for the Ministry, was fond of pointing out to ministerial interns and student ministers that congregations are conservative by nature. Institutions, he would observe, exist to preserve traditions and customs. Institutional change, therefore, is inherently problematic. How can we invest in change to ensure more of our vital congregations survive? Our research suggests several areas for focus:

The culture of many congregations is not keeping pace with the expectations of new generations for anti-oppression practices. We believe that for Unitarian Universalism to survive as a faith movement, we must have reform at the congregational level. This will be some of our hardest work. Those who have long been entrenched in our congregations believe that this kind of work is not useful, is simply a form of political correctness, or is not of value for them. Longtime congregational leaders may not see the patterns of white privilege, institutional racism, and other oppressions that can be present in our congregations—and they may not see the ways that a changing world is asking that Unitarian Universalism be accountable to all the diversity of people in our congregations and communities.

It is urgent that we recognize that those among the newer generations and marginalized identities represented in Unitarian Universalism have begun to lose hope that our congregations will ever choose to change. These communities and individuals are therefore less willing to continue to give of their time, energy, resources, and emotional labor in order to do the work of teaching and leading for internal justice at the congregational level.

Because of the historical expansion of UU religious expression, followed by the eventual neglect of theological work within the UUA in the twentieth century, our congregations often have the characteristics of elite social clubs rather than of religious institutions. As a religious institution—and not a social club—we are bound in covenant to a set of beliefs and aspirations. Our inclusive, pluralist Principles allow individuals to find their own paths to truth within our Unitarian Universalist frame, yet often individuals do not see that our faith community is held together by a set of common, communal values. When individualism is not in balance with communal good, individualism can become toxic to our religious community. If we wish to preserve Unitarian, Universalist, and Unitarian Universalist traditions, our conversations and research suggest that our congregations must center themselves in the communal and covenantal and not primarily the comfort and familiarity of the social club. This change must be accomplished with some speed and agility.

This example from submitted testimony illustrates the tensions:

We have begun engaging in a process of visioning for our congregation. And one of the first actions [was] we gave everyone an... opportunity to write or draw or something, some part of where they hoped our congregation would go. And then people were given little blue stickers, two little dots, so that they could attach the dots to the things that they liked.... So one of the things that I wrote in that process was that I would like the congregation to commit itself to antiracism. And a lot of people wrote that they wanted to see the congregation become more diverse, and there were a lot of blue dots next to becoming more diverse. There were no blue dots next to becoming antiracist. Or maybe I said ending white supremacy culture.... How are we going to become more diverse, assuming that diverse means racially diverse, unless we commit ourselves to acting against racism? So it seems to me there's a disconnect there, and that might be a way of expressing that disconnect and therefore the struggle so that it's easier for someone to say, "Yeah, I want to diversify as long as I don't have to actually do anything to change myself, as long as the congregation doesn't have to change." And I suspect that's kind of a struggle that a lot of people are going through.

Unitarian Universalist Association member congregations must act both as independent bodies and in coordination, covenant, and communion with other congregations. The UUA serves a central role as the facilitator of this communion. Miscommunication, distrust, or lack of understanding between the congregations and the UUA inhibits needed growth and transformation in our faith. Congregations are disconnected from the issues and resources of the Association. Many leaders told us that their congregation did not feel connected to the Association or aware of what is happening. The extent of this disconnect was amplified by the events in Spring 2017, when a hiring decision was challenged and a series of high-profile resignations occurred. Many people in the congregations were puzzled and had no context or little awareness of what was happening with the Association.

Concerns about how the UUA communicates with congregations and UU leaders were frequently voiced in our work. Communications from the Association have historically been funneled through a very narrow spectrum of congregational positions—predominantly presidents and ministers—and may not get communicated to all members of a congregation by a minister or Board president. While we applaud the efforts of President Susan Frederick-Gray's administration to improve this, continued effort should be placed in developing these vital channels.

This small number of leaders—ministers or Board presidents—can determine what information about the Association is passed on to congregations, and they can decide what Association initiatives for change to ask congregations to engage.

Associational work to prepare congregations for today's needs can be ignored or invisible. Though technology allows for more open-sourced resources, the lack of effective official channels means that issues continue to be tried in the court of social media, causing polarization and the development and spread of much false news.

Since the last Associational effort to enhance cultural competency and reduce oppressive practices (known as the Journey Toward Wholeness) was defunded, congregations and communities that wish to participate in efforts toward inclusion, equity, and diversity often do so on their own. Curated resources and sharing of models happens infrequently and ineffectively. Tools available are often costly and inaccessible. Those engaged in this work do have curated resources and support the sharing but operate without any UUA support.

Does the justice work of your congregation incorporate learning around anti-oppression or multicultural work? 623 responses:

- Yes: 67.3%
- No: 18.6%
- I Don't Know: 14.1%

Congregations lack a covenantal understanding with one another and with the Association, which is critical to the effectiveness of congregational polity. Congregational leaders may use the idea of congregational polity to maintain an organizational independence that discourages them from joining with other congregations in the work of equity and justice.

Congregations may not see a duty toward the Association as a whole, especially when the Association is acting as a change agent. Therefore, a change process driven from the Association to the congregations may be doomed to fail because of the emphasis on congregational autonomy.

The Association and the congregations themselves have become overly dependent on the need for overwhelming consent of all members, or at least all current acknowledged and vocal congregational leaders, before beginning to undertake any faith work. However, we must recognize that congregational polity calls for our Association and congregations to heed all voices, including new members and minority members, as sources of wisdom, direction, and faithfulness.

In addition, we misinterpret what congregational polity means. So often we talk about congregational polity and covenant as structures of organization and management for our movement, as if they are only our business model. However, our polity and covenantal agreements enable us to come together in ways that honor the sacredness of our gathered communities. They speak to who we are and how we are to be when we are together. Congregational polity says that each of us, as individuals, makes up the shared body that is our community of faith. Each of us is an equal and needed partner in our living tradition. Each of us is responsible and accountable for the future of our faith.

This misinterpretation has led to a culture of critique, which makes change processes tedious and often unwieldy.

Regional staff are often the gatekeepers and the bridgers between and among congregations. Regional staff are often the first responders when conflict erupts over differences. A lack of multicultural skills in regional staff and others, such as professional good officers, has inflamed and exacerbated many of the conflicts that were described to us.

We know from focus groups that many congregations are working to address matters of diversity, equity, and inclusion. Participants also talked about the need for ongoing learning communities.

As one focus group participant shared,

We're lifting up sources of music where we might have stolen some things. Our religious education is interweaving antiracism literature and teachings through all of the grades. And the Membership Committee is looking at specific activities and trying to ask screening questions about what could we do better. And just a month ago, our Stewardship Committee finally eliminated the \$100-a-year donation, or you have to sign a waiver clause, in order to be a member in our congregation, which feels much more equitable. So these questions are starting to pop up in the different nooks and crannies of the church, where we are looking at how we're doing things structurally.

Has your community experienced an incident of tension around race or other forms of oppression? 621 responses:

- Yes: 56.4%
- No: 20.9%
- I Don't Know: 22.7%

Congregations need promising practices, including resources on caucusing to support oppressed and marginalized groups. The VISIONS report identified the importance of caucuses during this time of moving toward a more inclusive Unitarian Universalism, recommending that congregations and other groups within the UUA engage in supporting caucus groups for support and continued growth; these can be facilitated at the start to give participants an idea of how the groups should run to promote learning and growth; this process would also provide the opportunity for greater clarity around the use of these groups—i.e., making sure that both personal and systemic work can occur through the process in these groups:

1. How white members can do their own work; building humility, learning, working with each other around the impact of racism on their group and their responsibility to themselves for being accountable for that learning as well as to communities of color; also, to developing their own ideas for how to address racism at the interpersonal and institutional levels—“we need affinity groups for all groups to work well and support ourselves as well as each other.”
2. Working within the people of color community for healing and collaboration across people of color groups (i.e., Indigenous and black, black and Latinx, the challenges that exist within the African Diaspora etc.); and for their own accountability within group and how they could and would support each other as they discuss addressing interpersonal and institutional challenges. [19]

As we work toward a congregational model that can serve generations with new practices around diversity and equity, we will need other community models to complement and support what is available in congregations. In a time in which people do not enter religious communities easily or instinctively, we believe we need to have congregations more focused on promoting and providing opportunities to live our values.

“There is a power in the Assembly that can be harnessed which is not just free range,” observed Rev. Kimberly Hampton at the 2019 Harper-Jordan Symposium sponsored by BLUU. “There really is something that happens when people can look one another in the eye or have an ‘amen’ corner or get corrected by the elders.... There is a lived and living theology that comes from the shared experience.”

Congregational Polity, by Rev. Dr. Natalie Fenimore

The Unitarian Universalist commitment to congregational religious governance goes back to the Cambridge Platform of 1648. The signers of the Platform created self-governing churches (without bishops), gathered in the spirit of love and inspired by the example of community they found in the Christian Bible. Church governance was important because it could reflect societal organization and theological aspirations.

On the individual level, our congregationalism gives authority and responsibility to each member of our congregations and communities—and it is a proclamation of their worth and dignity. It says, “You are needed, you are valuable, you are central to the process of making a Unitarian Universalist community. There is nothing unless you make it.”

The power of the individual member of our congregational and covenanted community is best held with humility. We are asked to recognize that our power is shared with other individuals and with those called as partners in leadership within our communities. This is the dance of congregationalism—sharing leadership, recognizing when individuals are best in position to lead or to move back, and making space for new ideas, change, and transformation.

Congregationalism asks us to struggle as individuals and a body in order to determine the future of our faith. And while Unitarian Universalists value democracy, it is best not seen as democracy in the purely political sense. This is not about winning by vote alone but rather as honoring the voices of all—and listening to the call of conscience.

We are also called to be in partnership with our ministers. The Cambridge Platform puts it this way: “The minister has no controlling power over the church,” and also, “The connection between a pastor is too sacred and important to be dissolved upon trifling mistakes on either side.”

Indeed, congregational ministry cannot be evaluated as an administrative, management role alone. A minister is not essentially equivalent to a corporate CEO. Congregational ministry encompasses a deep and meaningful relationship with the congregation that calls them to leadership. The minister does not take the ministry from the people; they amplify and help to clarify the potential for ministry and mission that lives in the congregation as a whole.

Our congregationalist ancestors balanced the relationships of authority and responsibility between individual church members, between the congregation and the ministers, and between each other. They recognized the tug between autonomy and fellowship that is inherent in our polity as we do it today.

Walking Together

As Conrad Wright writes in *Walking Together: Polity and Participation in Unitarian Universalist Churches*,

For us there exists, as there did not exist for our ancestors, a regularly constituted agency for common action. We call it the Unitarian Universalist Association. Sometimes, perhaps when we are tired and exasperated, we think of it as a distant bureaucracy, and berate it as though it was something alien that has somehow been saddled on us. Sometimes, in a more reasonable mood, we recognize that it is there to serve us, not merely with things like hymn books and religious education materials, but also with established and responsible agencies for the very same consultation among churches the Cambridge Platform insisted was a necessary aspect of the fellowship of churches. But the UUA is something more than an agency to serve us; in some respects it is actually ourselves, and provides an organ through which we may state from time to time the consensus that prevails among us, so that the waywardness of particular churches may, if necessary, be rebuked, though not coerced, by opinion of the whole. This is one of the things that the fellowship of the churches means: that the local church, while it is free to make its own decisions, is bound to make its decisions responsibly, with a decent respect for the considered judgment of the whole.

Rev. Dr. Susan Frederick-Gray, the UUA's president, has called the UUA the "embodiment of covenant... life-giving, life-affirming, and justice-centered."

Again, our polity can reflect our theological desire to model an egalitarian and just way of living. It is a challenge we are called to meet; our very commitment to Unitarian Universalism makes this struggle, this dance, inherent. It is what Rev. Victoria Safford has called our "declaration of interdependence."

Again, Conrad Wright:

Can two walk together except they be agreed? Yes and no. How much diversity a church can tolerate without losing its sense of direction is a delicate question, not to be decided by abstract analysis. But consensus does not have to mean conformity; diversity need not mean surrender to the arrogance of those who insist that tolerance means that others must tolerate them, no matter how rigid and dogmatic they may be. There is much ground between extremes. That is where we belong, seeking a straight way for ourselves, our children and our children's children.

The First Parish of Malden, Massachusetts: A Case Study

The First Parish of Malden, gathered in 1648, found that the congregation was losing members. Instead of continuing as it was, the congregation made a commitment to welcome younger and more diverse leadership and is now a thriving congregation with a young adult focus. Here are some of its identity documents:

Mission Statement

Worship is what we do when we gather together, take risks for justice, embrace difference, and give back.

Worship is what we do.

This is what it looks like.

Vision Statement

We, the people of First Parish, are a welcoming mid-size congregation that brings its love beyond the walls of our church. We share our worship and gathering space with neighbors and allies for progressive change. We are challenged by our Unitarian Universalist Principles and committed to justice and compassion for all, on Sunday and every day.

Covenant of the Members

We, the members of the First Parish, covenant in friendship to create together a community of respect, equality, openness, trust, and compassion.

We pledge ourselves:

- to hospitality—extending a warm welcome to all and caring for each other in times of need
- to understanding—fostering an atmosphere of acceptance based in goodwill

- to spiritual growth—honoring the spiritual and religious journey of each person
- to sharing—openly and respectfully offering our views, seeking others’ views, listening attentively, and honoring our differences as we honor that which we share
- to participation—supporting the church through our presence and the many diverse gifts we bring

Our covenant, founded in the seven Principles of Unitarian Universalism, calls us:

- to deal with disagreements constructively and to communicate with each other in a direct, caring, and responsible manner
- to express gratitude and support to all who volunteer their time and talents in support of the church
- to call each other lovingly back into the circle of covenant when necessary
- to live our values within the church and throughout our wider community, bringing the best of each to the other.

Recommended Congregational Practices to Increase Equity, Inclusion, and Diversity

- Appoint someone to be a liaison to the UUA. While many congregations may have trouble supporting a full “denominational affairs” committee, a point person can monitor and make sure leaders and publications have a representative.
- Ensure that lifespan religious educators are focused on building understanding about equity and inclusion. This includes providing significant opportunities for cross-cultural immersion through partnership and also use of videos, films, and other online resources.
- Do basic hospitality role-playing and education each year for those involved with membership and greeting activities, including greeting, membership, ushering, worship planning, refreshment serving, etc.
- Put money in your budget for education around anti-oppression practices every year. The amount can be small—\$500 to \$1,500 to participate in a curriculum, pay a speaker’s fee, or get a group subscription to an online course.
- Add a line item for scholarships to General Assembly, and make them available to those who most need to connect around identity—Black people, Indigenous people, people of color, LGBTQ folx, and young adults and youth.
- Form justice partnerships with organizations led by those most affected by the issues, and follow their lead. This is especially important when working with organizations across lines of race and class.

Recommendation

Covenant and commitment, not comfort, should be the binding fabrics of UU congregations and other communities.

Our faith communities are not just available for those who fit in most easily or who make so much trouble no one is willing to challenge them. New generations have even more discomfort with, and lack of tolerance for, this sort of culture and consider it toxic.

Our covenant calls us to hold urgent and dear Unitarian Universalism’s aspirations to building the Beloved Community with diversity, inclusion, equity, compassionate justice, and an acknowledgment of our interdependence with other forms of life. We have bound ourselves together in faithful discernment, not just by structure but in our learning and living. Our common ministry must lead us forward toward transformation and liberation. We are called to travel this path together because together we are more.

In a world in which people have less and less time for volunteer activities and it is harder and harder to get people to attend, leadership education efforts should be focused on deepening a sense of how we live our values and core skills that equip people to manage change, conflict, traumatic events, and generational differences. Work to promote equity, inclusion, and diversity should be incorporated in these efforts.

- **Action:** Prioritize workshops on covenants of right relationship and curate models of covenants for congregations and communities of different sizes and demographic profiles.
- **Action:** Equip leadership development efforts at the Associational or regional level with information on how to facilitate needed conflict and how to promote racial equity.

Recommendation

The UUA Board and the president and administration should continue to prioritize efforts to create communications channels and strengthen regions, clusters, and other structures in which congregations can live into true congregational polity, the lack of which has exacerbated conflicts and created unnecessary distractions from mission.

Currently there is no easy way for the leaders from the national structures to effectively communicate with a broader range of Unitarian Universalism. Maintaining congregational connections is also challenging because of changing patterns of communication in the social media and multimedia world. Investment in this area is critical to any kind of ongoing systemic change.

Regional meetings allow people who will not generally travel to a national conference to have access to the greater resources of our faith. This enables people of color and other marginalized Unitarian Universalists to meet others like them who may also be just one needle in a haystack of more affluent white cisgender Unitarian Universalists.

- **Action:** Continue to develop new channels for communication with congregational leaders, including enhanced or regular virtual convenings for those interested in learning best practices in diversity, equity, and inclusion.
- **Action:** Work to make regional gatherings and structures possible and to regularize them across the country so that there is some consistency and they can be used to provide a common framework for anti-oppression work and other needed changes.
- **Action:** Send an annual communication to all congregations about the number of congregations, with membership data, including the number of congregations with fewer than thirty people, as this is the number of people required to charter a congregation today. Also include the number of intentional and alternative communities serving those historically unable to thrive in our mainstream congregations, such as people of color, LGBTQ people, and young adults.

Congregational Audits

Congregations with an interest in incorporating practices aimed at increasing equity, inclusion, and diversity more fully into all their work have conducted racial audits. Unity Church-Unitarian in St. Paul, Minnesota, has not only done an audit; they have continued to make an annual report on their work to do this ([these reports are available online](#)).

Here is what Unity Church-Unitarian leaders wrote about their audit:

The purpose of the institutional audit is to research an institution's identity in relationship to racism. The Antiracism Team examined Unity Church from the time of its earliest formation to the current day in order to provide a thorough, thoughtful analysis of the church's institutional response to race. The audit will be a guide as the church moves forward in the process of becoming an intentionally antiracist institution.

The audit is also an invitation to the congregation to participate in work that is extremely vital for the... future of Unity Church and Unitarian Universalists everywhere. We believe that we can create a church that is not only antiracist in word, but has genuine acceptance, respect, and love for all people as a recognizable part of its identity.

The audit report concluded,

We must have the will and determination to undertake what may at times be very painful work. We want to create a religious institution that is known throughout the neighborhood, the city, and beyond, as a place of loving, welcoming, joyous Unitarian Universalists who are not afraid to live out their values. Can we imagine a day when Unity's bell peals and the whole neighborhood takes comfort, knowing what that ringing symbolizes?

For congregations with less financial and staff resources, a simpler practice can be used. Here is the racism audit tool used by the Mt. Diablo Unitarian Universalist Church in Walnut Creek, California:

Questions for Multiculturalism Audit

- On a scale of 1 to 10, how important to the work of your committee is working to help MDUUC become exuberantly multicultural? (Where 1 is least important and 10 is most.)

- What policies and practices promote multiculturalism and eliminate racial bias within your group? (For Board and bylaws as well.)
- How are your members chosen? How are your members equipped to learn to respect and honor racial and cultural diversity?
- How are the voices of those historically marginalized not represented in discussions and decisions?
- How do leaders within your group show that they value diversity on an ongoing basis?
- How is anti-bias education built into your group's yearly cycle?
- What stories or anecdotes illustrate how your group engages in practices that counter these practices of white-normed culture: perfectionism, defensiveness, valuing quantity over quality, worship of the written word, conflict avoidance, paternalism, either/ or thinking, power hoarding, paternalism, false sense of urgency, assuming a right to comfort, and individualism. [20]

Recommendation

The UUA Board should look at the best way to provide ongoing active governance for congregations as the current annual General Assembly system is too costly and cumbersome for many to participate, as this disproportionately affects people of color.

The testimony we collected caused us to conclude that gatherings at the regional level are more important than annual gatherings of the General Assembly, an increasingly expensive and elite gathering. Growth of community at the regional level for Black people, Indigenous people, and people of color would help maintain representation of these groups at the congregational level, except where the aggression and oppression are most pronounced. We need to look at the cost of having our governance centered in a financially inaccessible General Assembly. We are also concerned about GA's carbon footprint, even taking offsets into consideration. And in the context of dwindling resources and the search for a new funding model, we believe it is essential to bring these conversations and resources about oppression and other Associational issues closer to the congregations and allow leaders to learn together.

- **Action:** Make caucusing for people of color standard, and offer administrative support at regional and cluster events to allow more space, contact, and support for those who are often "the only one" at the congregational level.
- **Action:** Fully implement the regional system, making space for clusters of congregations interested in equity to form.
- **Action:** Convene General Assembly as a biennial gathering and on the off years, set and keep a schedule of regional meetings, with these meetings occurring at least biennially and perhaps more frequently by teleconference.
- **Action:** Ensure that regional/district staff are fully trained and demonstrate multicultural, antiracist, and anti-oppression competency to act as a resource for congregations and lay leaders in their antiracism work. Continuing education work in anti-oppression techniques should also be required.
- **Action:** Explore providing delegate status to members of alternate covenantal communities serving those less welcomed by current congregational cultures.

Recommendation

Development of a common frame of anti-oppression training and multicultural competency is needed for all regional staff, those trained to advocate for UU professionals during times of conflict, and regional boards and entities to help prevent injury and wrongdoing.

During the 1990s and into the early 2000s, the UUA's antiracism work was centered around the model proposed by Crossroads Ministry. The learning, opposed by many who did not see its relevance, was criticized for being not grounded in Unitarian Universalist theology. Though the organization has long had UU leaders (and in fact has been headed by Robette Dias, a former staff member of the UUA), the idea that Unitarian Universalists should look at their own racism (with racism defined as "prejudice plus power") caused enough controversy that the Crossroads model was abandoned. During the time when the Crossroads model was in use through a series of UUA resources known as the Journey Toward Wholeness, those engaged in these efforts had a common frame of reference, a vocabulary that could be used, and assessment tools based on a model of change.

The Commission's research reveals that today we can barely speak to each other across generations and socio-economic location. Terms such as *white supremacy culture* have dramatically different meanings across generations. In today's world, it is easy to stay in our comfort zones, with communities and communication channels designed to reinforce our opinions, so that we have less and less common language among us, and that is true for us as Unitarian Universalists as well. We must enter into some

negotiation to understand that while we may not use the same words to describe the issues, we must have a shared commitment to the work of building a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive faith.

Congregations that wish to undertake anti-oppression measures at this time do so largely on their own. In some cases, congregational leaders are unaware of existing resources and, in other cases, no resources are available to them in the Association. Because different resources will be needed by different groups in different communities at different times and under different circumstances, perhaps the best use of our Association's funds would be to continue to curate the best resources that are out there and to regularly allow congregations to know that the resources have been updated.

Congregations interested in becoming more equitable, inclusive, and diverse should be connected in a virtual learning network and should be provided information about how to work with leaders who are Black, Indigenous, and people of color in respectful rather than in tokenizing ways, and how to be mission-focused in their work.

- **Action:** Begin a “Promising Practices” program to recognize congregations that have made progress in becoming more equitable, inclusive, and diverse.
- **Action:** Identify and curate anti-oppression resources that are appropriate for congregations of different sizes, geographies, etc.
- **Action:** Create methods of interaction between congregations to promote sharing of learning and promising models for equity, inclusion, and diversity work as well as models for accountable justice work. Ensure that all regional staff are trained in this work to be able to seed best practices.

Take-aways

- Congregations that choose to engage to increase equity, inclusion, and diversity are leading the way into the future.
- Too often congregations must do this challenging work by themselves when learning communities would be easy to form.
- Curated resources, learning circles, and funding to develop needed tools should be a priority for UUA-led efforts under the leadership of the Liberal Religious Educators Association.
- Anti-oppression tools as well as conflict facilitation are essential to leadership development efforts, and leadership development is needed in the complex and often conflictual context of leadership today.
- None of this can be accomplished without better communication between the Unitarian Universalist Association and the congregations it serves.
- Regional gatherings could touch more Unitarian Universalists and help provide a common frame of reference.
- Regional staff should provide a consistent structure for work on diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Hospitality and Inclusion

“The opposite of racist isn't ‘not racist.’ It is ‘antiracist.’ What's the difference? One endorses either the idea of a racial hierarchy as a racist or racial equality as an antiracist. One either believes problems are rooted in groups of people, as a racist, or locates the roots of problems in power and policies, as an antiracist. One either allows racial inequities to persevere, as a racist, or confronts racial inequities, as an antiracist. There is no in-between safe space of ‘not racist.’ ”

—Ibram X. Kendi, *How to Be an Antiracist*

“No man can be a Universalist whose love did not take in all races and colors.” *

— attributed to Quillen Shinn

Background and Trends

Our work concludes that Unitarian Universalists continue to repel many of the people who would otherwise provide the resources to fuel our continued growth. Though our predominantly white congregations and organizations may see themselves as welcoming, without particular practices, they continue to mirror the kinds of harms done to people of color and other marginalized groups in our larger society. On this note, we stress that when we are inhospitable to one group—for example, Black people, Indigenous people, and people of color—others who experience marginalization notice and our sacred spaces become unwelcoming for them as well.

Note this submitted testimony:

- “I am a white queer UU lay leader from a poverty class background... In a former congregation, after being elected to the Board, I began asking questions about why our congregation was so predominantly white— despite being located in a very diverse area—and how we might start to change that. There was pushback by several prominent white members, some of whom I had worked with for years. They spoke about being the last white person in their neighborhood, or how they had been wronged by racial minorities, and how they liked coming to a place where almost everyone was white. One person said they came to this particular congregation ‘to escape diversity.’”
- “Coming from Brazil, I see how the Evangelical churches in my community (Catholic too) are quick to offer services in Spanish and Portuguese. They have hordes of people in the church. However, as we all know, members of the LGBTQ community are not welcomed in these congregations. I wonder if we could have a much more diverse congregation (and attract these disenfranchised people looking for a spiritual home) if we offered services mid-week or on Saturday in other languages.”

Once equitable practices are introduced, people feel welcome quickly. Engagement with a more diverse Unitarian Universalism does not need to mean marginalization for those who are older, white-identified, and economically secure. It does mean the willingness to question assumptions, learn a more inclusive version of history, and adopt new practices.

Because of the numerical realities within our spaces, gathering spaces for people of color and others historically marginalized among us are essential to help counter the ignorance and aggression these beloved UUs encounter within so many of our congregations, communities, and groups.

Stopping Harm, Restoring Relationship, Responding to Microaggressions and Oppression, from the Fahs Collaborative

This is adapted from a [printable PDF](#).

Microaggression is a term coined by psychologist Dr. Derald Wing Sue and it refers to a comment or behavior that others or demeans someone because of their culturally marginalized identity. Microaggressions are often unintentional but can cause serious psychological and spiritual harm over time—the effect known as “death by a thousand paper cuts.”

A Few Common Microaggressions in UU Spaces

- “Where are you really from?”
- “You must be new to Unitarian Universalism.”
- “You speak English so well!”
- “Welcome! Do you want to join the Racial Justice Team?”
- “Ooh, I just have to touch your child’s hair.”

NOTE: A comment experienced by one person as a microaggression may not impact another person in the same way. Rather than commenting about someone or making assumptions about their experience, ask open-ended questions that invite people to tell you about themselves and what is important to them.

For White Allies: DOs and DON’Ts for Interrupting Microaggressions

- DO build relationships with people of color to develop trust.
- DO practice approaches to interrupting before you’re in a real-life situation.
- DO take cues from the target, rather than “playing the hero.”
- DO focus on the impact, rather than the intent, of the microaggression.
- DON’T accuse the speaker of being a bad person; DO focus on behavior and why it was problematic.
- DON’T forget to ask the target how they’re doing and what they need.

Possible Ally Responses to Microaggressions

- “Ouch. Those words are really hurtful.”

- “I don’t know what you mean by that [offensive joke/remark]. Could you explain?”
- “I know that comment made me really uncomfortable. Are you okay, [person being targeted]?”
- “I’m sure you didn’t mean to cause harm, but I need you to know that your words are problematic.”

For People of Color: When Times Get Tough

We are all born into systems of white supremacy, yet our ancestors gifted us with the strength of their survival. Consider using the following practices to build on a legacy of resilience and audacious hope:

- **Self-care.** Get in touch with spiritual practices and sources of life that refill your cup, arm your humanity, make you feel whole, and give you integrity. Protect and use those practices and spaces regularly.
- **Gather your people.** Activate a small group of trusted friends who will take your call and give you honest and loving feedback.
- **Refuse either/or thinking.** Strengthen UU values of interconnectedness of mind, body, and spirit in everything you do. Build and celebrate your web of life.
- **Deepen your multicultural self!** Live into the advantages of code-switching, allowing you to function in oppressive environments while maintaining a sense of self-worth.
- **Be strategic with social media.** Social media is great for organizing, but not a good alternative for working through personal challenges. Rely on your trusted people.
- **Notice privilege.** Think about the intersections of identity in your life. When are parts of your identity rewarded? Untangle and own the complicity of your privilege (e.g., gender, able-bodied, class, age, education, etc.).
- **Understand your patterns of internalized oppression.** When in your life do behaviors such as avoidance and denial of conflict, deflecting responsibility, learned powerlessness, and anger toward others in your racial/ethnic group appear? What cultural toxins have you internalized?
- **Explore your ancestral story.** Call upon ancestral wisdom stories about resilience, creativity, pride, and excellence. How do those traits exhibit themselves in your personal and spiritual lives?
- **Celebrate!** Don’t let racial oppression steal your joy. When you feel defeated, practice gratitude. Show loving kindness. Be wildly generous. Celebrate community. Make art. Laugh. Sing loud. Dance. Restore your soul.

Recommendation

New structures to provide leadership education to UU leaders are needed and should include multicultural hospitality practices as foundational.

Over and over Black people, Indigenous people, and people of color, as well as other people in groups not seen as mainstream in Unitarian Universalism, report interactions with congregations and Unitarian Universalist organizations in which they are treated as less than or received in a way that is simply inhospitable. When we talk about the need to become more diverse, inclusive, and equitable at a basic level we are talking about hospitality. Our congregations need new practices around hospitality so that fewer people are repelled.

In a time in which fewer and fewer people believe that it is important to be part of any kind of religious community, it should be heartbreaking to us all that people who need our saving message, who are sure that our values could help transform their lives, are trying to be part of us and yet cannot exist within our communities because we lack basic skills in welcoming the personhood and gifts of all people.

We need new structures to provide leadership education to Unitarian Universalist leaders, and they should include multicultural hospitality practices as foundational. Allies for Racial Equity, the Liberal Religious Educators Association, the Association for Unitarian Universalist Music Ministries, and other UU organizations should compile practices that would be useful in training white members of hospitality teams, including ushers, readers, people who prepare coffee hour, and worship leaders in ways to avoid offending people who are often already coming in with hard and painful experiences. We also need more convening for volunteer leaders at the regional and cluster levels to glean support for Black people, Indigenous people, and people of color.

Too often we approach work on inclusion through a tokenized emphasis on diversity, and this taxes those who have identities that are marginalized and thus less available among us. These spaces offer a critical resource for those who might otherwise have encountered few or no other Unitarian Universalists who share their racial or cultural context. Administrative support would allow

the leadership of these groups to devote their time and effort to advocacy and programs necessary to build and support their communities.

- **Action:** Include scholarship funds in congregational budgets to allow leaders of color, Indigenous leaders, and other leaders under-represented in the congregation to attend affinity groups and national meetings where they will be able to connect with others who share their identity and Unitarian Universalist faith.
- **Action:** Curate and amplify best practices for training ushers and greeters, board members, worship assistants, and other lay leaders in intercultural competency.
- **Action:** Contract with the identity-based groups such as DRUUMM, TRUUsT, and EqUual Access to develop a new certification program for congregations ready and willing to take on the work of being diverse, inclusive, and equitable. Such a process could make sure there is congregational dialogue about these issues as educational experiences to help create a common vocabulary and analysis of what is needed.

Recommendation

Convening for volunteer leaders at the regional and cluster level should be emphasized to allow support for marginalized groups, including people of color.

One of the most common comments we got was about how lifesaving it is to be able to be with other Unitarian Universalists with similar identities. For white, able-bodied, straight, cisgender Unitarian Universalists with means, this may seem puzzling because they do not understand what a struggle attendance at a congregation can be when microaggressions and assumptions damage one's sense of belonging. Black people, Indigenous people, and people of color report over and over again being the only, or one of a very few, non-white people in their congregation.

This means that opportunities to gather with other Unitarian Universalists who also share more of their life experience become critical to their ability to navigate the difficulties of being in what are often almost all-white congregations. In the eighties and nineties, this was recognized in the establishment of specific organizations such as DRUUMM, LUUNA, and other Unitarian Universalist groups that allow people who share an identity to come together. Most recently, the formation of BLUU has given birth to a new community. The histories found in the writings of Rev. Dr. Mark Morrison-Reed and others provide rich resources for leadership education.

- **Action:** Develop a curriculum for multimedia presentation that provides resources to document contributions of people of color and Indigenous people to Unitarian Universalism and also traces the history of the involvement of these marginalized people who have contributed to Unitarian Universalism since its earliest decades on this continent. Building upon and also tracing the histories found in the writings of Rev. Dr. Mark Morrison-Reed and others, these resources should be in an accessible format that allows for easy delivery to congregations.
- **Action:** Provide support for DRUUMM to continue the work they have begun to connect people of color caucuses and encourage caucusing at the congregational level. A list of all congregations who are engaged in caucusing and who have ongoing people of color or other identity caucuses should be maintained by the UUA as another way to communicate with vital populations within and across our congregations.

An Invitation to Conversations for Liberation

The following invitation was released in September 2019 to encourage Unitarian Universalists to engage in Conversations for Liberation. It was endorsed by the governing board or leadership team of the following organizations: the Unitarian Universalist Association, Allies for Racial Equity, the Association of Unitarian Universalist Administrators, the Association for Unitarian Universalist Music Ministries, Diverse & Revolutionary Unitarian Universalist Multicultural Ministries, the Liberal Religious Educators Association, Transgender Religious Professional Unitarian Universalists Together, and the Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association. Full text is at [An Invitation to Conversations for Liberation](#).

We are at a moment of great power and potential in Unitarian Universalism. Unitarian Universalists have charted a new path to create a faith movement where people of all backgrounds and identities can thrive to challenge systems of oppression, patriarchy, and white supremacy at all levels. We have begun to make progress in reimagining and diversifying our leadership and our communities to make good on the promise that generations of our faith forebears have made. At General Assembly 2019 in Spokane, WA, the change was seen and recognized from the stage, among attendees and in programs and worship, embodying the theme of “The Power of We.”

We also recognize that meaningful change is hard, especially as it relates to identity and power, which raises essential questions about whose voices are heard, who is asked to take risks, how we negotiate our relationships, and what our priorities are as a community. False divisions like “political correctness” versus “inclusive speech,” or the question of whether to focus critiques inward in our communities versus outward toward the world, distract from the core calling of our faith to move toward equity and compassion in every way.

We offer Conversations for Liberation to invite Unitarian Universalists into broad, shared discussion to discern together how to move our faith forward toward greater justice. Using this common framework, UUs can engage faithfully in their own congregations and communities and then bring their discussions on the future of our faith to the wider Association. As you engage in Conversations for Liberation in your communities, we invite you to honor these three core commitments, grounded in Unitarian Universalist values:

- We recommit ourselves to the aspiration of a fully inclusive and anti-oppressive community. This is an essential calling that arises from our Principles and theology. We recognize oppressive systems as violations of human dignity, demanding we challenge them both within and beyond our congregations. Systems of oppression hurt and dehumanize us all. We acknowledge that we are a part of the interdependent web of existence, and that none of us is truly free until we are all liberated from oppression.
- We recenter the truth telling that comes from voices at the margins of our faith community. The call to spiritual maturity and growth means listening to marginalized voices, and to create brave space where these truths can be held. The circle of faith community grows wider from the margins, not the center. We value the leadership and wisdom of people who are trans and/or nonbinary, those who are disabled, people of color and Indigenous people, those who are poor, and all who have historically been and continue to be in oppressed communities.
- We reaffirm that we must lead from the covenant of care that binds us. We must hold each other in love and kindness, including when we do not agree. We have to take responsibility for the impacts of our voices, processes, and actions as we engage with the expectation of growth and learning. No one is disposable.

Unitarian Universalism is no place for namecalling, dismissal, gaslighting, or arguments that undermine and erase. With humility, we must affirm one another’s humanity, even in times of frustration, heartbreak, and trauma. Together, we must dig deeper to advance our shared aspiration toward a Unitarian Universalism that practices the liberating values of our theology.

Recommendation

Providing resources to promote *young adult and youth convenings* that include support and caucusing for those with marginalized leadership is essential.

In past generations, the existence of groups such as the youth and young adult network of DRUUMM (DRUUMM YAYA) led to the development of a network of young leaders trained in how to work together as co-journeymers on addressing issues of oppression within Unitarian Universalist structures. Many of those who are currently leading our Association as of the writing of this report are alumni of these programs, which are now defunded.

While there are small-scale efforts, particularly serving young adults who are Black, Indigenous, and people of color through Thrive, the larger scaling of those programs would allow young adults to feel invested in a more equitable, inclusive, and diverse future Unitarian Universalism in which our leaders would have the skills to lead. Many of these younger leaders already come with extensive expertise because of the prevalence of such efforts within their contexts.

- **Action:** Provide funding for an annual convening of youth and young adults of color across Unitarian Universalism that builds on and expands the reach of the Thrive program, including virtual gatherings to provide ongoing support.
- **Action:** Invest in concurrent convenings of white youth and young adults interested in sharpening their skills at supporting and co-journeyming with youth and young adults who are of color or Indigenous.
- **Action:** Include funding for youth and young adults, Black people, Indigenous people, people of color, disabled people, transgender people, and others of limited financial means to attend Associational events in congregational budgets as this will allow them more contact with people who share their identity.

Take-aways

- Most Unitarian Universalist congregations and organizations need ongoing intention, education, and structural change to be hospitable to all.
 - A certification process for those interested in addressing racial bias and oppression is overdue.
 - Identity-based groups such as DRUUMM, BLUU, TRUUSt, and EqUUal Access could provide those from marginalized groups with needed support while longer-term cultural change is happening.
 - The defunding of our national youth and young adult programs has hindered our anti-oppressive efforts and redress is necessary.
 - Congregations committed to equity, inclusion, and diversity should demonstrate this through funding of travel and scholarships for Black people, Indigenous people, people of color, LGBTQIA people, disabled, and poor people as well as for youth and young adults as a regular part of annual budgets.
-

* Word used in vernacular of the times.

Minister of Color Avatar

- Doreanne Spotswood
- Black
- disabled
- femme

While I have experienced harm in various ways as a Black person within Unitarian Universalism, most of the harm done to me has been from UU ministers or seminarians despite their lofty declarations of collegiality.

During seminary, I was called a quota filler, was told it would be easier if I were not there.

I have spent several different chapter meetings listening to white colleagues compete with one another over the number of “African American” or Black members.

I was asked by a colleague during ministry days to park his car—he tried to hand his keys over even though I was wearing a GA badge and had known him for years. I was invited to preach at a colleague’s church and he put a fellow woman of color colleague’s picture on the front cover with my name.

For years, colleagues would ask if I was in preliminary fellowship. Why this is important I don’t know, but when I would say no, they looked at best surprised and at worst as if I were lying. On the day I received final (now full) fellowship, I was asked over and over if I were getting preliminary fellowship and one colleague loudly insisted I was in the wrong line and needed to gather with the ministers getting preliminary fellowship.

On at least two occasions, colleagues have argued that they know more about the experience of racism and oppression than I do as they marched with Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr, and one had worked with Nelson Mandela. Many colleagues have told me that I am being intimidating and that I should assume “good will.”

Many of the candidates for ministry used black and dark in negative ways. When I asked them what their theology of darkness was they said things like “the absence of God,” “evil,” and “sinful.” When I pressed them about the impact this might have on members of their congregation who identified as Black or brown, a white male colleague reprimanded me and defended this use of language and wouldn’t back down until a white female colleague affirmed what I was saying.

The objectification of female candidates and colleagues was also a regular feature of the Ministerial Fellowship Committee. Male panel members would describe women as attractive and young as if that had anything to do with their qualifications. To be female and of color is more than a double whammy.

Living Our Values in the World

“The good news is that we are in control of what we do with our daily living. If we, each one of us, represent a missing remnant in the fabric of our collective future—then together we can lean into a possibility that we have yet to fully experience in human history. A collective wholeness. An unassailable good. That is the kind of salvation I am here to fight for in the small moments of every single day.”

—Rev. Dr. Sofia Betancourt, “The Missing Remnant”

“Protest is telling the truth in public. Sometimes protest is telling the truth to a public that isn’t quite ready to hear it. Protest is, in its own way, a storytelling. We use our bodies, our words, our art, and our sounds both to tell the truth about the pain that we endure and to demand the justice that we know is possible. It is meant to build and to force a response.”

—DeRay Mckesson, *On the Other Side of Freedom*

Background and Trends

The work of becoming more equitable, inclusive, and diverse within our congregations is justice work. If we cannot do this well, we cannot be effective as justice partners.

A frequent criticism of anti-oppression and hospitality work is that people are tired of us focusing internally, “navel-gazing,” rather than working on issues in the world. Yet greater awareness of the practices within our own institutions is complementary work to our justice. We cannot do accountable justice work if we are not able to remain in good relationship with those most affected by the conditions of injustice.

One of the principles for being a more accountable community is the ability to think in inclusive ways that are also nonbinary (i.e., work to make our own institutions more just and work to aid others). If we fail to address our own injustices, we are not only hypocritical, but we are probably working out of an outdated, paternalistic model of “helping others” rather than acting out of the recognition that our lives are interdependent with those of our neighbors.

Consider these comments from our research:

- “I was very disappointed that there was no mention of Martin L. King, Jr. on MLK Sunday. There is political turmoil and a resistance movement going on, but there is no mention of it. There is a huge disconnect between what is going on in the world and what is said in the pulpit. I know my concern for what is going on in the world is much more personal than my fellow white UUs’, yet we need everyone’s concern and voice in this fight.”
- “We need embodied theology. If we don’t ground ourselves in the real work we can’t embrace the fact that it impacts real lives; my people are dying. If we are not saving the earth and our bodies, then we are not being saved. We need a salvation theology. A ‘They-ology.’ We need a world where our bodies matter. That is real, not imagination.”
- “We need to articulate a theology of people. Our social justice work is a theological response to evil. This allows us to leave it outside our doors. When we need to do this work on the inside, it is harder because we left it outside.”

We frequently heard that we should be focusing on climate change rather than antiracism work. This is another false binary in the face of extensive research that climate change is already affecting Black/Indigenous/people of color communities more quickly than it is affecting other communities. [21]

And yet, as one person submitting testimony said,

I’m hoping that we can build a group of white people teaching other white people and do it in a way that is sustainable so that this isn’t a passing fad. So that our congregation understands that what we do inside our walls is just as important as the protests that we go to outside.

Our internal work as people of faith is to become more inclusive, equitable, and diverse while our external work is to be accountable to those most affected by injustice. For us to be able to be good, accountable partners, we must do both. As Vann R. Newkirk II put it recently in a video published by *The Atlantic*, issues of the environment and climate change are rapidly becoming the new Jim Crow. [22]

At their heart, issues around climate change are issues of resource distribution, and any issues of resource distribution tend to disproportionately affect Black people, Indigenous people, and people of color. Our ability to work together and to cooperate in ways necessary to radically change our interaction with the environment and our economy will be dependent upon our ability to recognize that our future and survival are bound together.

By heeding the knowledge of those impacted “first and worst” by climate change and other justice issues, we can better grasp the problems, and answers, by the root. Not only are Indigenous cultures more likely to retain knowledge on how to coexist with the ecosystem that mainstream white culture has divorced itself from, but they’ve developed effective means of resilience by resisting oppression and genocide.

Finally, new generations are interested in being part of organizations that are making a difference. [23] An important recognition in today’s justice landscape is that while we may need to do restoration work to ameliorate the impact of inequitable distribution of resources, truly just and long-term justice work cannot be based in a charitable model that assumes that people of privilege have more knowledge of what is needed than those who have faced limited economic and social opportunities because of discrimination within organizations, communities, and systems. [24]

Environmental Justice

It has long been understood that unpopular environmental decisions often follow the “path of least resistance,” but we should expand that assertion to include the path of structured or institutional discrimination. To say that the decisions follow the path of least resistance takes the focus off of the systemic nature of oppression; specifically, who gets to make decisions. There are many examples of communities of color and low-income communities that are at risk due to pollution from the placement of industrial sites, environmental waste disposal, resource retrieval or use, and air and water pollution. These communities often bear the negative historical impact of racial and ethnic segregation, income inequality, and limited access to resources and policy makers. —Paula Cole Jones, “The Formation of the Environmental Justice Movement”

We can come to know the world as paradise when our hearts and souls are reborn through the arduous and tender task of living rightly with one another and the earth.

—Dr. Rita Nakashima Brock and Rev. Dr. Rebecca Ann Parker, *Saving Paradise*

The intertwined devastation of the Earth and dehumanizing living conditions for the most vulnerable people, often women, children, and peoples of color, are morally and aesthetically ugly. Both justice and beauty are violated when what is inherently valuable is devalued, defaced, or destroyed.

— Dr. Alison Downie, “A Spirituality of Openness”

Our theology tells us to choose faith and hope and deep, abiding love over fear—to act from the knowledge that we will save what is of great worth and sacredness to us. Let us refuse to be made immobile by fear and despair, instead choosing one more faithful action in every moment.

— Rev. Dr. Adam Robersmith, “Cherishing Our World”

Faith-rooted solidarity is not transactional. It might be described as universal relational because its adherents say, “I know that my well-being is totally and irrevocably tied up with yours. My liberation is dependent on yours.”

—Pam Sparr, “Transforming Unitarian Universalist Culture”

Four Levels of Oppression: Analysis and Change Model, from VISIONS, Inc.

In thinking about creating change, identifying and addressing the following are needed:

- Personal Level: What are the reported attitudes, beliefs, values, and feelings about various aspects of inclusion and equity? Of these, which ones support the desired goals within the organization, and which ones serve as barriers?
- Interpersonal Level: How are people behaving toward each other on a variety of dimensions at the UUA? How do different members in various roles experience the cultural climate of the organization? Again, what behaviors maintain or enhance an inclusive, open, and supportive environment and which create or reinforce barriers, particularly with regard to personal demographics and other cultural variables?
- Institutional Level: What are the ways that the UUA conducts its work? How do both formal and informal policies, practices, and organizational structures support the related goals of the organization, or not? What are the similarities and differences across, age, race/ethnicity, gender identity/expression, sexual orientation, role, length of service, and other variables?
- Cultural Level: What are the currently valued norms, customs, and “ways of being and acting right” endorsed by the UUA? How are these working and/ or not working for various members of the organization and its constituent community?

Recommendation

A liberatory faith will remember the mandate from our theological legacy: to privilege those most affected in our justice work, which should follow the voices of those most at risk.

Younger people who might be attracted to liberal religion want meaningful work as well as volunteer opportunities consistent with their values. [25] They are also more sensitive to the need to empower those most affected by the issues that we face and less likely to want to prescribe top-down solutions. This sort of accountable justice work requires the ability to be in authentic relationships with others and, in an increasingly diverse world, this means relationships across difference.

Hands-on and experiential educational experiences are particularly effective for all ages. These should be seen as important destinations for youth groups, as important as heritage trips to Boston, since racial injustice is part of our common heritage and one that our theology particularly calls on us to address.

- **Action:** Study income inequality and racial history in areas served by Unitarian Universalist communities as well as the impacts of injustice on Black, Indigenous, and people of color communities.
- **Action:** Expand accountable service-learning and action-education trips to allow real-life contact with difference and a hands-on experience of inequalities as this kind of action learning reflects generational learning norms. Screen justice trips to ensure that they are not tourism but rather actual service-learning experiences with an action-reflection model that includes preparation in anti-oppression practices for every trip that will cross cultural barriers and boundaries. Encourage legacy trips such as the Living Legacy [26] tours and border trips.
- **Action:** Develop and apply antiracism and anti-oppression approaches for Unitarian Universalist justice organizations, including state advocacy networks. This will allow for accountable partnerships at the international, national, and state levels.
- **Action:** Consult with identity-based groups on justice issues that affect their demographics disproportionately. This will allow the UUA and other UU communities to be in accountable relationships with Black, Indigenous, and people of color communities. Ground accountability in organizations rather than individuals.

Recommendation

Through its regional structures, the UUA should promote education for those who would accompany and co-journey with Black, Indigenous, and people of color communities and their leaders and groups to ensure more competency in this area.

Allyship can be an important part of a more inclusive strategy, as was seen when more than five hundred Unitarian Universalist clergy joined the Oceti Sakowin camp and other Indigenous leaders to oppose the Dakota Access Pipeline. For those who were able to follow orders from the Indigenous leaders, it was a powerful experience. [27]

White justice leaders should recognize that their privilege can interfere with building authentic relationships and accountability. It can also be a powerful tool on behalf of those impacted. Yet for the strategies to be effective, accompaniment must be done in an accountable way. [28]

Unitarian Universalist congregations and other organizations must also become more skilled in being accountable to groups rather than to individuals. Too often, individual Unitarian Universalists who are Black, Indigenous, and people of color are asked to speak for an entire group of people in whose community they may not even be currently living. Authentic partnership can offset this.

- **Action:** Identify and spread partnerships that illustrate how to be allied across lines of race and class so that this can become a standard practice in Unitarian Universalist justice work.

Recommendation

Develop more theological resources to center our justice work in our faith and make clear the interconnection between action in the world and spiritual development.

Black people, Indigenous people, and people of color within Unitarian Universalism repeatedly point out that too often our justice work is not grounded in our faith and our theological mandates. A better articulation of this could help make the connection between justice making and anti-oppression work clear. Without this, too often work for justice has a “charitable” bent that can be patronizing and demeaning.

- **Action:** Articulate the faith basis for our justice work both within our communities and to the larger world. If we can engage our theological schools and other theologians in doing this, it will offset the tendency to approach justice efforts from a paternalistic basis.
- **Action:** Support theological schools that articulate a Unitarian Universalist liberation theology that calls for accountability and reparations, deepening our approaches to inequities.

Recommendation

As people of faith, our call to collective justice work, through accountable partnerships, is our salvific path.

Accountable partnerships are critical to actually fulfilling our theology and mission as Unitarian Universalists. Methods of approaching justice work that do not honor the full worth and dignity of those who are affected by societal inequities are not consistent with our beliefs and cannot be part of our justice work if it is to be sustainable.

In our justice work, we also need to be able to maintain relationships with, and privilege the voices of, those most affected. One of the reasons Black people, Indigenous people, and people of color find time in our congregations challenging is that they have seen the biased way we treat partners in the community, acting as if we are better than others.

- **Action:** Amplify models of effective and accountable partnerships with organizations led by people of color as well as other marginalized leaders as part of the Promising Practices Congregation recognition at each General Assembly.
- **Action:** Learn from and take note of the work of organizations led by Black people, Indigenous people, and people of color on the issue of climate change, as these communities have been (and are now) feeling the effects of these issues for generations.
- **Action:** Deepen and strengthen connections with Black, Indigenous, and people of color–led organizations in the area of immigration.
- **Action:** Encourage donations to organizations led by people of color and Indigenous people who are working on justice issues critical to our faith beliefs at the congregational level.

Take-aways

- Our theology calls on us to respect the worth and dignity of all, and that is the foundation for our justice work. That foundation, along with our understanding that we are bound together, means that we need to center justice work in accountable partnerships.
- The lens of diversity, equity, and inclusion should be applied to all areas of justice work—including climate change.
- Accountable partnerships are dependent on our ability to educate ourselves and avoid microaggressions, tokenizing, and other forms of modern racism.
- Accountability in our justice work should be to organizations with which we have partnerships. We should not ask individual members of a particular racial or ethnic group (or other group such as transgender individuals) to serve as our accountability partners.
- Anti-oppression work is a necessary foundation for justice work.

Religious Professional of Color Avatar

- Jessie Anaya
- Afro-Latinx/Indigenous
- queer
- boomer

I came into Unitarian Universalism because I was queer. Sure, I no longer believed in the kind of God of the church where I was born. I probably would have stayed, for the music and the people and community if I hadn't been a lesbian. That was non-negotiable.

When I came into my first UU congregation, someone asked me if I wouldn't be more comfortable down the street at the Catholic church, and on my second visit, someone asked if they could touch my hair to see how it felt. The message, though, it spoke to me. About how we all have worth and dignity. The service the next week was about racial justice and immigration and I wanted to come back. I have lived in a lot of places that were not too good at welcoming me (I was working as a sociology professor then), so I kept coming back and I brought my kids.

Pretty soon I was asked to be on the Membership Committee and then the Religious Education Committee and the Board. We had districts back then and I was asked to be on that Board as well.

At my first district meeting, someone brought up their concerns that the site we had chosen for our conference was in a "mixed" neighborhood and they wanted to be sure people would be safe. I lost it and we had to call in a consultant from the UUA staff who seemed like she had never been part of a conversation about race before. When she got nervous, she used the term *colored people* instead of people of color. A couple of the other Board members defended her, saying it was "just words." I ended up taking over the session and facilitating the conversation. At the end, people understood a lot more about the experience of people of color in this nation, and by my next meeting, I was thinking that maybe I needed to be doing this for a living.

When a job working for the district opened up, I applied and got it. My bilingualism was sometimes welcomed, but my biculturalism and my ideas on how to accomplish the objectives within my responsibility were consistently unwelcome.

I had to visit a lot of churches. It was troubling the way that Black and African diaspora music is appropriated within UU churches, many times as a way to perform "multiculturalism." Another disturbing thing is the way people of color are erased. For example, a church with three Black members might hear comments at congregational meetings such as "We are an all-white church." And I cannot count the number of times I have objected when someone has said, "Well, we have no diversity in this room," only to have the response be, "Oh I mean Black people, real people of color."

I had a lot of background in meetings, organizational development, and all of that. One time I showed up to help a congregation deal with a problem with their finances and an older white man from the Finance Committee said, "We don't need someone to talk to us about race relations, we need someone who understands numbers." A younger Board member stepped in and called him in. However, that incident and so many other little jabs stuck with me.

My supervisor changed a couple of times and then we did away with districts. I went to seminary and made my way through a reading list that had only a few authors of color then. (My complaints and those of some of my classmates helped change the reading list.) I went into mega debt to get through. For my first cycle of candidating, I was asked to candidate in five different places but wasn't offered a call. I had to go back to consulting and also take a temp job to wait until the next cycle. It was the same thing except I was called to a small congregation that had had three ministers in five years. They had no Board policies and made a stink when I tried to get them to put some in place. I lasted there for four years, working around the clock. When I left, I knew I had made it longer than any of the last three ministers—but I was beaten up. One of my kids was a teenager then and got so sick of seeing what they did to me that she quit the faith.

I took a job as an associate minister in a larger congregation. The senior minister has done some work and I can call her on her stuff when it comes up. Someday I might want to try to be the number one again, but the way Unitarian Universalists have to always resist all authority and the way they resisted my strong womanist style just wore out my last nerve.

I think, looking back over my decade of involvement with Unitarian Universalism, that I was too polite for too long. Some of my younger colleagues of color come in now and they are much more real. I get through my days, I do what I need to do, and sometimes I say what I want to say: "You sing songs without understanding the history, the pain and the faith that birthed them. You change the words without understanding how that distinctly changes the meaning of our songs."

Yes, a lot has changed. In a lot more congregations, people wouldn't try to violate my body or touch me or try to send me to another church. And every day someone says something ignorant, truly ignorant, about someone who looks like my mama or my aunties or my kids. And that takes a toll, it really does.

Why do I stay? Because what we believe is what I believe and no color owns that. And because the young people coming in are fierce and I can't help but want to see where that goes....

Religious Professionals

“We begin with the premise in all our work that the values of Unitarian Universalism cannot be realized in a system that is centered around one cultural expression. In fact, the centering of white culture and values has stymied the development of a full range of cultural expressions. In the Unitarian Universalist tradition, two “pillar” Principles invite us to covenant to affirm and promote the inherent worth and dignity of all people and to acknowledge the interdependent web of existence of which we are all a part. Systems, policies, practices, and expressions of Unitarian Universalism that bias one racial or cultural group above others make a mockery of these two core values, and so we are called into efforts to name and change them as acts of witness to a fuller and more authentic expression of this faith.”

—Commission on Institutional Change, “Findings Related to the Southern Regional Lead Hiring Decision, Spring 2017”

“In a world in which diverse settings are increasingly the norm, religious professionals of color provide a very specific form of leadership in addition to the other professional skills that they bring. If properly supported, the hiring of a religious professional of color can be a turning point in a congregation’s commitment to address bias and racism inherent in a white-centered system.”

—Commission on Institutional Change, “Findings Related to the Southern Regional Lead Hiring Decision, Spring 2017”

“No process exists for redress when damage due to institutional racism is done, whether that damage is done to people of color or white participants. Trial in the court of social media is not a workable alternative to a real process.”

—Commission on Institutional Change, “Findings Related to the Southern Regional Lead Hiring Decision, Spring 2017”

Background and Trends

When the Commission on Institutional Change was appointed, we were asked to examine the events around the hiring of the Southern Regional Lead in Spring 2017. We prepared a report, which is found in Appendix I. While the specifics of that situation were complex and accounts varied, what clearly emerged were patterns of inequities and abusive conditions in which ministers who were Black, Indigenous, or people of color worked. Some of the broadest concerns are worth revisiting:

- Our system of credentialing is antiquated, very expensive, and emphasizes a narrow band of knowledge that does not validate lived experience, especially of those in marginalized identities.
- Religious professionals who are Black, Indigenous, or people of color are more often in non-ministerial professional roles and need additional institutionalized systems of support for credentialing. The cost of education and training for ordained ministry and non-ordained religious professionals can be a barrier to entry or professional development for many.
- Religious professionals face difficult working conditions caused by a lack of resources, a culture that undervalues the work of religious professionals, and growing demands on paid staff as volunteer pools diminish. Religious professionals of color experience these conditions alongside aggressions, disregard for their authority, and outright discriminatory and racist conditions; this makes employment in UU settings threatening to life and well-being. Those who have marginalized identity may also face abusive situations outside of their work.
- A team approach should close the gap between ministers and other religious professionals. Recognizing the role of ordained clergy alongside religious educators, who educate the leaders of today and tomorrow; music professionals, who can illuminate the beauty and power of marginalized cultures in a way that changes hearts; and membership and administrative professionals, who are on the front lines of hospitality, is critical.
- Though employment of Black people, Indigenous people, and people of color (as well as employment of people with disabilities or LGBTQ people) is one of the best ways to further work toward equity, inclusion, and diversity, few settings within Unitarian Universalism offer a quality of employment that makes such employment viable for the long term.

Employment within our Unitarian Universalist institutions remains very difficult for people from oppressed groups, who experience toxic levels of stress as they encounter ignorance, bias, tokenism, and racism in their workplaces.

Consider some of these examples from testimony:

- “During the Fall 2017 OWL training, there was a conversation about identity and how we label people. One woman, a member of [a nearby] congregation, asked, ‘Is labeling like when Black people can call each other niggers but no one else can?’ And she turned to look at me. Other white ministers agreed, and I was put on the spot to defend my race. The facilitators, one white man and one woman of color, didn’t address it publicly. The woman facilitator later came to me

and apologized for the interaction. For the remainder of the training, the woman who asked the question followed me around and tried to make me engage with her. On the last day of training, she addressed the group to say that she felt she was being disadvantaged and handicapped because some people were not wearing a name tag (I was the only one not wearing a name tag). I absolutely got nothing out of the training because I was so anxious and traumatized.”

- “I am white. My husband is Black. Our three children are biracial. In 2013, I was still fairly new to being a religious professional. When I saw the pictures of the view of [a UU retreat center], I knew I wanted to go. For the first time, I had the budget and a bit of extra money for the whole family to join me. I excitedly showed my husband. I had mapped out the driving route so he could see that it was drivable from the area where we live. He looked at me with a somber look and said very seriously, ‘I’m not driving with my white wife and biracial children through [that state].’ I’m sad to say, I told him he was being ridiculous, that in 2013 these things didn’t happen. Moments after this conversation, the news started sharing some new information about Trayvon Martin and I knew he was right. A road trip... was not safe for my family. He was willing to compromise though. He asked me to call the organizers and ask them if any Black people had attended the [program] in the past. So I did. The person I spoke to said that the only people of color she knew of who had ever attended were adopted children of white parents. That summer we did attend an RE week, the one in [a different state]. We were more familiar with that drive, and despite the fact that the city was over 90-percent white, we knew of another biracial family that would be attending. It became clear to me through that experience that the institutional structures of Unitarian Universalism would be a barrier for me and my family.”
- “When I participated in a music director search there, there were no best practices in place about equity. I was told, ‘Oh, this needs to remain confidential. Our conversations within the Search Committee are confidential, so they shouldn’t be brought to the Board.’ It’s this kind of maneuvering that I’m struggling with. And also as a member of the church with kids who attend. And the lack of, I guess, commitment that I’m seeing to racial justice really makes me question being a member of the church. And because I’m in the position that I’m in, I’m really seeing how we’re not putting our faith into action. We’re not following our Principles. So personally, that’s been a difficult struggle too.”
- “When we had our assistant minister of color, I was on the Board. I did employment discrimination law for years, and I... just saw such differential treatment going on with our assistant minister of color and I would try to bring that up at the Board.”

As we said in our November 2018 report on the Southern regional lead hiring controversies:

- First, we need to ensure that we reduce the barriers to entry that continue to make it hard for Black/African, Indigenous, people of color, and others marginalized in our wider society from lending their gifts as religious professionals.
- Second, we need to be sure that we do not ask people of color to exist in toxic work conditions.
- Third, we need to engender an atmosphere of continued learning and growth as the dialogue is ever evolving as those who have been silenced find their voices louder and stronger.

At the 2019 General Assembly, a bylaws change substituted the word *full* for *final* as the kind of fellowship ministers who have completed three years of evaluation receive. And yet, to make this meaningful, ongoing quality education on multiculturalism is needed. As one focus group participant put it, “Once those three

[preliminary fellowship] renewals occur, the minister never has to go to another workshop or GA ever again unless their congregation really wants to hold them to that.” In a world with so much change, ongoing learning should not be optional.

The Apprentice Track to Ordination, from The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Northern California/Nevada

The following is an adapted excerpt from the Training and Care Manual: Seminary and Apprentice Tracks for The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Northern California/Nevada. This is an example of an alternative approach to credentialing.

Seminary Track

There are two educational tracks in preparation for ordination: an Apprentice Track and a Seminary Track. Candidates for Ordination are encouraged to follow the Seminary Track, unless they determine, in consultation with their Region, that their economic, vocational, or familial circumstances makes the Apprentice Track (centered around Competency-Based education) more appropriate. Those in the Seminary Track will demonstrate competency in the 16 areas of ministerial practice by securing a Master of Divinity degree or its equivalent from a theological school accredited by the Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada or its equivalent.

Apprentice Track

Those in the Apprentice Track will demonstrate competency in the 16 areas of ministerial practice by completing a program of study of at least 250 contact hours approved by the Region in which they are under care.

Commissioned Minister

A Commissioned Minister is a person authorized or “commissioned” by the Region to offer a ministry in a particular place for a specified purpose and for a designated period. A “Commissioned Minister” replaces what was “Licensed Ministry.” In the CCNCN, T&C reviews and recommends to our region “commissions” for ministry.

Recommendation

We need to *reduce the barriers to entry* for those who seek to serve as religious professionals. This is true for all people, but these barriers are especially damaging for Black people, Indigenous people, people of color, and other marginalized people, who tend to have fewer financial resources due to historic and continuing patterns of discrimination. [30]

Life experience should be considered as part of admissions criteria alongside academics; nontraditional students should be actively recruited and provided with scholarship funds. Other faith traditions have addressed this by developing less academic paths to religious professional credentialing.

- **Action:** Create alternative paths to religious leadership, including certification in spiritual direction, ministerial apprenticeship, and scholarship funding for credentialing in non-ministerial professions.
- **Action:** Allow for ordination at the Associational level rather than only in congregations, to honor the diversity of ministries that exist but may not be easily supported at the congregational level.
- **Action:** Continue the practice of reporting on diversity and inclusion in hiring at the UUA, and an annual report on the demographic data of employment at the congregational level, collected as part of the annual certification process, should be made to the Board of Trustees and the General Assembly each year as a benchmark for the willingness of congregations to engage directly with these issues in a national context that is increasingly diverse.
- **Action:** Maintain a database of all religious professionals who are Black, Indigenous, or people of color, and consider maintaining it for other identity groups struggling within our professions. Track time for completion of certification, pay levels, and length of tenure.

Recommendation

Improving the *quality of livelihood* for religious professionals who are Black, Indigenous, and people of color should be an ongoing goal, recognizing the particular demands of serving a predominantly white Association and its congregations and communities.

We need to recognize the essential role of religious educators, music professionals, and membership professionals in making congregational change and experiment with new forms of team ministries.

Reasons for employment or termination ought to be analyzed, integrated, and benchmarked according to best practices, including trauma-informed ways of following up with religious professionals who have been damaged by their work with our communities.

Our collection of testimonies points to the use of negotiated settlements and other closed processes to reduce the public outcry that can come from the firing of religious professionals who are Black, Indigenous, and people of color. (Negotiated settlements are private agreements, the details of which are not shared with the congregation or other staff members of the employing body.) When these include nondisclosure clauses, they can also keep our congregational misconduct a secret and allow it to be perpetuated.

Please see [Appendix I, the Commission on Institutional Change’s Findings Related to the Southern Regional Lead Hiring Decision, Spring 2017](#).

In our initial report, we called for the establishment of a Rapid Response Team to intervene when employment disputes involve religious professionals of color. This team would be centrally coordinated and consist of trained individuals with different specialties so that team members could respond to concerns in their areas of expertise. Efforts to launch a Conflict Transformation Team are under way and are critical.

The Southern regional lead hiring decision brought ongoing concerns of religious professionals who are Black, Indigenous, and people of color to the forefront—and in the years that have passed since these events, a number of religious professionals have shared that they were not able to get critical support from regional staff, which resulted in early termination of positions. The staff of the Unitarian Universalist Association, while they articulate it in theory, lack in practice a common framework for understanding systemic racism, sexism, heterosexuality, ableism, and other oppressions. Without this understanding, they cannot effectively aid religious professionals of color, who might be in need of support against congregations also wrestling with a different kind of leadership.

We continue to miss the opportunities to advance these inclusive and hospitable practices in our congregations during times of transition. The fact that we continue not to insist on diversity, equity, and inclusive approaches to interim ministries engenders forehead smacking among many as it is so clear that such times of change are opportunities that should not be missed.

And when congregations do engage religious professionals who are Black, Indigenous, and people of color, we should *expect* that some conflicts will arise and be prepared to deal with them. Key to this is having all likely participants in a time of conflict equipped with multicultural competency skills. That this is not the case was heard again and again in the submitted testimonies, as exemplified by this comment:

I almost wish there was some process within the UUA to seek help because, I mean, I know that was very tricky in our situation with our assistant minister of color because, I mean, we would have conversations on the Board, but I know none of that could be shared with anybody. And you know, there are people who say, well these are personnel issues. You know, we can't really talk about this as a congregation. And there were also some instances where we had some of the district people come in and I was just flabbergasted. I felt like they were compounding the problems.

Finally, much was submitted to us about the patterns of abuse that exist with some congregations or religious professionals. Congregations that have had practices contributing to failed employment for a religious professional of color should be identified in the search process. Black religious professionals, Indigenous religious professionals, and religious professionals of color feel strongly that congregational leadership that inflicts harm, and especially those who do so repeatedly, should be considered to be “misconducting” in the same way that professionals are. Ministers and other religious professionals who have had a failed relationship with a religious professional of color should be identified as part of the search process. Educational resources should be offered to them (perhaps at their cost), and this education should be required before they are allowed to participate in the settlement system. We commend President Susan Frederick-Gray for making resources available for the beginning of the ministries for ministers of color and strongly recommend offering these to other religious professionals of color as well and further developing them with a more systemic than case-by-case approach.

- **Action:** Continue the investment in gatherings and professional development for religious professionals who are Black, Indigenous, and people of color. Consider ways to maintain these by job type online every quarter as a way to provide more effective support.
- **Action:** Provide resources for those who struggle with the impacts of emotional and spiritual harm as a result of serving as religious professionals in Unitarian Universalist settings.
- **Action:** Codify that all interim ministers will have anti-oppression training based in experience and not just literature review and that multicultural competency will be part of accreditation as an interim minister. (For example, invest in strengthening the UUMA’s Committee for Antiracism, Anti-oppression, and Multiculturalism.)
- **Action:** Implement the UUA Conflict Transformation Team, which can intervene when issues of racism or other forms of oppression are part of the narrative. This team needs to be consistently trained and available throughout the country now as religious professionals of color continue to face traumatic situations without needed support.
- **Action:** Refine and use consistent hiring and firing processes for UUA staff and promote models to recommend them to congregations seeking to hire religious professionals of color. Offer resources to ministers and other religious professionals of color when conflicts arise at the congregational level as well.
- **Action:** Identify resources to treat the trauma associated with encountering racism, sexism, homophobia, and transphobia as religious professionals who are Black, Indigenous, and people of color.

- **Action:** Re-examine the compensation guidelines to look at the differential between ministry and other professional positions. While recognizing the higher costs of obtaining a master's in divinity, compared to other forms of credentialing for religious professionals, and differences in authority and responsibility, huge differentials should be addressed in this era of income inequality.
- **Action:** Maintain a list of congregations that have had unsuccessful ministries with religious professionals who are Black, Indigenous, and people of color or ministers with other identities marginalized among us. Identify congregations that allow lay leaders or religious professionals to misconduct repeatedly in a transparent fashion and as part of the search process and make this information available to those in search.
- **Action:** Continue the development of a Common Code of Ethics for all religious professionals and conduct training for congregational boards, personnel committees, and other leaders to spread understanding of best practices.

Recommendation

Lifelong learning is the standard for all religious professionals, and this learning should address generational and multicultural awareness.

For some religious professionals, anti-oppression work is a core part of their preparation and of their ongoing continuing education. For others, it is seen as ancillary or even totally irrelevant. This creates a disconnect for Black people, Indigenous people, and people of color and many working-age Unitarian Universalists who have come to expect a basic level of multicultural dexterity.

As one focus group participant said,

I think we need to have it institutionalized that anyone who's working for the UUA should have substantial antiracism training, not just presume that because somebody went to seminary or whatever that they have that grounding. That should just be something that happens and that is ongoing.

Those who have received education of this type speak to the need for widespread education of others and say that all need ongoing continuing education because the dialogues evolve as more people who have been silenced find their voices.

- **Action:** Develop a fund to support the development of resources for ongoing education on anti-oppression practices and learning modules as part of the continuing education required for all ministerial candidates and ministers to combat white supremacy culture, racism, and other systemic oppressions as well as for other religious professionals.
- **Action:** Allocate resources to retool and update the Beyond Categorical Thinking program, which helps congregations assess their readiness for more diverse ministries. It has not been updated to reflect current issues and needed competencies.

Take-aways

- Religious professionals of color are essential to a more equitable, inclusive, and diverse Unitarian Universalism.
- Team ministry among religious professionals will provide new models of professionalism that will bring in new ways of working and model better practices at the congregational level. Team ministry will give voice to religious professionals of color in non-ministerial positions.
- In order to ensure inclusivity, equity, and diversity within the body of religious professionals, we need to take specific steps to ensure the quality of livelihood for religious professionals who are Black people, Indigenous people, people of color, and other ministers from oppressed groups. It is not consistent with our values to harm, abuse, or damage the health and well-being of our employees.
- Lay leaders, congregations, or religious professionals with a history of aggression toward religious professionals from oppressed groups should be identified so that further damage will not be done.
- In this time of unprecedented change, lifelong learning for religious professionals should be the standard and consistent with the continuing education requirements for most professions.

Educating for Liberation

“The next call to action for racial justice has arrived. My people: Will we answer? The UU White Supremacy Teach-In movement was unprecedented in its scope, and it was just the beginning of a crucial conversation. This conversation has angered some and empowered others. It is, for the first time, an honest conversation. What is at stake is the heart and soul of Unitarian Universalism. We are a people of faith, a faith that demands of us reflection, determination, and yes, a commitment to justice. Centering the voices of the marginalized will be part of becoming whole as a faith and as a people.”

—Aisha Hauser, accepting the Angus H. MacLean Award, 2018

“Children learn more from what you are than what you teach.”

—attributed to W.E.B. Du Bois

“Until you make the unconscious conscious, it will direct your life and you will call it fate.”

—attributed to Carl Jung

“Some beliefs are rigid, like the body of death, impotent in a changing world. Other beliefs are pliable, like the young sapling, ever-growing with the upward thrust of life.”

—attributed to Sophia Lyon Fahs

Background and Trends

A growing awareness of the power of unconscious bias is pervasive across many settings. The fact that a vocal minority of Unitarian Universalists continue to deny the existence of unconscious bias is both disturbing and discouraging. It is also true that many Unitarian Universalists have not personally experienced the impacts of such bias, though Black, Latinx, Asian, Indigenous, poor, disabled and LGBTQ congregation members and professionals understand it as a day-to-day reality.

For many generations, the standard within many Unitarian Universalist communities has been to promote a “color-blind” approach to religious education and social engagement. This approach is inadequate. Research shows children, and people of all ages, need positive and empowering conversations about race to overcome bias and internalized oppression. Our theological mandate to be inclusive of all who share our beliefs includes a responsibility to move from being “color-blind” to working to end “anti-blackness” and unconscious bias. [31]

Unconscious bias, left unaddressed, creates personal, interpersonal, and organizational practices that privilege some and oppress others. These practices can prove toxic for members of groups that they are not designed to serve. The idea of unconscious bias is a hard sell for people who value rationality and observable science above all.

The good news is that, once unconscious bias is acknowledged, the journey of dismantling it is productive and, for many people, freeing. However, initial efforts can be unskillful and further distance, other, and humiliate those of our beloveds who are Black, Indigenous, and people of color. Here is an example shared as testimony:

One of the people actually presented during the time for all ages and had our children stand up, which included children of color and an economically diverse group of folk, which the church does have. And they did a “step up/ step back” exercise in front of the whole congregation. And so I’m standing there and wanting to immediately stop it because I knew what was coming. It was like watching a train wreck. And there was no consent. You know there was no safe space. And all my children were involved.

If unaddressed, unconscious bias creates communities that are not safe for people who are marginalized. This is particularly true in religious communities because people bring their highest ideals and the gap between what they see professed and what is actually happening can be truly damaging.

One barrier to doing anti-oppression work can be shame and the expectation that the goal is to make people feel guilty. In fact, the goal is to allow people to change, and guilt is not an effective agent for change. The nature of history and facts makes it easy to center an approach on what has actually happened. Shame is never the goal of antiracism work—and it is a frequent by-product because of conditioning in a ‘mastery’ culture that one is supposed to be ‘learned,’ not ‘learning.’

The antidote isn’t to avoid antiracism work. The antidote is to train people to see that oppression happens at the personal and interpersonal levels and at the systemic and cultural levels. People are taught to be biased and to privilege the experiences of the white race over others. To undo this, people can engage their free and responsible search for truth and meaning in the work of self-discovery and learning about the systemic effects of oppression. [32]

We also heard about several other barriers. A significant one is that resources to assist with education are not easily identifiable and the existing resources are seen as too expensive.

As one person submitting testimony said of adult faith development,

Some people are doing some of that here. A lot of it costs a lot of money, especially if you're talking about counter-oppression kind of work. Those things cost a lot of money. Other organizations can't afford them. If we were doing something as a denomination that was consistent across the board, I think that that would be the biggest structural change I would make. But that's not a structural change. That's a cultural change.

And we can start with our children. As one focus group participant put it,

All of these problems we have with fragility, we still have to solve them. It might be a little easier if we started earlier and if we had a good solid curriculum that we could [use to] work with our kids about the way that they think about race.

VISIONS Audit of the UUA

VISIONS, Inc., a national consultant who engaged in an assessment of the UUA in the second year of the Commission's work, recommended including the following skills and learnings in trainings and ongoing work. The following recommendations are coming both from participants in the focus groups and from VISIONS, Inc.

1. Training/tools and skill building to do the work to prepare/equip congregations/UUA at all levels for maintaining energy and commitment in this (DEI) work
 - Our experience is that if an organization or institution wants to learn a few concepts or become aware of some things that it had previously been unaware of, then a training or two may suffice. However, UUA is already on a path to improve the racial/ cultural climate in the organization as a whole, with a hope to impact congregations everywhere. Such a goal requires a consistent effort, over time, to impact all at the individual/interpersonal level as well as the institutional (policies, practices) and cultural (environment, building of community) levels. This effort would include building in regular times for leadership, and where relevant, other groups within the UUA to continue having conversations around related topics and experiences to increase individual and institutional practice with the issues as well as provide significant opportunity for additional members and congregations to grow into this initiative. This kind of process— building in ongoing work relative to trainings, conversations, support groups—was also very clearly emphasized in/and desired by many of the groups.
 - Ongoing trainings (and coaching, as needed) would broaden a foundation for some of the skill development for members to be able to more confidently be in, hold and manage such conversations. Being able to use a multicultural lens as one engages with colleagues, employees, supervisors and leadership provides additional support for members to practice and hone their skills. Many of the needs and next steps could be addressed with such an ongoing initiative: community building, understanding the relevance of engaging in these conversations and other aspects of the work, knowing how to have and practice having challenging conversations while being able to specifically talk about oppression as it pertains to race and other structural 'isms,' identifying and addressing micro-aggressions, learning from these incidents and accounting, etc. Additionally, as these skills are practiced, the growth across the UUA that could gradually result from staying this course as an ongoing engagement is much more likely to enhance a shift in culture such that more people, particularly those uncertain about/or fearful of how to engage in these conversations will be more likely to join in the journey.

Therefore, the following are recommendations regarding training:

- a. The first step is to examine the existing trainings that are/recently have been in place and debrief/ glean impact to determine next steps; a thorough analysis of the trainings should yield successes to leverage, keep moving with, and challenges to learn from; additionally, we have learned that many trainings that have already taken place in recent years in various locations have been delivered by UUA members; leveraging internal resources like these that are effective is something that we highly recommend
 - i. The impact of diversity, equity and inclusion trainings and practice will lead to development of a multicultural lens through which all work can be viewed/completed; including all variables related to both privileged and marginalized groups (race, class, gender—cissexism and sexism, ability, ordained/lay, UUA/local congregation, etc.)

- ii. Consider offerings that meet the status of the congregation—that is, to tailor trainings based on the pace and place where the members/ congregations are with regard to DEI learning and practice; also taking into consideration geography: focused learning within location (i.e., Canada and the nuances of race there).

Trainings and ongoing work would also provide the following skill building opportunities:

- i. How to respond to challenges (i.e., changing [bystanding] to action)
 - i. Interrupting/responding to challenges; demonstrating learning from issues sooner
 - ii. Leadership would enhance their growth/be able to do their own deeper work using a multicultural lens through all of its work—‘leadership training development within congregations’; ‘putting resources to develop Ministers of Color and how we can support trans ministers; they will need resources of money, time and people; we are not doing this perfectly and committed to doing it differently’; ‘ongoing coaching for and around experiences of being a leader as a person of color’; ‘more leadership training around issues of addressing oppression.’
 - iii. Confidence building for more ministers to take on the work of anti-racism and dismantling white supremacy culture
 - iv. Realization that members and congregations can continue doing multicultural work despite the lack of diversity—that they don’t have to wait to obtain a critical mass of diverse members in order to be ‘ready’ to do the work; many organizations have learned to work effectively with a multicultural lens, while not experiencing much diversity; additionally there is positive impact at the cultural level and when prospective members see that members and congregations are working in this way they are more likely to be attracted to them and more likely to stay once they enter
 - v. Holding the ‘both/and’ of collaborating around the need to address white supremacy and environmental/ecological justice

*Ongoing training, coaching, technical assistance would provide opportunities to address the **personal, interpersonal and cultural levels** which can lead to insight around what **institutional** shifts need to be made to support the work at the other three levels. There are many different modules that VISIONS offers as ways to identify, analyze, understand and address obstacles to organizations moving in a direction that is more equitable for its employees and constituents. One such module—called *Modern Oppression and Internalized Oppression Theory and Behaviors*—focuses on what implicit/ unconscious bias is, the behavioral manifestations of it, how to identify and address the challenges related to it, and how to identify and put into place options for behavior/ decision-making that is more collaborative and equitable.*

VISIONS also noted,

VISIONS acknowledges the challenge/dilemma of the autonomy of congregations and the inherent challenge in wanting to have an initiative take hold without the ability to delegate it to the congregations. It seems that continuing to enhance the culture and demonstrating to both old and new members the benefits of how this [diversity, equity, and inclusion] initiative can and will enhance the organization and communities alike is the way to create the kind of culture shift over time necessary for getting more and more buy in to the work itself, and the organization as a result.

Recommendation

The Unitarian Universalist Association and other national UU organizations should prioritize the development of resources that allow Black people, Indigenous people, people of color, and other targeted groups to address the effects of today’s racism and other oppressions on their minds, bodies, and spirits.

Participants in our process spoke repeatedly of the impact of living within a white supremacy culture, especially the relentless toll it takes on the spirit, mind, and body. A particular source of pain was the disillusionment that comes from discovering these same societal and cultural forces within one’s beloved religious community.

So many of those engaging with the Commission’s work spoke of the fact that they would not have been able to remain Unitarian Universalist without the support of networks that brought people who shared their identities together. Gathering with others who are Black, Indigenous, and people of color or other LGBTQ or disabled people was essential to preserving a sense of dignity and self-worth.

Diverse and Revolutionary Unitarian Universalist Multicultural Ministries (DRUUMM) and Black Lives of Unitarian Universalism (BLUU) are two such networks. DRUUMM has continued to be part of efforts to identify systemic problems and

demand redress. BLUU has taken leadership in developing Black-centered worship, theological, and spiritual resources. Opportunities to come together and spiritual practices that embody Unitarian Universalist values are all essential.

VISIONS, Inc., told us that a continuum of options is needed. These can be curated as well as developed. VISIONS advised us to tailor trainings to the “pace and place where the members/congregations are” in their learning and practice around diversity, equity, and inclusion as well as their local contexts.

When developing these resources, the UUA should look toward the knowledge and expertise of those most affected religious professionals, lay leaders, thought partners, and leaders among our own ranks, while bearing in mind and deed the ways in which they have already been harmed by our institutions and ways in which we may empower them to heal, survive, and thrive beyond that harm. To do so, the institution must re-evaluate power and authority in these relationships, striving for power with rather than power over.

- **Action:** Continue to prioritize support for gatherings of lay leaders of color and religious professionals of color, including continued funding for the Finding Our Way Home gathering for religious professionals and regional and national DRUUMM events. Resource efforts to address physical, emotional, and spiritual injuries caused by systemic racism.
- **Action:** Curate new online resources to address the impacts of systemic oppression and white supremacy culture. These resources, including worship resources, inSpirit meditation manuals, video archives, and other tools should be made available and funded to allow for easier distribution.
- **Action:** Develop peer networks to collect and create trauma-informed resources for Black/Indigenous/people of color to address the spiritual issues of systemic oppression, to be used at the annual gathering of religious professionals of color and in online settings.

Recommendations About Education, from VISIONS, Inc.

Our experience is that if an organization or institution wants to learn a few concepts or become aware of some things that it had previously been unaware of, then a training or two may suffice. However, the UUA is already on a path to improve the racial/cultural climate in the organization as a whole, with a hope to impact congregations everywhere. Such a goal requires a consistent effort, over time, to impact all at the individual/interpersonal level as well as the institutional (policies, practices) and cultural (environment, building of community) levels. This effort would include building in regular times for leadership and, where relevant, other groups within the UUA to continue having conversations around related topics and experiences to increase individual and institutional practice with the issues as well as provide significant opportunity for additional members and congregations to grow into this initiative. This kind of process—building in ongoing work relative to trainings, conversations, support groups—was also very clearly emphasized in many of the groups. Ongoing trainings (and coaching, as needed) would broaden a foundation for some of the skill development for members to be able to more confidently be in, hold, and manage such conversations. Being able to use a multicultural lens as one engages with colleagues, employees, supervisors, and leadership provides additional support for members to practice and hone their skills. Many of the needs and next steps could be addressed with such an ongoing initiative: community building, understanding the relevance of engaging in these conversations and other aspects of the work, knowing how to and practice having challenging conversations while being able to specifically talk about oppression as it pertains to race and other structural ‘isms,’ identifying and addressing microaggressions, learning from these incidents, and accounting, etc. Additionally, the more that these skills are practiced, and the growth across the UUA that could gradually result from staying this course as an ongoing engagement, is much more likely to enhance a shift in culture such that more people, particularly those uncertain about or fearful of engaging in these conversations will be more likely to join in the journey.

Modern “Isms” and Internalized Oppression Behaviors

Modern “Ism”

The ways that people in historically and currently privileged groups continue to perpetuate discrimination without meaning to, especially through the use of explanations or justifications that deflect the ways that we still operate off of “better than” and “less than” dynamics. Most often, these behaviors are unconscious and unintentional yet still have tremendous negative impact and serve to maintain the status quo.

Types of Behaviors

- **dysfunctional rescuing**
Help that doesn't help and that isn't requested or mutually agreed upon.
- **blaming the victim**
Placing 100 percent of the responsibility for negative consequences on the historically marginalized group, whether individually or as a group.
- **avoidance of contact**
Keeping at "arms length" from people in historically marginalized groups or not saying something about cultural differences for fear of making a "mistake" or offending. This can also take the form of not raising issues of oppression with people in one's own historically privileged group.
- **denial of cultural differences**
Not recognizing that cultural differences do exist, not acknowledging the importance of coming to understand and appreciate the relevance of these cultural differences. Also refers to the ways that people in historically privileged groups don't acknowledge our distinct cultural backgrounds, norms, and values.
- **denial or lack of understanding of the political, social, economic, cultural, historical, psychological significance of cultural differences**
Minimizing, discounting, or refuting the day-to-day impact of oppression on people in historically marginalized groups.

Internalized Oppression

The ways that people in historically and currently marginalized groups internalize negative messages received from society. The result is the development of survival skills to cope with overt prejudice, bigotry, discrimination, and "modern isms." Most often, these behaviors become ingrained and we fail to realize that they no longer serve as survival mechanisms, but rather as barriers against change.

Types of Behaviors

- **system beating**
Not challenging oppression and prejudice, or using one's historically marginalized group status to "get over."
- **blaming the system**
Placing 100 percent of the responsibility for negative consequences on the historically nonmarginalized group (privileged group or institution) whether individually or institutionally.
- **antagonistic avoidance of contact**
Overwhelming mistrust of the non-target group, or being entirely separate from them for fear that marginalized group will not be able to hold on to "selves." This mistrust can also extend to people in the marginalized group who connect with folks in the historically privileged group.
- **denial of target group status**
Internalized self-hate as a result of oppression. This condition leads to many other behaviors, such as excessively trying to assimilate to the standards and norms of the privileged group and not connecting with other people from one's historically marginalized group for fear of being negatively associated with it.
- **lack of understanding of the political, economic, cultural, historical, psychological, significance of being part of the target group**
Minimizing, discounting or refuting the day-to-day impact of oppression on oneself and one's group.

Recommendation

Resources and tools to ensure a variety of entry points into the spiritual work of embracing one's own identity and the identity of others should be curated and, where not available, developed. Resources on healing religious wounds and productive conflict engagement are also needed as a core part of faith development.

This sort of education for liberation could be a source of dynamic spiritual growth and an invigorating set of spiritual practices. It requires a willingness to acknowledge and accept mistakes, emotional maturity, and the ability to use productive conflict. While models of education that involve training over a period of months can be helpful, they are not accessible for all people, and less time-consuming models should also be made available for those who need a different kind of entry ramp.

One focus group participant said,

I think I would just say in general that my focus has been really on helping the congregation focus on reflection and antiracism as a spiritual practice and its own work.... I think one of the things I began to realize [is that the] congregation is struggling with this urge that we have to go out there and do something. We have to go fix everybody. And so I'm pushing back a little and saying we need to do this work ourselves and trying to get people to really focus there and really go deeper and really get it in that way.

- **Action:** Offer resources to address the healing of religious wounds, which many Unitarian Universalists bring in from past religious experience and which sometimes restrict the deepening of our shared Unitarian Universalist faith.
- **Action:** Include funds to purchase equity, inclusion, and diversity resources in congregational budgets, since many existing curricula are fee-based to allow the developers, often people of color, to be supported in this work.
- **Action:** Develop training in inclusion, equity, and diversity for boards, nominating and membership committees, and other key leaders at the regional level, both in-person and virtually.
- **Action:** Promote intergenerational partnerships within Black/Indigenous/ people of color communities to provide mutual mentorship and support to address wounding because of systemic oppression.

Recommendation

A comprehensive path to understanding the work of equity, inclusion, and diversity should be developed and maintained as part of faith development.

Because of the widespread focus on equity, inclusion, and diversity work across a range of fields now, many of the tools congregations need may be available and may need adaptation rather than full development.

Black people, Indigenous people, and people of color have called for the development of a certification program that would help religious professionals of color discern which congregations are most equipped to accept their leadership.

- **Action:** Increase the repositories of worship resources that center the voices of people of color as well as others marginalized within our Unitarian Universalist culture.
- **Action:** Develop tools that allow congregations to hold conversations across generations about issues of inclusion, with the goal of recognizing the evolution in our Living Tradition and that spiritual developmental needs change over time.
- **Action:** Begin a renewing certification program similar to the Welcoming Congregation program for congregations, emphasizing lifespan learning in diversity, equity, inclusion, and anti-oppression similar to the Our Whole Lives curriculum.

Take-aways

- Unconscious bias is real.
- Unconscious bias, when unaddressed, creates toxic organizations.
- Many congregations have not addressed this and so can be toxic to people of color.
- Addressing unconscious bias requires education, not guilt.
- Many good tools are available and need to be curated for leaders who are overwhelmed by today's challenging religious landscape and need easy access to resources.
- More Unitarian Universalist-specific tools are needed, including a certification program which would indicate commitment and readiness for leadership from people of color.

White Accomplice Avatar

- Genevieve Mills
- white
- cisgender woman
- heterosexual

When I was in seminary in the late 1970s one of the requirements was to take a course in non-Western religion. I enrolled in a course on Native American spirituality and tradition. A leader advising the seminarians informed me that that was not going to meet the MFC requirement for a non-Western religion. I protested, saying that indeed it was non-Western, and he responded by

implying that it was not a real religion. I was furious and voiced my objection yet he would not reconsider. It was one of the first times I started to realize how many people don't see their white supremacy/settler-colonial attitudes in action. Who was he to decide what is a "real" religion?

I joined my current UU congregation about ten years ago when I moved here for a new job. I've spent most of my career working with adolescents and had the chance to join an organization working on re-entry programs for youth offenders. My work gave me a close-up look at the vagaries and biases in the criminal justice system and I started to learn to identify systemic racism. I joined my congregation's Social Justice Committee after the shooting of Michael Brown and the uprising in Ferguson.

Michael Brown was the same age as many of my clients and his loss felt personal to me. At the beginning of the Black Lives Matter movement, I knew we needed to get more white people engaged in changing these systems.

I advocated for hanging a Black Lives Matter banner on our congregation's building when the call went out for congregations to support the movement with this action in early 2015. Our committee debated the idea for a few meetings and then we had to do congregational education before asking for a congregational vote. I was new to organizing work and found the gathering of signatures and conversations with my fellow congregants to be very informative about the range of views and level of understanding about racism in our country and our city. We had a lay service about white privilege in which three members shared their stories about the harm they had done to friends of color when they acted without acknowledging their privilege. It was very powerful and moving, so by the time the congregation voted there were only three dissenters.

So I was completely surprised—and bitterly disappointed—when the Board said they didn't want to participate in the White Supremacy Teach-In just two years later. Our Social Justice Committee was working with the religious education director and Worship

Committee to make it happen when we got shut down without a real explanation. We had gone together to the Board meeting as a courtesy to let them know about our plans because they didn't usually get engaged on matters of our Sunday services. The Board thought we had already done enough work and the framing of White Supremacy made them very uneasy. I was angry and sad and tired. We'd done so much educational work in the congregation and to be stopped in our tracks was tough, really tough. I have to admit I wasn't my best self when I called the Board in on their cowardice and lack of support for our justice work. I told them centering their comfort was not what we needed in this moment. But our group wasn't successful and we were one of the few congregations that didn't participate.

I found a congregation in a nearby town that did participate and went to their service. I've attended services there a few times since, and while I've kept up with my Social Justice Committee work, the lack of support and enthusiasm from leadership for the work has made me reconsider whether that congregation is still a good place for me. I need a community committed to justice inside and outside the congregation.

Innovations and Risk-Taking

"I'm not an entertainer. I'm not an athlete. I'm not someone who said, 'I want to be a star.' I really just love my people a lot. And I love Black children a lot. And I want to see us live. I want to see us thrive. I want to see us enjoy the kind of life that our ancestors fought for. And that's the way that I was raised. I feel like every time I'm able to access some of that joy, I try to hold on to it in my personal life. I just want to see us all be able to live lives of full humanity, 'cause that's what we deserve."

—Brittany Packnett Cunningham, interview with [The Undefeated](#)

"What if we had a 1-800 number for spiritual support for people who are doing this work and are feeling weary and discouraged and confused?"

—focus group participant

Background and Trends

We live in a world of change. The pace of change is now at an unprecedented level accelerated by shifts in global economics and demographics as the world adjusts to a world economy and as the US prominence in that economy drops, signaling an "end of empire." This is affecting us at the local level as well, specifically in these ways:

- The demographics of our nation are changing, with Black people, Indigenous people, and people of color making up a greater share of the population.
- Newer generations are more interested in using direct lived experience as the basis of worship rather than the secondary sources or more academic frameworks.
- Younger families face extreme stress because of increased workloads and greater economic insecurity, exacerbated by phenomena such as the gig economy.
- Technology has changed expectations for the kind and quality of worship, making authenticity and high quality particularly important to newer generations. They expect to see a diversity of voices represented in worship, as well as the multicultural competency they learned in school and are expected to have in the workplace.

The good news about all these changes is that it could actually make the value of face-to-face religious community more important. This kind of community offers a kind of sanctuary and solace that is not offered in other experiences. And yet without attention and care, oppressive practices that center the white, straight, cisgender, affluent, able-bodied, neurotypical, college-educated experience will make religious community untenable for those who need it the most as a place of sanctuary in these troubled times.

The pace and extent of change require us to reexamine how we lead, staff, and organize our shared community life. We need to recognize that generations coming into leadership, or that we wish to come into leadership, will not come with the same level of security or resources with which past generations entered. A model in which we pay a minister's health insurance, for example, yet expect a director of religious education's needs to be provided for by a spouse is not a viable model. The practice of paying wages that do not recognize the debt with which seminarians graduate is not sustainable. Since the lower net worth of Black/Indigenous/people of color families (as well as members of other oppressed groups) is well documented, these factors are compounded.

In other words, the ways we have been doing business need to change and we need innovation, experimentation, and support for those risk-takers who are building new ways.

New models of shared leadership that recognize the importance of all religious professionals are needed to meet the skill level expectations of people used to professionalism in the nonprofits they serve as volunteers. These models would also provide meaningful and time-effective ways to tap the talents of volunteers as they face unprecedented time pressures.

We also need new models of worship that integrate emotional intelligence, music, and other forms of knowing in a world in which people are often overwhelmed. People's spiritual solace is often not the lack of good ideas but the lack of space to process the emotional difficulties of living in a world wracked by conflict, inequity, and uncertainty; we need more spiritual practices and tools.

Rituals and spiritual practices are essential alternatives to all-or-nothing arguments, as they are capable of holding the highs and lows of authentic human religious expression. Technologies and practices that encourage generative conflict can replace exhausting, disillusioning, and heartbreaking practices of ignoring conflict until it is explosive and burying or covering up abuse or mistakes.

One of the main concerns of the focus groups was that people who are front-runners and innovators need support. As one participant put it, we need "some kind of structure for congregations to share their stories and their journeys with each other on a regular basis, some structural mechanism."

Considerations for Cultural Borrowing: Questions to Ask (and Answer)

The following is from UUA.org

Motivation

- Why am I doing this? What is my motivation?

Goal

- What is the goal?

- Why do we want multiculturalism?
- Why this particular cultural material or event?

Context

- What is the context in which I will use the cultural material?
- What is the cultural context from which it is taken? The history?
- What are the controversies/sensitivities surrounding this material?
- What are the power relationships in this context? The privileges?

Preparation

- What am I willing to do to prepare for this experience?
- Have I done my homework on this material?
- What sources/resources have I used?
- Have I asked people from the culture for feedback/ critical review of my plans? The history?
- Have I asked people from the culture to create or co-create the material?
- Did I invite people from the culture to participate?
- To speak for themselves in this plan?

Relationship

- Am I in relationship with people from this culture?
- Am I willing to be part of that community's struggle?
- What is my relationship with the source of the material?
- What can I give in return? What do I offer?
- With whom do I ally myself with this usage?
- Am I working alone?

Identity

- How does this work nurture self-identity and group identity?
- How does this strengthen UU identity?
- How does it help UUs be religious?
- What does this say about UU faith?
- How does it relate to UU spirituality or spiritual practice?
- What can UUs learn from other traditions?

Adaptation

- Who holds the copyright?
- Have I received permission to use the material?
- Who has the right to adapt? Why?
- Who will be insulted/offended by this adaptation?
- With whom do I ally myself with this adaptation?
- What is the difference between symbolic and real ritual, and how am I using this ritual?
- If I am using a translation, is it accurate, authentic, and current?

Language

- Am I using current, authentic language?

Mistakes and Miracles, by Nancy Palmer Jones and Karin Lin

The following is an excerpt from the Introduction of Mistakes and Miracles: Congregations on the Road to Multiculturalism.

This book models a fundamental truth about multicultural work: At its heart, it is always about the relationships we create and the care that we bring to these relationships. Taking the time to build these relationships is part of the work we're describing. Storytelling, too, takes time, and in that sense, it is an act of resistance in a culture like ours, which values the quick and efficient. Stories take longer to unfold and ask more of the reader or listener than does a list of to-dos. The interweaving strands of the stories we tell—their loop-de-loops and muddy patches, their forests of details and their bright shining moments—all help to paint a fully human picture of what's at work in each congregation.

Such stories transform us—readers, hearers, and tellers alike—into participants in the act of creating something new. We experience joys, sorrows, anticipation, disappointment, hope, frustration, and wonder together. We come away from these stories with lessons learned to guide our actions and with a new vocabulary to name the meanings we discover along the way.

The complex stories we share here show that it takes intentional work and persistent commitment to build multicultural, antiracist Beloved Community. Mistakes and misgivings abound and are inevitable. But unexpected miracles of joy and transformation are abundant too. The journey itself; the companions who join in; the sometimes fleeting, often sacred sense of completeness that emerges in the midst of the journey; the satisfaction that we are living our faith—these elements make all the hard work meaningful and worthwhile.

Recommendation

The Unitarian Universalist Association should fund, spread, and curate the ideas of those congregations working for many decades now to become more inclusive, equitable, and diverse and amplify this work at the General and District Assemblies.

We need to allow ways for these innovators to share together in order to do this and spread findings to the larger Association so that thoughtful leaders do not have to all reinvent the wheel.

- **Action:** Work with funders to establish grant programs for those developing practices and technologies for inclusion.
- **Action:** Provide learning circles and virtual learning circles for groups of white people interested in learning how to be accountable to Black people, Indigenous people, and people of color and co-journeying with them.

Recommendation

Assistance to congregations supporting circles or caucuses involving Black people, Indigenous people, or people of color as well as young adult groups within their local context should be prioritized.

- **Action:** Amplify community practices building diverse, equitable, and inclusive spaces throughout General Assembly as “Promising Practices.”
- **Action:** Develop a new annual award to be presented at General Assembly to individuals, congregations, or other groups or communities for innovation in counter-oppression work.
- **Action:** Provide resources and a coaching program for congregations interested in retooling their forms of worship, leadership, and accountability. This can include small and shrinking congregations willing to redirect existing resources toward new groups such as young adults, LGBTQ people, or Black people, Indigenous people, and people of color.

Recommendation

Funding is needed to ensure that Black leaders, Indigenous leaders, leaders of color, and leaders from other marginalized groups with lower financial resources can be engaged and provide leadership into a more inclusive future. We need to continue to figure out ways to use the leadership, expertise, and life experience of Unitarian Universalists who are Black, Indigenous, or people of color or have other marginalized identities, as they are very valuable in designing faith-based experiences that speak to resilience and inclusion in an increasingly diverse context.

The wealth gap between white people and non-white people, and especially between white people and Black people, continues to be documented. [34] As we seek to bring the power of many life experiences to the table, we need to compensate for and counter

the wealth gap so that those living in the new economy can participate. Many currently in the workforce and in lower paid jobs are not able to take paid vacations, so participating in gatherings can endanger their incomes.

In addition, as we shift to counter-oppression practices, we know that cultural misappropriation (the taking of resources out of context or the use of resources for an inappropriate purpose) will occur. In the 1990s and early 2000s, Associational resources were developed to counter this, so we need to revive best practices for cultural borrowing.

- **Action:** Examine the ability of volunteer leaders in certain key positions—such as moderator, General Assembly Planning Committee members, and UUA Board of Trustees members—to recoup lost income on a needs basis and to pay for child care and other service-related expenses.
- **Action:** Fund leaders who are Black, Indigenous, and people of color to develop new worship materials, including curation of music with guidelines for how to use music in a culturally competent manner.
- **Action:** Revive a focus on cultural competency and cultural borrowing in all religious professional associations to counter the cultural appropriation that can come with efforts to become more equitable, inclusive, and diverse.
- **Action:** Continue to prioritize resources about inclusion, equity, and diversity written by Black people, Indigenous people, and people of color in Unitarian Universalist publications, including Skinner House books.
- **Action:** Provide funding in congregational budgets to allow leaders who are Black, Indigenous, and people of color; younger leaders; and those without means access to funds for child care, travel, and other expenses so they can participate in leadership and decision making in all aspects of our Association.

Recommendation

New settings and structures for worshiping and convening for Black people, Indigenous people, people of color, and youth and young adults should be funded, including new communities.

In these times of seismic change, we need to be investing in new ways of creating religious space that can honor other sensibilities and sources of truth and that can allow a place for engagement for those not served by more established congregations. Congregations can also serve as incubators to allow these groups to be nested within their walls and supported by their resources.

As we continue to provide worship that nurtures those already in our congregations, we also need to look at models that will support and nourish people who share our theological beliefs and do not find our worship models adequate for their needs.

- **Action:** Convene a learning group for people of color, youth and young adults, and other marginalized groups interested in experimenting with new ways of worshiping and convening that better suit their cultural norms.
- **Action:** Provide learning circles and virtual learning circles for groups of white people interested in learning how to be accountable to Black people, Indigenous people, and people of color and co-journeying with them.

Take-aways

- People and communities who are front-runners and innovators in combating white supremacy culture and developing practices of equality, innovation, and diversity have traditionally faced barriers when what we need for them to have is support.
- The limited resources we have should showcase and spread successful innovations because such change is critical for our survival as a faith tradition.
- We should not be culturally appropriative as a way of being inclusive, and education can help prevent that. We should do this education.
- Congregations taking the risk of engaging in inclusion, equity, and diversity work will pay a cost because of those unwilling to adapt to the times. They should be supported.
- Recognizing and honoring those engaged in equity, inclusion, and diversity work at the national level can build support at the local level.

White Counter Narrative Avatar

- John E. Pickett

- cisgender man
- heterosexual

Greetings, Commissioners,

I am writing in response to the call for testimony about member experiences with racism.

I am copying Rev. Susan Frederick-Gray, as I have been in contact with her regarding my dismay at the direction our beloved Association is heading by adopting dangerous authoritarian ideas like critical race theory/critical race theology, rejecting logic, and promoting dangerous and disrespectful persons to leadership.

By way of introduction, I am a fourth-generation Unitarian, my family having begun in the faith at the church served by Rev. William Ellery Channing.

I am a retired county executive, councilman (during which time I passed an ordinance to rename a local road “Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard”), professor, former congregational president, and district leader. I have served in various other roles, including religious education chair and chair of the Social Action Committee.

During the sixties and seventies, I marched for racial justice and the student anti-war movement, risking jail time (as well as life and limb!) to speak up for my fellow Americans. I was a supporter of the Black Affairs Council and wrote a strong letter of disapproval to the moderator regarding the failure of leadership after the Black Empowerment Controversy.

I am proud to say that things have improved considerably, both in the world and within Unitarian Universalism. In my own life, I have seen many engineers, police officers, and elected officials who were not Caucasian males (a big change!), some of whom were even openly homosexual.

Currently, my primary physician, physical therapist, and home health aide are all Black. My daughter is a pilot, breaking out of traditional jobs for her gender. I have personally hired both men and women of color in various subordinate positions.

And I worked tirelessly to call our first openly gay director of religious education. Of course, more could be done. However, I believe it would be a great shame to destroy the excellent work so many have produced, as it seems your approach is insistent on doing.

Another troubling idea being pushed by the Commission is “cultural misappropriation.” Within our congregation, we’ve happily celebrated Day of the Dead and Juneteenth, and we regularly sing African-American Spirituals despite having no Black members in our choir (though I should add, we have *two* Black people in the congregation)! These should be seen as great strides toward learning and reconciliation, not demonized and barred by illiberal, fascist edicts from the UUA.

Am I not allowed to eat bagels because I have no Jewish ancestors? Can I not listen to Chopin if I am not Polish? Should we bar our African-Americans from attending our Fourth of July services?

The current direction of the UUA and groups like the Commission exacerbates divisions when we should be minimizing differences and focusing on unity. My minority friends and many who are black and gay want to be accepted as people, not seen as part of groups, or victims.

Reasonable people of color will not join a faith that stereotypes them with identity politics. Caucasians will not join a church where they are called “White Supremacists” like the KKK or Skinheads, and many will decide to leave. If that happens, the Association will collapse financially.

We must get our faith back in line with the principles of liberalism, democracy, and critical thought.

Restoration and Reparations

“We, like N’COBRA and many other formations that have come before us, call for reparations to all African descended people in the United States for harms flowing from the ‘badges and incidents’ of slavery—the ways in which the practice of chattel slavery

in the United States marked all Black people, regardless of whether they are direct descendants of Africans enslaved in the United States, for dehumanization, violence, structural exclusion, and discrimination.

This includes: racial terror, state-sanctioned segregation, and theft and destruction of Black people's land, property, businesses, and homes in the Jim Crow era and beyond, housing discrimination and 'redlining,' and the ongoing effects of racial segregation, discrimination, and structural exclusion which represent ongoing impacts and harms of slavery that have not yet ceased or been remedied.

We also call for reparations for all Black people in the United States who have been subject to post-slavery policies and practices representing a continuation of harms inflicted in the context of chattel slavery, including family separation, state-sponsored sterilization and medical experimentation, mass criminalization and incarceration which followed slavery, and for the violence, institutionalization, discrimination and structural exclusion specifically targeting disabled Black people, and contributing to high rates of disability among Black people."

—M4BL (Movement for Black Lives), "Reparations Now Toolkit"

"What is needed is an airing of family secrets, a settling with old ghosts. What is needed is a healing of the American psyche and the banishment of white guilt. What I'm talking about is more than recompense for past injustices—more than a handout, a payoff, hush money, or a reluctant bribe. What I'm talking about is a national reckoning that would lead to spiritual renewal."

—Ta-Nehisi Coates, "The Case for Reparations"

"We must move away from an idea of personal and individual 'success' and toward ecological economics, collective advancement, collective achievement, and collective wealth."

—Diallo Kenyatta, *The Bro Diallo Show*

Background and Trends

Any discussion on reparations must begin with an acknowledgment of the ongoing genocide, oppression, and exploitation of Black people, Indigenous people, and people of color so pervasive in the worldwide Euro-dominant, racist, capitalist system; in the nations and cultures where those Western cultures and ideologies originate; as well as in the nations and cultures that have been influenced and molded by invasion, colonialism, and socio-economic oppression. Ultimately, a true cessation of this aggression is required to ensure freedom, justice, and equity for all.

While we work toward a total liberation for all, we must acknowledge the hurts that can be healed, the faults that can be fixed, and the repair possible among communities suffering from the material outcomes of hundreds of years of oppression.

As this report is being written, we are in a time of renewed conversation about reparations for African Americans. Numerous scholars, think tanks, and policy organizations representing affected groups have offered their assessments. Ta-Nehisi Coates's "The Case for Reparations" and the Reparations Now Toolkit from the Movement for Black Lives (M4BL) are prime examples. We have also seen calls for legislation such as the proposal of H.R. 40, a bill that would establish a commission to study reparations.

As this cry for justice reverberates across our land, it would behoove Unitarian Universalism to look inward at its own history of oppression and exploitation of Black people, Indigenous people, and people of color, as well as at the harm that has been articulated by members who are people of color in the near past and present. And to study and learn about the history of our own institutions and the models of redress being discussed and advocated for by Black leaders, Indigenous leaders, and other leaders of color.

Black activists and organizers have long understood the role that religious institutions play in institutional racism and therefore should play in reparations. For example, the 1969 Black Economic Development Conference wrote and issued the "Black Manifesto," a call for \$500 Million in reparations to be paid by US religious institutions.

This placement of responsibility is consistent with the role played by religious practices such as missionary colonialism and religious oppression, such as the use of Christianity to erase African culture and sow obedience among Black captives, as well as religious enforcement of culture, such as the Ku Klux Klan, a self-proclaimed Christian organization using religious rituals as tools of violence against Black people and white-identifying people who are not Protestant Christians.

Looking further back, we must acknowledge that Protestant theological thought, such as that espoused by theologians Increase and Cotton Mather, helped to articulate the conflation of European Identity with Christianity, righteousness, and purity to develop the concept of whiteness, inversely establishing anti-Blackness. [35]

Because religious institutions and groups often create, maintain, and cultivate cultural ideas, their complicity with racism, anti-Blackness, and white supremacy culture must be acknowledged and owned.

What do our own UU Principles and experiences teach us?

While Unitarian Universalism does have a history of resisting slavery and supporting the Civil Rights movement; it also has a history of institutional racism, support for cultural racism (Unitarian Minstrel Shows [36]), and its own experience with religious oppression of Black people (as evidenced by the Empowerment Controversy [37]).

Indeed, when one reads Unitarian abolitionist opinions on whether Black people had the right to physically resist kidnapping during the debates over the Fugitive Slave Act, or the opinions of Unitarian volunteers during the Union Army Port Royal experiments about whether Black people could maintain basic human industry, overtones of modern discussions on animal rights echo.

Surely, if our first Principle is to be believed, those captive people had worth and dignity; although their dignity was assailed, it was not degraded or diminished, and we should not disregard it now. And when we respect their inherent worth and dignity, we must conclude that they deserve what justice this generation is able to afford their memories.

Our limited scope of history means that we have not been restored to the wholeness that comes from a true accounting for the ways that our faith has been complicit in the oppression of Black people, Indigenous people, and poor people as well as other people of color.

The lack of identifiable and covenantal ways to air, process, and address damaging behavior by the dominant culture toward marginalized folx has caused an intolerable level of pain.

Beyond history, this report has endeavored to gather and present data on the current inequitable and oppressive treatment of people of color within Unitarian Universalism.

We need to identify and address and stop the many ways in which our institutional practices have caused harm and heed the cries for equity from people of color in our own Unitarian Universalist community.

We believe that healing is needed for those who have been harmed, and we also believe that our values call us toward community and a willingness to share the labor of healing the hurt together.

The Commission's work affirms that reparations within Unitarian Universalism are imperative to both fulfilling the values of the second Principle (covenanting to affirm and promote justice, equity, and compassion in human relations) and achieving the goal of a "beloved community."

Further, our sixth Principle calls on us to work toward "a world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all," thus requiring we work for "justice for all."

We call for the adoption of the following principles for reparations:

- Resources need to be redirected toward investments needed to accomplish reparations as well as transform and shift our culture and practice toward more inclusion, diversity, and equity.
- Risks should be born by our systems and institutions and not just by individuals.
- Promising practices should be identified, curated, and made available as models.
- A more uniform, flexible, and culturally competent regional structure is essential to support this institutional change at the congregational level.

Definitions

The National Coalition of Blacks for Reparations in America (N'COBRA) defines reparations as:

A process of repairing, healing and restoring a people injured because of their group identity and in violation of their fundamental human rights by governments, corporations, institutions and families. Those groups that have been injured have the right to obtain from the government, corporation, institution or family responsible for the injuries that which they need to repair and heal themselves. In addition to being a demand for justice, it is a principle of international human rights law.

The Anarchist Reparations Movement says,

“Reparations are bigger than a paycheck” is a saying among those seeking reparations. It requires land return, agency return, and the intentional commitment of resources to foster restoration of affected healthy communities through resource allocation, policy change, and targeted economic opportunities. Reparations takes into account the concept of “well-being,” as meaning health in all areas, spiritual, mental, physical, financial, social, environmental, to create a ‘horizon of possibilities.’ ” *

While investment in oppressed and tyrannized communities may take the form of support of individuals and groups may follow reparative philosophies when paying restitutions they have harmed, we also follow the lead of various other groups, such as N'COBRA, M4BL, and the United Nations in understanding reparations as specifically relating to groups of people.

Restoration requires truth telling, accountability, and the willingness to feel with others. It may also require innovative ways of power sharing, resource shifting, agency return, and cooperative economics to restore to well-being those who have been harmed directly as a result of oppression.

How do we know what is reparations and not something else? M4BL offers these criteria:

It is reparations if it includes:

- An official acknowledgment and apology for harm, public education or memorial about the harm; and Compensation to a specific, defined group of individuals harmed by a violation, including descendants, as well as family and community members of individuals directly targeted for harm who were adversely affected; and
 - Action to restore individuals harmed to the position they were in before the initial harm occurred; and
 - Action to stop the systems, institutions, and practices causing the harm; and
 - Changes to laws, institutions, and systems aimed at ensuring that harm will not happen again.

Restitution

We see *restitution* as having two definitions.

Groups such as M4BL set a context of reparations for all Black people that defines restitution as the measures intended to restore the survivor to the original situation before the violations occurred, including, as appropriate: restoration of liberty, enjoyment of human rights, identity, family life and citizenship, return to one’s place of residence (repatriation), restoration of employment, and return of property.

We understand the above mechanisms to be the material actions taken to achieve the big idea of reparations.

In common law systems, there are many times when restitution is called for, both for people and groups. Within any functioning community, there should be mechanisms whereby victims of harm are given restitution.

Divestment/Investment

According to M4BL,

Divestment (in the form of resources, legitimacy, and power) from exploitative forces (including prisons, fossil fuels, police, surveillance, and corporations) and investment into infrastructure and services that support our people (including education, transportation, and the health and safety of our communities).

Divestment and investment strategies can take many forms and have many degrees of scale. When the Board of Trustees of a majority-white congregation chooses to work with a caterer who is a Black woman and her small business for their Board retreat lunch rather than a corporate chain restaurant, when well-to-do white church members raise money to replace the dead vehicle of a young lay leader of color, or when church foundations run a stock inventory to make sure their investments align with their values as closely as possible—these are all divestment/investment strategies.

Many Black people, Indigenous people, and people of color are enlisting white allies and co-laborers for direct financial, material, infrastructural, and institutional assistance in times of need. This assistance may include money, ride sharing, temporary housing facilitation, or in some cases, access to employment opportunities.

The Commission on Institutional Change agrees with M4BL that, while divestment and investment strategies are crucial elements of any plan to dismantle white dominance and capitalist oppression, they are not reparations; they may only be part of that process. M4BL points out that while these strategies address immediate harms, “a requirement of reparations is that those harmed are restored back to the condition they would have been in if the harm had not happened.” Divestment and investment strategies don’t guarantee such restoration.

Reconciliation

In this report, we define *reconciliation* as two parties coming to a place of restored community with one another.

We recognize that first cessation of harm is necessary, and also that reconciliation is often not the goal of reparations, as it requires a desire from both parties, both those who have harmed and those harmed.

Badges and Incidents of Slavery

The phrase *badges and incidents of slavery*, coined by M4BL, refers to the “ongoing perceptions, discrimination, violence, or state or private policy or action that targets or taints any racial group or population that has previously been held in slavery or servitude.”

Because anti-Blackness is a primary factor within the system of white domination, so that even those whose ancestors were not directly affected by, for example, the Transatlantic Slave Trade that primarily affected West African people and those of West African descent, are still greatly disadvantaged by the effects of that history through the religious, cultural, and socio-economic oppression required to establish and perpetuate it.

Caribbean Black immigrants often have higher levels of income than Black people born in the US (though lower overall than similarly educated white immigrants). Facts like this are used by many conservatives to argue in favor of bootstrap politics, but a closer look shows that this group is affected by the “badges and incidents of slavery.”

Ta-Nehisi Coates summed this up beautifully during the US House Judiciary Committee (Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights, and Civil Liberties) hearing on H.R. 40, Legislation to Study Slavery Reparations, saying,

There is a difference in the income between Caribbean Black immigrants and Blacks [born on the continent]. This is true; people who come to America to pursue opportunity generally do better than the masses of the whole group. This is true of all immigrants. However, what happens when you look at the second generation, and the third generation of those Blacks? Unlike all other groups they quickly become “African-American.”

These Black immigrants to the US, like many other Black people, suffer under a generations-old system of anti-Blackness upheld and conditioned into the culture by religious views and theology, politics, literature, and advertising.

Churches, as Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King said in his 1966 Ware Lecture, act as the “moral guardian of the community and of society,” and in many ways, churches within the US have wholly accepted, supported, and perpetuated these predatory cultural habits.

This report finds that many of those coming into our own community have experienced harm due to the existing culture of anti-Blackness, theological erasure and exclusion, institutional neglect, financial oppression, and violence already operating within Unitarian Universalism. Reparative action must include a thorough understanding of this harm.

Recommendation

As an act of reparations, funding and administrative support for groups that allow Black/Indigenous/people of color and other marginalized groups to convene and gain the support necessary to worship and serve in predominantly white communities should remain a priority.

As noted in our discussion of Hospitality and Inclusion, people of color reported over and over that they were the only or one of a very few non-white people in their congregation, which makes opportunities to gather with other Unitarian Universalists who are Black/Indigenous/people of color critical. The establishment of specific organization such as DRUUMM (Diverse and Revolutionary Unitarian Universalist Multicultural Ministries), LUUNA (Latina/o Unitarian Universalist Networking Association), and other groups that allow people who share an identity to come together AND to continue to survive in situations where they are isolated in their core identities. Most recently, the formation of BLUU (Black Lives of Unitarian Universalism) has given birth to a new community because reparations monies were paid to BLUU as a result of the promises that were promised but not delivered in the 1970s. The principle behind the awarding of money to BLUU was continued in an agreement to provide administrative and other support to DRUUMM and should be expanded as part of a reparative practice to other identity-based organizations.

- **Action:** Establish a position to provide increased ongoing administrative and travel support to DRUUMM, BLUU, TRUUsT, and EqUUal Access, the organizations currently representing many of the people whose identities are marginalized in Unitarian Universalism. This would allow the leadership of these groups to devote their time and effort to advocacy and programs that are necessary for their communities' sustainability and would ensure that important administrative functions, such as mailing lists, membership lists, and donation lists, are maintained for the long-term survival and growth of these vital organizations.
- **Action:** Maintain a list of all congregations that are engaged in caucusing and that have ongoing people of color or other identity caucuses at the Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations as another way to communicate with vital populations within our congregations.

Conditions for Full Reparations, from the United Nations

According to the United Nations, full and effective reparation includes the following components: restitution, compensation, rehabilitation, satisfaction, and guarantees of non-repetition. This is summed up well by the International Commission of Jurists ("[Guidelines on the Right to a Remedy and Reparation for Victims of Gross Violations of International Human Rights Law and Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law](#)):

- *Restitution* refers to measures that restore victims to the original situation before they suffered gross violations of international human rights law and/or serious violations of international humanitarian law. For example, restoration of liberty, identity, family life and citizenship, return to one's place of residence, restoration of employment and return of property.
- *Compensation* refers to a monetary quantifiable award for any economically assessable damage, whether pecuniary or non-pecuniary, as appropriate and proportional to the gravity of the violation and the circumstances of each case, such as lost opportunities, loss of earnings, and moral damage.
- *Rehabilitation* refers to medical and psychological care as well as legal and social services.
- *Satisfaction* refers to a broad category of measures, ranging from those aiming at a cessation of violations, to truth-seeking, the search for the disappeared, the recovery and reburial of remains, public apologies, judicial and administrative sanctions, commemoration and memorialization, and human rights training.
- *Guarantees of non-repetition* comprise broad structural measures of a policy nature such as institutional reforms aimed at civilian control over military and security forces, strengthening judicial independence, the protection of human rights defenders, and the promotion of human rights standards in public service, law enforcement, the media, industry, and psychological and social services.

Recommendation

Methods for encouraging and channeling productive conflict should be established and promoted to decrease harm.

Unitarian Universalists tend to be conflict-averse. In part this is because so many UUs came into our movement out of conflict with other faith traditions. It may also be because we spend very little time talking about our shared theology and beliefs, which

means we are not held together by deep faith convictions. While some forms of conflict are not productive, such as people simply resisting authority or constantly asserting their own needs and wants, other forms are critical in these times of change. Change produces conflict, and in order to continue to be flexible and responsive to the needs of today, we must be more comfortable with change and thus with the conflict that it may generate. Regional gatherings should emphasize the nature of change in conflict and allow leaders an opportunity to gain skills in dealing with these. Conflict aversion among key leaders, especially in those in mediating positions such as UUA regional staff members and professional good officers and ministers, prevents productive resolution of conflict, often leading to harm of those most vulnerable.

- **Action:** Develop and curate resources for skill building in dealing with conflict and require competency in these skills of all regional staff to promote engagement with conflict rather than shutting down conflict, which often continues oppression.
- **Action:** Prioritize and report on the progress of the UUA's Conflict Transformation Team and document it as a model for congregational teams.
- **Action:** Ensure that those serving as mediators or good officers for all professional associations are educated about and skilled in conflict engagement.

The Conflict Transformation Team, from UUA Congregational Life Staff

The following is a statement about the formation of a new Conflict Engagement Team in 2019.

Congregational Life recognizes that conflict is a natural part of being in community. Yet most of us are never taught how to engage with conflict in [productive] ways. Creating a Congregational Life Conflict Engagement Team (CLCET) gives us the opportunity to address multiple needs:

As we intentionally become an Association with greater leadership from communities traditionally marginalized, and with cultural differences that push against the norms of the white supremacy culture, more conflict is inevitable. We need people who can bring a strong lens of equity and inclusion, who can identify and address oppressive behavior, and who will embody the resiliency necessary to keep showing up to engage in congregational conflict.

In creating a team to normalize and provide expert support for [productive] approaches to conflict, we will make it easier for people (especially leaders holding marginalized identities) to know what to expect and to feel like they can reach out to get the support they need.

Congregational Life staff who serve as primary contacts will benefit from having others come into the congregation to deal with high-level conflict.

A team comprised of staff and lay leaders helps us draw from wisdom in the field and can create a pipeline for future Congregational Life staff.

Recommendation

Channels and procedures for *identifying harm, making amends, and financial reparations* should be established.

Throughout US history, institutions have been built upon an economy that used stolen lands and slave or indentured labor to transfer resources to a small group that became wealthy.

One result of this systematic exploitation is that communities of color in general have fewer financial resources than other communities. That means the cost of trying to enter into volunteer or underpaid leadership in Unitarian Universalism affects them disproportionately due to financial and time burdens taken on by uncompensated lay leaders as well as education and credentialing fees for religious professionals.

- **Action:** Provide funds to Black people, Indigenous people, and people of color for travel to and registration for General Assembly, regional assemblies, and other key gatherings such as youth and young adult programs, as well as to members of other groups that face marginalization, and frame this as an act of congregational reparations.

- **Action:** Develop the capacity to work with congregations with fewer than twenty-five members or that are closing their doors to accomplish redirecting their resources to the Association in some manner rather than making donations to their local community. Reserve these resources to fund next-generation communities and practices.
- **Action:** Study the reparations movement, and examine implications for institutions at all levels of Unitarian Universalism.

First Parish Unitarian Universalist in Needham, Massachusetts: A Case Study, by Rev. Catie Scudera

This is an excerpt from a sermon entitled "[Northern Reparations](#)," Rev. Scudera also delivered a follow-up sermon, "[Revisiting Our Slavery Past](#)."

In 2017, the Black Lives of Unitarian Universalism organizing collaborative challenged Unitarian Universalist congregations to reflect on how white supremacy lives on in our institutions. For the second "UU White Supremacy Teach-In," the organizers asked us to research the history of black membership in our institutions and black residents in our localities. As we here in Needham prepared for the second Teach-In, I dutifully read the Wikipedia entry on Needham's census records and demographics, and I typed into Google: "Needham slavery." Thanks to Google Books, I began to pull on a thread about slavery in Needham which has unraveled my assumption that slavery didn't happen here in our small, poor New England farming town.

What I'm about to share with you, you may find disturbing, unbelievable, and shocking. I know I found it so, as did other members of our congregation who helped me with this research: Jeanette Anderson, Marianne McGowan, Becky Siebens, and Tad Staley.

What I first uncovered in late 2017 was First Parishioner George Kuhn Clarke's *History of Needham, Massachusetts, 1711-1911*, a 200th anniversary history of our town. I have a physical copy, which, to my memory, was gifted to me by our own Jamie Turbayne. What I had never noticed before was that on page 565 begins a chapter on slaves in Needham. Interestingly, in my paper copy, that chapter's pages are "unopened," which means the binder did not perform the cut to allow the pages to be opened and read. So, I'm not the first to have not read this chapter.

George Kuhn Clarke wrote, "The institution of human slavery never flourished in Needham, but a few blacks were held in bondage here, as the Church records and inventories of estates testify. At the time of the War of the American Revolution, Captain William Faris, a Loyalist, and William Bowdoin, Esq., were the only slave holders in town, and were each taxed for one slave. [Though, the late Horace Mann stated that he found the names of four slaves of Captain Faris:— Jack, who went to England in 1779, Sylvia, who was sold to Sir Henry Frankland, Terence, who died of the smallpox, and Phebe... {who} was supported by the Faris family in her old age.] In 1775, 'two negro children belonging to Captain William Faris named Prince and Silvia' were baptized by the minister of the First Church."

(That's us!)

I was horrified, and did not know what to do with this information. I needed time to think, reflect, and recalibrate. It had never occurred to me that slavery happened here.

Speaking with Becky and Marianne from our Racial Justice Task Force, we decided to perform further research and share the beginnings of what we found with all of you through worship and adult education events during this Black History Month. Our research is not complete, but here's what we can tell you:

Our Archives Committee chair, Jeanette Anderson, has yet to find much information about William Bowdoin, whether he was part of First Parish, or who he held in bondage. Captain Faris, Jeanette learned, was not a member of this congregation—he was an Anglican who attended services in Cambridge and was formally excused from paying taxes to First Parish in Needham. We don't know why, then, he had Sylvia and Prince baptized here by our second minister, Reverend Samuel West, especially as West would become a founding member of the American Unitarian Association and, by our understanding, was devoutly anti-slavery.

I'll admit, when I learned Captain Faris was Episcopalian, I felt relieved! I actually thought to myself, "Ah, he's someone else's problem!" Isn't that awful?

But, the same week Jeanette uncovered Faris's affiliation, Tad, Marianne, Becky, and I met with Dr. Gloria Greis, the Executive Director of the Needham History Center and Museum. Dr. Greis has always been a generous partner to First Parish and the Town of Needham in uncovering, preserving, and sharing our history, and we asked her specifically about Prince and Sylvia.

She found so much more.

At this meeting, Dr. Greis handed us copies of two documents: The first, a transcription of two 1890 handwritten letters from Robert Mansfield, who grew up in Needham and attested that he had met a "full blooded African" named Boston Fude, who, with his wife Jenney and their friend Primas King, had previously been enslaved by Charles Deming's family of West Needham, now Wellesley. (Interestingly, Clarke's 1911 history mentions Boston Fude by name as a "free negro" living in Needham in the early 1800s, without mentioning that he had been enslaved before slavery was outlawed in the Commonwealth.) Mansfield concluded one of his letters, "[Boston] and his wife deserve a written monument... at the hands of the citizens of Needham, and especially of Wellesley."

Again, I felt comfortably removed from slavery in Needham, knowing that the Deming slaveholders were *really* from Wellesley. Not that the separate West Needham church even existed until 1798 nor Wellesley as a separate town until 1881, but still, I felt a comfortable remove.

But, the second document Dr. Greis gave us was from the *Vital Records of Needham*, a list of births, baptisms, and deaths recorded primarily by our first two ministers, Revs. Jonathan Townsend and Samuel West. In both the births & baptisms and the deaths sections, at the very end of the alphabetized list of white family names, is a separate category for "negroes/ servants." Under births and baptisms, we found Sylvia and Prince, both baptized on August 19, 1775. Also listed were: Rose, a "negro child of Mrs. Sarah Deming's," baptized here by Rev. Townsend in May 1750; Jethro, a "negro child—servant to Nathaniel Tolman," baptized here by Rev. Townsend in 1744, and then two more "negro" children without white families attached to them, Violet and Phoebe, both baptized here by Rev. West in 1768 and 1773, respectively.

As I said before, the Demings lived in West Needham, and it's possible that Boston and Rose were enslaved by the same Deming family; there were two Deming families in Needham, both with a patriarch named Charles, but only one Charles was married to a Sarah. The Tolman family who enslaved the child Jethro lived right here in "East" Needham in the historic Tolman-Gay House at Central Avenue and Gay Street. Nathaniel Tolman's father, also named Nathaniel, was one of the original members of this congregation, signing the church covenant in 1720 when Rev. Townsend arrived.

On the death rolls for "negroes/servants," we found Rose again, who died just a year after her baptism, and three other "negro children" who died in the 1750s nameless, "belonging to" Andrew Gardner, Samuel Glover, and Jonathan Gay. According to Jeanette's research, Andrew Gardner is not on our church rolls, but two other Gardners (Lucy and Elizabeth) are. Samuel Glover is not in our church rolls, but Lydia Glover, possibly his mother, is; Samuel himself died young in 1756 in the French and Indian War, leaving a widow and young son, also named Samuel. However, Jonathan Gay's family was closely tied to First Parish, donating money for the purchase of our beloved Paul Revere Bell for the 1811 100th anniversary of the town.

I must lift up, there were so many children enslaved here—I cannot help but wonder, heartbroken: Where were their parents? Twentieth-century historian William Pierson wrote that in New England, enslaved children were often brought up from the West Indies, where the work was too harsh for many children to survive. Furthermore, Pierson wrote that New England slaveholders were not wealthy enough to enslave whole families, so they typically "regarded black babies as an unproductive expense... [and] were willing to sell or give away their slaves' children for other masters to raise." And we know from Clarke's 1911 history that there were many "free mulattos" in Needham in the early nineteenth century, after slavery was outlawed; like in the South, some of these children may have been born of their so-called "masters." There is no implication from any source of a happy family picture for these enslaved Needham children.

There was one more name on the *Vital Records* death rolls, a name that disturbed me greatly: Homer, called the "negro servant" of Reverend Jonathan Townsend, the first minister of First Parish in Needham.

I did not want to believe that our first minister was a slaveholder. I wanted Homer to be an indentured servant, or a free black worker, or any servitude status but enslaved.

My alma mater, Harvard Divinity School, maintains the archives of our denomination, the Unitarian Universalist Association. I reached out to Gloria Korsman, a Unitarian Universalist at First Parish in Cambridge herself and a research librarian at Harvard Divinity's library, to see if she could find me more information about Rev. Townsend and Homer.

Within the span of a single morning, she found the information I dreaded: in a biographical volume of Harvard College graduates, it states that Rev. Townsend's father-in-law, Captain Gregory Sugars, "provided the means for building the pleasant parsonage which still stands at the corner of Nehoiden Street and Central Avenue. Perhaps from the same source came the minister's slave, Homer, who for periods served the parish as sexton." Indeed, a quick search for the name "Homer" in Clarke's 1911 history revealed this sentence: "On June 5, 1754, the Rev. Mr. Townsend was granted 1 [pound], 1 [shilling], 4 [pence], for his servant's taking care of the meeting-house in 1753; this was probably the negro Homer, who died April 9, 1754."

The Harvard biography went on that one month after Homer's death at the May town meeting, Rev. Townsend threatened to resign unless he received better pay in reliable currency. Though the biographer, university archivist Clifford Shipton, didn't make the connection, I wonder if Townsend could only "manage" serving First Parish for as long as he did because he held an enslaved person in his home.

I wonder if our first meetinghouse would have stood as long as it did if it hadn't been for Homer's unpaid labor. I wonder how much of the foundation of our church rests on Homer's shoulders, not to mention the labor of all those enslaved black children whose enslavers paid taxes to our congregation.

If it hadn't been for Black Lives of UU, I may have never found the entry on slavery in Clarke's history. We owe that organization our thanks for pushing us to find the truth....

But slavery in Needham, specifically, seems to have been buried, forgotten. I hope that we can recalibrate our assumptions about our town and Commonwealth, reconcile with this history, and work within ourselves and with our town to make some sort of reparation to the enslaved residents of Needham.

Recommendation

Widespread practices of acknowledging *Unitarian Universalism's foundational complicity with racist practices*, especially against Indigenous and Black people, are essential to understanding the need for continued support.

- **Action:** Develop an Associational fund for scholarships and travel funds for people of color, Indigenous, and other marginalized groups, especially transgender and disabled people, and those living below their area's median income to allow a greater diversity of people to be sustained while working toward credentialing as religious professionals and to provide support for a diversified religious leadership.
- **Action:** Support religious educators of color pursuing credentialing with financial assistance to enable these invaluable role models to be present for families in an era when a higher percentage of children in our nation than ever are of color or multiracial.

Take-aways

The complexities of harm left by hundreds of years of oppression cannot be overstated; therefore this report will not issue "one size fits" all responses and policies for reparative actions.

While we offer takeaways as we have in other chapters, we believe that the impetus and responsibility for innovation and implementation lies primarily in the hands of the institutions and actors holding power.

The same energy, foresight, determination, capacity for organization, invention, and passion displayed in the European conquest of the world should be brought to bear in the dismantling of its oppressive, ecocidal, and genocidal practices.

- The UUA should invest in researching the best reparations platform from existing international, national, and local models.
- Best practices for this research would include prioritizing the voices of those most marginalized and harmed within Unitarian Universalism.
- The cultivation of reparative values within our theology is a moral imperative and the only way to provide true integrity to our existing Principles
- We need an ongoing commitment to reparations at the institutional level under the authority of the Board of Trustees and ongoing reform and accountability groups.

- While Unitarian Universalists probably do not have the will or the collective imagination to offset the harm done, especially to Black and Indigenous people among us, we can offer reparations by ensuring the continued funding of spaces that allow marginalized people to survive among us, such as DRUUMM, BLUU, TRUUsT, EqUual Access, etc.
- Congregations that are in morbid decline or closing their doors should be actively encouraged to donate their resources to the Association in some manner rather than making donations to their local community. These resources could be used to fund next-generation communities and practices.

* A “horizon of possibilities” means the entire spectrum of beliefs, practices, and experiences that are open before a particular society, given its ecological, technological, and cultural limitations (Yuval Noah Harari, *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind*, Generic Publishing, 2015.)

Accountability and Resources

“Racism is particularly alive and well in America. It is America’s original sin and, as it is institutionalized at all levels of society, its most persistent and intractable evil. Though racism inflicts massive suffering, few American theologians have even bothered to address white supremacy as a moral evil and as a radical contradiction of our humanity and religious identities.”
—James Cone, “Theology’s Great Sin”

“A theology of liberation is part of the work for a certain type of community, one in which freedom is possible, one always aware of the historical and material threats to the human sociality and existence that it values. Liberation theologians are not concerned with the essence of human being per se, but with the creation or maintenance of a specific form of human existence. In our work for communities of justice and peace, it is crucial that we remember how easily structures of [kinship] are obliterated.”
—Sharon D. Welch, *Communities of Resistance and Solidarity*

Background and Trends

As noted earlier in this report, many people of color did not wish to share their individual experiences with the Commission because their stories had been told and retold to no avail. Many told of having not seen any change in the systems that had injured them, and of their frustration in and unwillingness to continue to support such systems.

To restate: our concern here has been with systemic change and so our interest in individual stories was to look for patterns that revealed where our systems held or reinforced bias. Continuing to do so and to develop systemic capacity to do so is important.

A growing awareness of the inequities based in disparities created by bias has led to calls for accountability, especially by members of newer generations. Without any outlet for the reporting and analysis of such incidents, ugly divisions will continue to arise.

Ongoing monitoring is needed to continue to track progress toward equity, inclusion, and diversity. Continued assessment should be rooted in dialogue with groups representing Black people, Indigenous people, people of color, and other people marginalized within Unitarian Universalism.

The abandonment of anti-oppression work and investment in younger leaders that occurred after 2005 left us ill-equipped to meet the rapid-fire changes of today. We need to have mechanisms that sustainably ensure inclusion and innovation despite efforts to resist change.

Active attention and deep commitment to long-term progressive structural change address the *satisfaction* and *guarantees of non-repetition* requirements of reparations as defined by the United Nations.

Structures critical to the development and promotion of Unitarian Universalism, including the UU Ministers Association, Liberal Religious Educators Association, Association for UU Music Ministries, Association of UU Administrators, and the UU Association of Membership Professionals should all be explicit about their need to be accountable and active in promoting system changes to combat oppression, racism, and white supremacy culture.

When we consider that full reparations require both cessation and guarantee, we understand that we need mechanisms to ensure that cessation is ongoing, and restitution is continued until satisfaction.

“Bible Defense of Slavery,” by Frances Ellen Watkins Harper

This poem was written on the eve of the Civil War. The author was both African Methodist Episcopal and Unitarian.

Take sackcloth of the darkest dye,
And shroud the pulpits round!
Servants of Him that cannot lie,
Sit mourning on the ground.

Let holy horror blanch each cheek,
Pale every brow with fears;
And rocks and stones, if ye could speak,
Ye well might melt to tears!

Let sorrow breathe in every tone,
In every strain ye raise;
Insult not God’s majestic throne
With th’ mockery of praise.

A “reverend” man, whose light should be
The guide of age and youth,
Brings to the shrine of Slavery
The sacrifice of truth!

For the direst wrong by man imposed,
Since Sodom’s fearful cry,
The word of life has been unclos’d,
To give your God the lie.

Oh! When ye pray for heathen lands,
And plead for their dark shores,
Remember Slavery’s cruel hands
Make heathens at your doors.

Recommendation

Accountability should be embedded in the structure of the Boards of the Association and other key organizations, including all affiliated and professional organizations.

For equity, inclusiveness, and diversity to flourish in our Association, a united commitment must be reflected in the identity documents of the Association and all affiliate organizations. The differing practices and levels of commitment from structural entity to structural entity within our Association is one of the ways

Black people, Indigenous people, people of color, and members of other historically marginalized groups are injured over and over again.

Differences in commitments, structures, and practices among affiliate groups dilute and endanger these critical commitments. Professional groups are wrestling with these at differing levels and, when engaged in anti-oppressive work, can be critical levers for change. Other groups, such as camps and conference centers, when failing to adopt contemporary standards, impede our progress as an Association. The scope of our work did not allow for the full review of all these structures; however, the issue of discrepancies was well documented in the testimonies and conversations collected.

- **Action:** Include in the bylaws of the Unitarian Universalist Association **an explicit commitment to become anti-oppressive and equitable and to serve the full diversity of those who resonate with our theological tradition.**
- **Action:** Initiate a Board-driven process to develop such a statement and present it to the General Assembly of Congregations for inclusion in the bylaws of the UUA no later than 2022.
- **Action:** Request that all Unitarian Universalist–related organizations examine their commitment to equity, inclusion, and diversity work and include such a commitment in their bylaws.
- **Action:** Using the example of congregations who have already adopted such statements, develop a sample statement for inclusion in congregational bylaws.

Recommendation

Ongoing monitoring is needed to ensure that work to counter bias and oppression is not interrupted again.

In the focus groups and other conversations as well as within the meetings of the Commission, sorrow was expressed about the time that has been lost because we did not maintain a continual commitment to anti-oppression practice. Had this been adapted and continued rather than stopped and disregarded during the last decade and a half, the explosive incidents and deep divisions that have affected our Association at a time when religious life itself is challenged in US society would not have occurred.

Whether we will survive this leadership malfeasance is yet to be determined; what is clear is that we cannot afford to engage in it again. The following are actions we recommend for the UUA Board of Trustees and president.

- **Action:** Adopt goals by 2021, report progress on these goals at GA each year, and codify this requirement in the bylaws.
- **Action:** Provide annual report to the General Assembly of Congregations by the UUA president on goals and progress toward those goals of equity, inclusion, and diversity.

Recommendation

The UUA should establish an ongoing independent body to identify systemic changes and monitor accountability on work toward equity, inclusion, and diversity. This body should be based on representatives of groups of oppressed people and should have direct representation on the Association Board.

One of the issues that we have had in Unitarian Universalism is that we have set up structures that are accountable to individuals rather than to representative groups, which undermines our democratic process. It also creates tremendous amounts of stress on those representatives, especially when they are from marginalized populations. A model that we should look at is the accountability group that was used for the Justice General Assembly in 2010. That group had representatives from a variety of identity-based groups, and those representatives met together to discuss issues of accountability.

Using identity-based groups is a good method because our larger Unitarian Universalist culture cannot support certain groups of individuals. People come together in these groups because of the marginalization they experience in our larger culture, and this is a good way to make sure that we are accountable to communities rather than to individuals.

- **Action:** Establish an independent body through a vote at General Assembly to consist of one representative and one alternate from identity-based groups, including DRUUMM, BLUU, TRUUsT, and EqUUal Access if they are willing to participate. Membership for this panel should be reviewed every two years to include all relevant groups and to make sure the groups that are included have membership lists and at least one membership meeting a year. In addition, the Nominating Committee should appoint two at-large members and the UUA Board of Trustees should appoint one member who will represent the group on the Board. This representative should be confirmed by a vote of the new body focused on accountability and systemic change.
- **Action:** Recognize accountable congregational partnerships for purposes of equity, inclusion, and diversity at the local congregational and community levels. Amplify practices that include long-term investments in relationships with and regular donations of financial resources to partners serving in communities that are under-resourced.
- **Action:** Provide a report to the Association annually at GA on a set of metrics to be submitted no later than the 2021 GA. Metrics could include the percentage of UUA employees who are Black, Indigenous, or people of color, or who hold other marginalized identities, the percentage of the budget that is devoted to our work on an annual basis, the number of complaints received around racial concerns, and the number of new intentional communities that have been created to support the values of new generations.

Recommendation

Those responsible for managing and negotiating in times of change and conflict should have training in anti-oppression work.

At certain times in the life cycle of religious organizations, including times of conflict, biases, racism, and other -isms intensify. When tensions are high, people may not monitor themselves as carefully and systems that are inadequate to meet today's needs may show their flaws. For this reason, leaders who facilitate discussions at such times must have particular training in anti-oppressive practices. Professional associations have "good officers" trained to assist in times of conflict between religious professionals and congregations or among religious professionals. This training has not historically included training in anti-oppression work. Since a growing number of these incidents revolve around issues of demographic difference, this can no longer be optional.

Similarly, agreement on a common set of standards among all the professional organizations is also needed. These officers exist to maintain the highest standards of ethics and values during times of conflict, and such cannot be maintained without proficiency in anti-oppression work.

- **Action:** Identify best practices for inclusion, equity, and diversity for congregational nominating committees and make them available through all communications means and through leadership events.
- **Action:** Include training in anti-oppression practices as a standard part of interim minister training because of the opportunity to address issues of systemic bias during interim times.
- **Action:** Develop capacity within all good officer (and UUA regional staff) teams to lead and facilitate conversations around harm, injury, and conflict in anti-oppression practices.
- **Action:** Curate models of how to audit for oppressive practices at the congregational level.

Take-aways

- Accountability structures should be built into the bylaws and have direct representation on the Board of Trustees and should include accountability to representative groups.
- We may not survive the past decades' disruption of our commitment to anti-oppression work. We know we cannot afford to abandon it again because of its larger societal significance.
- Work to counter oppressive practice in our systems should be embedded in all levels of the UUA, including at the congregational and community levels.
- Regular reporting on our progress can keep us focused and on-track.
- All who facilitate conversations during times of conflict should be trained in anti-oppression and how to address systemic bias.

Final Thoughts

In 1989, a report titled "We Have No Problem... Again," from the Black Concerns Working Group, [39] included the following words:

That the white majority refusal to acknowledge and accept the firsthand knowledge that people of color, indigenous and other marginalized groups face within our frames is maddening to those who experience it over and over among us.

These words still resonate three decades later. This lack of regard and respect is what leads to an evolution from accusations of "racial bias" to "racism" to "white supremacy culture."

In spite of the promise of our movement, we still need to address the bias and oppression within our systems to build resilience in our living tradition for the times we are in and strengthen it for future generations. Making these changes will allow us to stay relevant. Addressing these issues will allow us to live into the theology we profess. Furthermore, if we are committed to this work as central to our faith, we will create the conditions in which all who are attracted to the theological premises of our faith can thrive.

This form of creative, faithful engagement is *joyous* when it is done in a spirit of aspiration to deepening our spiritual commitments. It can also be heartbreaking. Much of that heartbreak comes from the fact that we spend most of our time talking about whether we have a problem... again. As a faith, we have struggled to engage this question decisively, putting into relief our investment in maintaining the structures that create and perpetuate unequal arrangements.

As a Commission, we do not believe that a single path exists that will work for every UU individual or group or evenly across the current fragmentation among Unitarian Universalists. We have offered here, in good faith, and in carrying out the charge we received during the 2017 General Assembly, our best synthesis of the ideas and recommendations developed from this collective work and the work and ideas of Black, Indigenous, and other people of color who have offered them to no response generation after generation. These ideas and recommendations are a distillation of many conversations, laments, arguments, written testimonials, focus group interviews, gatherings, reports, and institutional data that we have been privy to over these years of service as your Commission on Institutional Change. As our work comes to a conclusion, we feel confident that there is much wisdom within these pages that comes not from our perspectives as Commissioners but from the cumulative lived experiences and ideas that have been fermenting for many decades among us.

As we prepare to close, we would offer one further distillation of all of that is contained within these pages. We affirm that, ultimately, what we have been talking about for these years are basic commitments that grow out of our theological legacy. Retailored for our time, these are the commitments:

- **Hospitality**—the willingness to welcome all who would find solace, comfort, and inspiration in the values that we hold.
- **Common sense**—the idea that we can often just do things in a more simple and basic way that makes sense rather than make things unnecessarily convoluted.
- **Empathy**—the ability to perceive and care about another’s sore struggle even if it is not your own, recognizing that it is part of ours and that we are bound together through the interdependence that is part of our faith.
- **Compassion**—the ability to walk with another and to be caring toward that one as if they were ourself.
- **Self-awareness and mindfulness**—recognizing the power we have over one another, simply allowing ourselves to wake up to that, not to be shamed or made guilty, rather simply to allow ourselves to prepare our own hearts for transformation.
- **Continuity**—the recognition that we would not be having these conversations in 2020 if we had kept them going in the 1970s, the 1980s, and the 1990s, for commitment and continuance are what will allow real progress.
- **Humility**—knowing we don’t know the answers, especially in these times; offering to one another those glimpses of what we do know and so, together, creating a clearer sense of where we are going. In the spirit of that humility, we acknowledge that we have no doubt forgotten some ideas and recommendations that should be included and have perhaps misformulated others. And once again we acknowledge the debt to our ancestors: much that is written here is the collective wisdom of those who have travelled in the valley places of our faith. With this we pass the baton for others to pick up and carry.
- **Restoration**—understanding that where harm has been done, effort must be expended to provide address and redress.
- **Prioritization**—Many of our recommendations are about focus and emphasis, rather than money. Though investments are needed in specific areas, much can be accomplished through education and attention.

What Do We Mean by Systemic Oppression?

The following is a Commission on Institutional Change blog post published on March 13, 2019.

This post is offered in solidarity with our transgender, genderqueer, and gender-expansive kin whom we have previously cited as experiencing similar dynamics as those experienced by people of color within Unitarian Universalism. We affirm, prioritize, and wish to amplify the analysis of the specific dynamics to those leaders and community members most directly impacted by these dynamics as that is a principle of accountability that we honor, the violation of which has caused much pain among us.

We do wish to pause a moment to discuss the costs of systemic oppression. As we have pointed out in previous posts, the oppression faced by transgender, genderqueer, and gender-expansive Unitarian Universalists, while unique in its manifestations, has many of the same dynamics that animate racism. A denial of the differential treatment faced by those whose gender identity is marginalized among us was the cause of much pain. We are deeply saddened by that pain and ask the larger Unitarian Universalist community to engage in self-study, learning, and transformation.

Those who are marginalized among us are not on display for the learning and edification of the majority culture. We treat people as “other” when we treat them as objects or when we act as if our understanding is more important than their right to dignity and privacy.

Second, we note that these sorts of damaging dynamics are perpetuated by a culture that values “expertise” rather than a culture of learning in which we know that we are all learners. The need to “master” knowledge in this way, especially by using individual lives as the teaching tools, further objectifies people.

Third, we note that we have a generational understanding gap in social justice issues. For many of our younger members, and certainly our youth, our failure to be able to expand our inclusion causes us to become irrelevant and also results in a culture in which we reject and harm people.

Fourth, we must create a culture of hospitality in which we allow people to enter into our congregations with the identities they claim without questioning their experience or their truths. Failure to do so feeds into a dynamic that denies that those targeted by hate in our larger society also struggle to thrive among us.

As we said in our blog post of September 2018, “Our basic premise is that if we can live into the full participation of those who have been most marginalized among us, we can create a responsive, vibrant Unitarian Universalism. A Unitarian Universalist faith marked by full equity and participation will continue to play a vital role in transforming lives and communities.”

Distinctions and Definitions

In our work toward the beloved community, a search for a common language and clarity around the meaning of the words and terms used by those with diverging opinions is crucial. The work of the Commission on Institutional Change indicates that there will probably be no consensus on language, and yet a lack of consensus should not get in the way of continued conversation and action.

Also, some terms may evoke discomfort, due to their past and current cultural usage across various generations, the interpreter’s experience, and various ways of understanding.

Presented here are definitions for the vocabulary used within this report and as part of the Collaboratory discussion. They are not intended to be dictatorial and are given with the understanding that language is multifaceted and our shared understanding encompasses more than the written word.

We also note that these definitions have been chosen with care, study, and above all, collaboration, both with the scholarly gifts of the past and with the brilliant co-laborers and friends of now.

In October 2018, the Commission hosted a Collaboratory gathering of thirty people who had been thinking about issues of race within Unitarian Universalism. These definitions were offered by consultant Melvin Bray and then retooled and refined by the Collaboratory participants. The sources of definitions that were not drafted by the Commission or the participants in the Collaboratory have been noted beneath them.

Distinctions

- **Antiracism ≠ Racial Justice**
While antiracism is an appropriate and needed response to racial inequality, it is not enough to be *against* something. Racial justice is a proactive assertion of what we are *for*—justice/equity/fairness for all.
—Race Forward
- **Racial Justice ≠ Equality**
Things can be equal but still not fair. The goal of racial justice is not to make everything and everyone the same but rather to make things fair. “Equality” can be an effective concept (e.g., “equal opportunity”) to use, but equitable outcomes are the goal.
—Race Forward
- **Racial Justice ≠ Diversity**
There can be diversity (variety) without equity (fairness). Integration of and variety of different races can be beneficial,

but it is not sufficient to produce fairness (equity). Diversity can be a tool for advancing equity, but equity is the goal.
—Race Forward

- **Racial Equity ≠ Multiculturalism**

Multiculturalism is the belief that different cultures within a society should all be given importance; racism is a system of social hierarchy based on the belief that white people have more value than non-whites. If we ignore the power dynamics embedded in the social construction of race and attend only to its cultural manifestations, racism will persist, even if things appear to be multicultural on the surface. [Note: These terms engendered a lot of controversy, with a range of views from the idea that multiculturalism is a worthy goal to the idea that multiculturalism is most often used in a tokenizing way.]

—Race Forward

- **Intentions ≠ Impact**

In pursuing racial justice, focus on equity and fairness in opportunities, outcomes, and impacts. Assess policies and actions based on whether they help or hurt communities of color, regardless of intentions.

—Race Forward

- **Admitting Oppression Exists ≠ Recognizing One's Own Culpability/Complicity**

The ability to recognize and acknowledge instances of a system of oppression is not sufficient for the work of transformation. Recognizing your role and complicity in maintaining and continuing the oppressive system is the next step to interrupting and dismantling to build a new way.

- **Radical Hospitality ≠ Welcoming**

Hospitality is a commitment to center the relationship and provide solidarity, a sense of family and belonging, and actions that support these. Welcome is a beginning and a temporary state.

- **Personal Bias ≠ Systemic Oppression**

Systemic oppression differs from personal bias in terms of the power dynamics involved. Systemic oppression exists independent of the personal bias of the actors and/or beneficiaries. Personal bias may or may not result in acts of aggression and oppression, but systemic oppression always does.

Definitions

- **Racial Equity/Justice**

The systemic fair treatment of people of all races that results in equitable opportunities and outcomes for everyone.

—Race Forward

- **Inclusion**

Authentically bringing traditionally excluded individuals and/or groups into processes, activities, and decision/policy making in a way that shares power.

—OpenSource Leadership Strategies

- **Co-laborer**

We understand white identity to be an imposition on all Europeans stemming from traditionally land-owning, wealthy culture groups within Europe who forcefully homogenized other Europeans through warfare and socio-economic and religious subjugation.

We also understand that the imposition and institutionalization of white-supremacist, patriarchal, colonialist capitalism, which dictates and celebrates excess and resource hoarding, has led us to ecocidal behavior and the risk of our own species extinctions following the mass extinction already under way.

Therefore, we recognize the efforts by European-allied folks and white-presenting people who understand that they must dismantle the white supremacist ideological system both to live their values and ensure their own co-survival and co-liberation with both the planet and their fellow inhabitants.

It is worth mentioning the reality that Black people, Indigenous people, and people of color have been most adversely affected by white-supremacist ideology, conquest, slavery, settler colonialism, and institutional racism. By pointing to the need for empathy we are in no way endorsing the centering of people with white identity in the struggle for liberation for all.

- **Ally**

Someone who makes the commitment and effort to recognize their privilege and work in solidarity with oppressed groups in the struggle for justice. Allies understand that it is in their own interest to end all forms of oppression, even those from which they may benefit in concrete ways. Allies are not self-declared; they are in relationship with and accountable to oppressed people.

—OpenSource Leadership Strategies

- Anti-Blackness

Anti-Blackness is not simply the racist actions of a white man with a grudge nor is it only a structure of racist discrimination—anti-blackness is the paradigm that binds blackness and death together so much so that one cannot think of one without the other. When one thinks of dying, we think of “fading to black”—when we think of Death (Grim Reaper, Devil, Angel of Death), we think of a being cloaked in blackness. And in the popular imagination, when we think of black people (children, women, men), a dead body will come to mind.

—Nicholas Brady

The opposite of the constructed white/black binary.

Blackness is redefined as corrupt, degenerate, evil, criminal, and ultimately associated with death.

The identification of Black people and “Black” as “other,” and “less than” the identity of whiteness.

Black people are redefined as slaveable objects for the use, gratification, and power of white males, primarily; white identified people in general; and by extension anyone within white dominated systems.

This extends to language that assigns negative associations to darkness and positive associations with lightness.

- Colonization

A process involving the invasion, dispossession, and subjugation of a people. The invasion need not be military; it can begin—or continue—as a geographical intrusion in the form of agricultural, urban, or industrial encroachments. The result is the dispossession of vast amounts of land from the original inhabitants.

This is often legalized after the fact.

—*Colonization and Racism (film by Emma LaRocque)*

Beyond merely a definition of conquest, colonialism is understood to have different forms and to have created extensive, generational harm.

Colonialism often begins with religious incursion, with a subtext of religious mandate, in which Indigenous beliefs are suppressed by missionaries from the conquering culture, and continues with economic oppression and dispossession of cultural tradition and values through aggressive trade backed by military force, overt conquest, and forced education in the dominant language and educational structure.

The effects of colonialism are far reaching. Within church life, it is likely to affect how we think about and use music, do religious education, choose readings, sources, architectural styles, and where and how we worship, with all of these aspects favoring the dominant culture.

The cultural dominance of the colonizing group punishes non-conformity; tokenizes and advances subjugated conformers; willfully ignores Indigenous history while codifying a narrative of events that reframes the intent, effect, and interactions of the colonizers; and cultivates cultural myths, media, and art that reinforce these beliefs.

We also see settler colonialism as the basis of a gentrification mentality in that the goal of settler colonialism is to displace and replace Indigenous groups.

Many have also explored the ways in which colonization also affects many Black people, Indigenous people, and people of color living within the countries of their colonizers.

For example, Black Panther Party political education points out that African diasporic people in the Americas are not a minority but rather members of a colonized majority from Africa, forcibly migrated over centuries to build the foundational wealth of the settler populace.

- Microaggression

Racial microaggressions are brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color. Those who inflict racial microaggressions are often unaware that they have done anything to harm another person. [Note: Many participants in the Collaboratory said that what we call “micro-aggressions” are in fact just aggressions because of the damage done.]

—D. W. Sue et al., “Racial Microaggressions in Everyday Life”

- Indigeneity

Indigenous populations are composed of the existing descendants of the peoples who inhabited the present territory of a country wholly or partially at the time when persons of a different culture or ethnic origin arrived there from other parts

of the world, overcame them by conquest, settlement, or other means and reduced them to a non-dominant or colonial condition; who today live more in conformity with their particular social, economic, and cultural customs and traditions than with the institutions of the country of which they now form part.

—United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Populations

- **Diversity Diversion**
Diversity can be a diversion. We must go beyond diversity to real parity, where inclusion of people of color on corporate boards, in senior leadership roles, advertising, and professional services can be quantified and measured.
—Rev. Jesse L. Jackson, Sr., “Diversity Is a Diversion”
- **Institutional Racism**
The ways in which institutional policies and practices create different outcomes for different racial groups. The institutional policies never mention any racial group, but their effect is to create advantages for whites, and oppression and disadvantage for people of color.
—Maggie Potapchuk, et al., “Flipping the Script”
- **Internalized Racism**
Internalized racism is the situation that occurs in a racist system when a racial group oppressed by racism supports the supremacy and dominance of the dominating group by maintaining or participating in the set of attitudes, behaviors, social structures, and ideologies that undergird the dominating group’s power.
—Donna Bivens, “Internalized Racism”

[Note: Collaboratory participants saw additional manifestations in Unitarian Universalism. Black people, Indigenous people, and other people of color found themselves being judged by a harsher standard of excellence than their white peers and overworking to “prove” themselves; disparaging, downplaying, and suppressing their own complexities of identity and experience as people of color; not addressing microaggressions and repressing their responses; limiting their aspirations to fit expectations; avoiding taking up space for themselves; and feeling pressure to compete with other Black people, Indigenous people, and people of color.]

- **Structural Racism**
“A system in which public policies, institutional practices, cultural representations and other norms work in various, often reinforcing ways to perpetuate racial group inequity. The structural racism lens allows us to see that, as a society, we more or less take for granted a context of white leadership, dominance, and privilege. It has come about as a result of the way that historically accumulated white privilege, national values, and contemporary culture have interacted so as to preserve the gaps between white [people in the United States and people in the United States] of color.”
—Aspen Institute Roundtable on Community Change

[Note: Collaboratory participants saw additional manifestations in Unitarian Universalism: the habit of congregations of seeking white heteronormative (“bearded”) leadership; access to the path of ministry only for those who can afford to go to seminary or move around for a job; norms about who is allowed to remain in the space and who is pushed out after conflicts in congregations and groups; lack of transparency about our congregational and institutional processes; and the locations of our churches in well-to-do, white-majority areas.]

- **Racism**
Individual, cultural, institutional, and systemic ways by which differential consequences are created for different racial groups. The group historically or currently defined as white is being advantaged, and groups historically or currently defined as non-white (African, Asian, Hispanic, Native American, etc.) are being disadvantaged.
—Racial Equity Tools
- **Whiteness/White Identity**
A set of physical characteristics and experiences generally associated with being a member of the white race. Due to worldwide anti-Blackness, primarily as a result of the imposition of white supremacist ideology through conquest, settler colonialism, and neo-colonialism, whiteness is seen by many cultures touched by this process as having inherent privileges over those who are considered “darker skinned.”
- **White Privilege**
I have come to see white privilege as an invisible package of unearned assets that I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was “meant” to remain oblivious. White privilege is like an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools, and blank checks.
—Peggy McIntosh, “White Privilege”
- **White Supremacy**
The belief that the white race is better than all other races and should have control over all other races.
—Merriam-Webster Dictionary
- **White Fragility**
A state in which even a minimum amount of racial stress becomes intolerable, triggering a range of defensive moves. These moves include the outward display of emotions such as anger, fear, and guilt, and behaviors such as argumentation, silence, and leaving the stress-inducing situation. These behaviors, in turn, function to reinstate white

racial equilibrium.

—Robin DiAngelo, “White Fragility”

[Note: Collaboratory participants saw additional manifestations in Unitarian Universalism, such as the system-wide “offense” taken at the language of “white supremacy” and concern that discussing white supremacy associates Unitarian Universalists with white nationalist groups, and the lack of willingness to explore the context in which these words are being used by the people who have needed to develop them as a matter of naming their lived truths.]

- **Erasure**
Minimizing, obscuring, and denying definition and visibility to identities, cultures, and ideologies that fall outside the “norm” of the dominant culture.
Erasure may manifest in groups and individuals being treated as not part of communities of color.
- **Unconscious/Implicit/Hidden Bias**
Negative associations that people unknowingly hold. They are expressed automatically, without conscious awareness. Notably, implicit biases have been shown to trump individuals’ stated commitments to equality and fairness, thereby producing behavior that diverges from the explicit attitudes that many people profess. The Implicit Association Test (IAT) is often used to measure implicit biases with regard to race, gender, sexual orientation, age, religion, and other topics.
—Cheryl Staats, “State of the Science: Implicit Bias Review”
- **Color-blindness/Racial Neutrality**
The racial ideology that posits the best way to end discrimination is by treating individuals as equally as possible, without regard to race, culture, or ethnicity... Colorblindness alone is not sufficient to heal racial wounds on a national or personal level. It is only a half-measure that in the end operates as a form of racism.
—Monnica T. Williams, “Colorblind Ideology Is a Form of Racism”
- **Criminalization**
Criminalization means, quite literally, to make an activity illegal or to treat someone as a criminal. In the context of civil rights and racial justice, researchers, advocates, and justice system leaders have described both the criminalization of poverty and the criminalization of people of color as interactive dynamics that perpetuate negative societal stereotypes and perceptions such that being Black, or being poor, is itself viewed as criminal. Criminalization is at the root of the simultaneous and sustained over-policing of targeted individuals and communities and under-policing of others, as well as the disparate outcomes that result from that policing, such as harassment, expulsion from school, use of force, asset forfeiture, questionable searches and seizures, fines, detention, and incarceration.
—YWCA, “Background: What Are Criminalization and Racial Profiling?”
- **Respectability Politics**
Harvard professor Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham first coined the term “politics of respectability” to describe the work of the Women’s Convention of the Black Baptist Church during the Progressive Era. She specifically referred to African Americans’ promotion of temperance, cleanliness of person and property, thrift, polite manners, and sexual purity. It entailed “reform of individual behavior as a goal in itself and as a strategy for reform.” Respectability had two audiences: African Americans, who were encouraged to be respectable, and white people, who needed to be shown that African Americans could be respectable.
—Paisley Jane Harris, “Gatekeeping and Remaking”
- **Targeted Universalism**
An approach that supports the needs of the particular group while reminding us that we are all part of the same social fabric. Targeted Universalism rejects a blanket universal that is likely to be indifferent to the reality that different groups are situated differently relative to the institutions and resources of society. Targeting within Universalism means identifying a problem, particularly one suffered by marginalized people, proposing a solution, and then broadening its scope to cover as many people as possible.
—John A. Powell, Stephen Menéndez, and Jason Reece, “The Importance of Targeted Universalism”
- **Intersectionality**
“A lens, a prism, for seeing the way in which various forms of inequality often operate together and exacerbate each other. We tend to talk about race inequality as separate from inequality based on gender, class, sexuality or immigrant status. What’s often missing is how some people are subject to all of these, and the experience is not just the sum of its parts.”
—Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, in “She Coined the Term ‘Intersectionality’ Over 30 Years Ago. Here’s What It Means to Her Today” by Katy Steinmetz, *Time*
- **Black/POCI**
Political terms of solidarity that include people of the African diaspora, Indigenous people, First Nations people, other formerly colonized victims of white supremacy/ domination, and non-European people outside the paradigm of whiteness.
- **Horizontal Violence**
When oppressed persons turn on those in their own lives (usually other oppressed persons) in frustration for not being

able to effect change against more powerful targets. The term was coined by Frantz Fanon and used by Paulo Freire in writing about the impact of colonization on those colonized.

—Ashwini Tambe, “Has Trump’s Presidency Triggered the Movement Against Sexual Harassment?”

- **Predatory Behavior**
Ways in which the most privileged are conditioned and encouraged to police and harm marginalized groups. (For example, “boys will be boys.”)

[Note: Collaboratory participants saw manifestations in Unitarian Universalism such as predatory behavior passed down generationally through cultural values around “manifest destiny,” “might makes right,” “white man’s burden,” protecting “white civilization,” “white womanhood,” and New England, Protestant-style individualism. Predatory behavior also manifests in bullying, work and conflict avoidance, financial malfeasance, and sexual predatory behavior.]

On White Supremacy Culture, by Cir L’Bert, Jr.

Why Focus on White Supremacy Culture/Racism?

Our first Principle leads us to value the inherent worth and dignity of all people, and our second Principle asserts the importance of equity.

These two Principles definitively oppose the concept of white supremacy, the reality of white hegemony, and the concept of “whiteness” having more inherent worth and value than other identities.

The term *white supremacy* calls up for many an image of neo-Nazi skinheads, Confederate flags, the KKK, and other extreme expressions.

Others understand *white supremacy culture* to describe the totality of race-based oppression in its ideological, interpersonal, institutional, internalized, and intersectional expressions, describing both the breadth and the depth of the impact in a way other terms such as *oppression* or *unconscious bias* do not.

On one hand, we have a definition that many of us, rightfully, don’t identify with.

On the other hand, we have a definition that is so broad as to occasionally overlook the processes that carried us to our current system of racial hegemony.

And further, some of us find it difficult to see our submergence in this cultural setting, especially when we are ourselves victims of its brutal logic, due to our own individual places within its gradations.

For others, the myth of individuality and meritocracy obscures the reality of privilege.

- **White Supremacist Ideology:** an all-encompassing ideological system that permeates our entire way of life.

White supremacy is an ideology and organizing principle that presents an intrinsic denial of the African origins of life and civilization in favor of a revisionist view whereby all civilization and culture stems from Europe, centers the white male as the standard from which all other humans deviate, and seeks to create and maintain “whiteness” as the dominant currency within the system it creates.

Historically, this belief system has been supported by major religious, social, educational, legal, and political institutions within the United States.

The result is the stratification of society such that whiteness is considered the ideal, proximity to whiteness beneficial, and non-whiteness subject to ongoing surveillance and control.

- **White Assimilation:** the process by which one small group of Europeans colludes to maintain power over everyone by aggressively assimilating successive waves of Europeans into the “white” cultural group, establishing several layers of agents and buffers
- **White Aggression:** the racially based genocide, enslavement, disempowerment, and exploitation of non-white groups by means of violent coercion, manipulation, and collusion.

- **White Domination:** a racial caste system that holds the comfort, safety, defense, power allotment, and influence of those with white identity to be of paramount importance compared to that of all other identities.

Though the usage of domination may seem harsh to some, I believe it is nonetheless more accurate than supremacy. Europeans are not in control of the planet's resources because they are inherently supreme but because they have accomplished and maintained this control by force.

The legal system, policing, school system, hiring policies, public bureaucracy, housing industry, media, cultural images, political power, and so on privilege people of European descent who possess various gradations of "white skin."

Summary

White supremacy is best understood as an ideology, a belief system, or even a pathology,* not an action or effect or even a culture.

White supremacy is not inherently true, as white people are not inherently supreme. In fact, that false assumption or belief that white people are supreme can be understood as the defining part of that ideology.

That false belief is then used to forcibly unify Europeans and inspire aggression toward "non-whites," with the purpose of establishing a racial caste system.

White supremacy is the ideology; white assimilation and aggression are the actions; white domination is the outcome. This is my analysis.

* mental, social, or linguistic abnormality or malfunction, not medical

Appendix I: Findings Related to the Southern Regional Lead Hiring Decision, Spring 2017

When appointed during the 2017 General Assembly, the Commission on Institutional Change was charged with working to identify and propose redress to issues of structural racism within the Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations. Specifically, the charge adopted by the Board of the Unitarian Universalist Association requested the Commission work "in collaboration with a professional organization capable of conducting an external audit of white privilege and the structure of power within Unitarian Universalism, to analyze structural racism and white supremacy within the UUA. The scope of the Commission shall be broad and far-reaching, with the goal of long-term cultural and institutional change that redeems the essential promise and ideals of Unitarian Universalism."

We begin with the premise in all our work that the values of Unitarian Universalism cannot be realized in a system that is centered around one cultural expression. In fact, the centering of white culture and values has stymied the development of a full range of cultural expressions. In the Unitarian Universalist tradition, two "pillar" Principles invite us to covenant to affirm and promote the inherent worth and dignity of all people and to acknowledge the interdependent web of existence of which we are all a part. Systems, policies, practices, and expressions of Unitarian Universalism that bias one racial or cultural group above others make a mockery of these two core values, and so we are called into efforts to name and change them as acts of witness to a fuller and more authentic expression of this faith.

We also work within a frame that the change required will be fundamental and deep, rather than superficial, and critical to the ability of the Association to bridge the generational divide and to survive. Younger generations expect multicultural competency, are wary of institutions that lack authenticity with their values, and expect more participatory models of shared leadership. People still in the workforce are in increasingly diverse settings and face very long work hours, so institutional in-fighting or internal power struggles can cause them to disengage. In an increasingly secular society, religious institutions must show that they have more to offer than a vague sense of community and as people of color make up more of the population, the need to be responsive grows.

The Commission on Institutional Change conducted fifteen interviews and had a listening presence on a Board of Trustees conversation with former UUA President Peter Morales to grasp a range of perspectives related to the events around the Southern regional lead hiring decisions in the spring of 2017. The interviews were conducted from September 2017 through January 2018. What they revealed were the myriad ways that a system of sometimes unconscious (and sometimes conscious) bias and white supremacy culture led to events that hurt many people, destabilized the workings and staffing at the UUA, and resulted in a less vital Unitarian Universalism. The events around the Southern regional lead hiring decision, specific to a decision that involves a personnel matter that is about individuals and specifics, are emblematic of the problems around race in the Association.

One Unitarian Universalist “Tapestry of Faith” curriculum defines *racism* as:

An institutionalized system of economic, political, social, and cultural relations that ensures that one racial group has and maintains power and privilege over all others in all aspects of life. As such, racism is measured by its economic, cultural, sociological, and political outcomes rather than its intentions (i.e., its effect on both racially and ethnically marginalized groups and racially and ethnically dominant groups).

It is in this sense that we entered into these interviews and information sharing about what had happened as part of the Southern regional lead hiring decision in the spring of 2017.

After conducting interviews and reviewing information related to the situation, we offer the following observations about the economic, cultural, sociological, and political impacts of race and racism in our Association. We note with sorrow the death of moderator Jim Key during these events, which added to the emotional nature of the spring. We make these observations holding our role as a faith community, bound by principles that should direct us in times such as those we faced in the spring of 2017. It should be noted that we concentrated on those events and participants involved in this situation between February 2017 and the end of June 2017.

When the Southern regional lead hiring process took place, racial tensions were already at a breaking point in the system, especially for religious professionals of color, who endure countless insults and aggressions as part of their work.

Religious professionals of color, in particular, were aware of and concerned about these inequities, and the events of Spring 2017 occurred in a system where racial tensions were already high. Religious professionals of color travel within those tensions throughout their professional lives and encounter many slights on their professionalism and personhood at the hands of people who do not understand cultural difference.

The number of religious professionals of color has been growing, in part because of the support they get from UUA staff of color and because of the continued support for the annual gathering for religious professionals, “Finding Our Way Home,” which was protected when other programs were cut by the administration of Rev. Peter Morales. In a world in which diverse settings are increasingly the norm, religious professionals of color provide a very specific form of leadership in addition to the other professional skills that they bring. If properly supported, the hiring of a religious professional of color can be a turning point in a congregation’s commitment to address bias and racism inherent in a white-centered system. Aisha Hauser, a religious educator, observed, “I feel like we are at a precipice. Either we are going to be who we say we are or we will be a country club for white people.”

- At the time of the decision to hire for the Southern regional lead position, five regional leads, who supervise the fifty members of the UUA’s Congregational Life staff who work throughout the United States, were all white ministers, as was Rev. Scott Tayler, their supervisor. Two of Tayler’s ten colleagues on the UUA’s Leadership Council were people of color.
- While other people of color are on the UUA payroll, many of them have traditionally been hired in support and other lower level positions that limited their ability to influence the culture of the institution.
- When the controversy began, of 56 people with supervisory responsibilities at the UUA, 8 were people of color, or just over 14 percent according to Rob Molla, the UUA’s director of human resources.
- The need to make change in this area was known to all involved, including Scott Tayler, who stated that he had planned to hire a religious professional of color in a future hire.
- News of Rev. Andy Burnette’s hiring, and his resignation from the UUA Board of Trustees, emerged as UU religious professionals of color were gathered in Baltimore for their annual Finding Our Way Home retreat on March 17, 2017. At this gathering each year, religious professionals of color share their experiences, which predictably include mistreatment at the hands of white leadership within congregational and Associational systems.
- The growing number of these stories and the growing discomfort with how this reflects the values of affirmation and interconnection within our faith creates a particular grief within communities of Unitarian Universalists of color,

especially religious professionals of color, many of whom hold multiple identities that are marginalized within contemporary Unitarian Universalism.

- Without proper support, anecdotal evidence shows that religious professionals of color are likely to face short tenures within congregations whose members may have never had another significant relationship with a person of color prior to knowing a religious professional of color—and these tensions continue. UUA chief operating officer Carey McDonald has reported to the *UU World* that his staff has received fifteen reports of religious professionals of color encountering conflicts within their congregational placements since the events of spring 2017.
- As a result of the aggressions they experience as a part of the Unitarian Universalist culture, which include but are not limited to questions about their qualifications, comments that they are hired only as a “token,” regular challenges to their authority, culturally uninformed comments, or articulated racial slurs, religious professionals of color are often in need of treatment for the traumatic impact of this cumulative experience.

Basic practices of good governance were violated, and these led to the level of chaos that resulted from these events.

What is clear is that no one problem in the system led to the events of the spring of 2017. Tensions between President Peter Morales and the UUA Board of Trustees were longstanding, and while they had improved by 2017, questions that had been raised about difference in goals and focus remained. Our Association and its congregations operate from practices that have been unaltered for decades in a world that is changing rapidly, and the knowledge that many of our practices no longer serve us well led to disregard of the rules and policies on the books. Some outgrowths of this are as follows:

- On February 16, 2017, the Board of Trustees chose to suspend its policy that forbade members of the Board to apply for staff positions, and this action was one catalyst for the Southern regional lead hiring controversy. Applications were submitted before the vote to allow Board members to apply had been taken. Rev. Scott Tayler, who made the hiring decision, wrote of this, “While not informed about the Board discussion.... I expected the discussion to include the principle that Board membership is not an automatic advantage in the selection process. I also expected the Board would have discussed [the applicant’s] future status in Board decisions and discussions if she was unsuccessful. For multiple reasons, I have found the practice of allowing UUA Board members to apply for UUA staff positions problematic.”
- No clear hiring processes were practiced or observed in this particular hiring decision, and informal networks were a frequent source of candidates. Even those asked to play a role in the interviews felt they did not have power or authority to influence the decisions.

An important aspect of our tradition—being in covenantal relationship with one another—was not observed by many of the direct participants and observers of the process, which led to more damage being done to individuals.

The sense of covenantal relationship and being bound as one religious body to a shared aspiration of beloved community was lacking. Many of those interviewed spoke of their disillusionment about this last aspect in particular. The lack of a covenantal understanding is seen in the following:

- Resignations compounded issues and did not allow an exploration through a more covenantal process as key actors were no longer available for dialogue.
- Key matters related were discussed extensively by people in leadership on social media, which, because of resignations and legal settlements, led to opinions being formed without full information. Social media distortions promoted adversarial conflict, triangulation, and demonization of participants on all sides.
- Legal settlements took precedence over the covenantal agreements upon which our Associational polity rests.

A bifurcated governance system does not allow for clear and strategic transformation.

The governance of the Unitarian Universalist Association allows a Board of Trustees and a president to take separate directions, and this makes it difficult to make systemic change. We live in a time when systemic change is essential and cooperation among all leaders is necessary to move toward being an authentically inclusive, mission-focused faith grounded in the values of our religious heritage. The events around the Southern regional lead hiring decision illustrate just a few examples of this issue:

- These events took place in an environment in which no shared goal for becoming transformatively multicultural existed.
- The President of the Association, Peter Morales, was not consulted or interviewed for background information when the events around the hiring decisions were made public through social media, including the severance packages. This continued a pattern of animosity between the administration and the Board, which led to a lack of clear goals for multicultural transformation, as well as other issues around the use of policy governance within the Association.

- The Board of Trustees was not involved in major financial decisions regarding severance packages, which is a concern because of their fiduciary function. This was true even when decisions were made because of fear of legal action, a contingency about which the Board would have been expected to be alerted.

Within the events around the Southern regional lead hiring decision itself, power and economic advantages were centered around the white participants in the process.

The decision to hire in this circumstance was made by one individual, Rev. Scott Tayler, who felt clear on his authority to do so and was up front in claiming this as his role, although he involved others in the process in less clear ways. The system from which this hiring decision was made reflected these characteristics:

- While a desire to gain greater “diversity” existed and was a stated goal for a number of those in positions of power, no analysis of power or privilege within the system was held in common by key leaders, and the aspiration did not include a desire to embrace other ways of thinking and being from a multicultural frame.
- The key decision makers were white, and the systems used were informal and relied on people’s networks, which tend to reflect their own culture and background.
- Women and one person of color were involved in the hiring decision in murky roles with little authority. One who participated in some of the interviews said, “I was volunteered to be a part of the team” and yet was also clear that they knew their opinion would not influence the final decision.
- The underrepresentation of religious professionals of color in higher level and better paying jobs reinforced white dominance in the system and modeled only one form of leadership rather than shared leadership.
- The compensation packages offered to employees who resigned reflected existing policies, which provided severance packages to the best compensated employees, who were largely white. The largest package, offered after a resignation, was offered because of a threat of legal action.

Assumptions growing out of “colorblind racism,” ignorance of racial bias, and white supremacy culture led to conclusions that harmed religious professionals of color.

Racism is when power and privilege are used together to deny opportunity to people of color. Today’s forms are more subtle but just as capable of doing damage as the versions in earlier times. For example, “colorblind racism” is a new form of racism identified by scholar Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, based on the profession of colorblindness as a way of continuing not to challenge the racial order. “White supremacy culture” refers to the unspoken beliefs and cultural practices that reinforce an institution’s white-centered practices. One article defines it thus: “Culture is powerful precisely because it is so present and at the same time so very difficult to name or identify...” Without conscious efforts, predominantly white institutions such as the Unitarian Universalist Association will perpetuate this sort of thinking and it will harm “global majority” members who are trying to be part of the system. Some examples that contributed to the events around the hiring decision include:

- The assumption that the only qualified candidates would need to be completely comfortable with and for those in the white-centered culture or would need to be ministers.
- A lack of awareness and outright denial of the possibility of racial bias in hiring among several of the people responsible for hiring for key positions at the Associational level, even though the existence of this type of bias is widely documented.
- One high-ranking member of the staff spoke in his interview about how he would hand-pick people and then select them, and all of those he mentioned as being good hires were white ministers.
- Another member who had control over hiring spoke about his plan to defer hiring of people of color to a later time, reflecting an awareness of the need and yet a diminished sense of urgency as well as a sense that these were difficult hires because too few qualified candidates of color exist.
- In our interviews, comments about the perceived lack of qualified candidates of color were juxtaposed with examples of personal recruitment of white candidates deemed ready for the job.

White decision makers lacked an understanding about why the perspectives and skills of religious professionals of color are necessary to fulfill the mission of Unitarian Universalism as part of our living tradition.

The larger frame of this single hiring decision, was, again, decades of experiences by religious professionals of color, who face the casual degradations known as microaggressions on a regular basis as well as more blatant forms of discrimination. Christina Rivera, who was the unsuccessful candidate for the position, noted that she was told she was not a good “fit” for the position though it was not clear what a good “fit” would entail. Many religious professionals of color can bring beneficial connections to

diverse groups in the community and, through their own life experience, offer congregations fresh perspectives. The importance of being a person capable of understanding multiple cultures belied the Association's stated intention to move toward multiculturalism and inclusion. Other manifestations include:

- A lack of appreciation from the average Unitarian Universalist that religious professionals of color are essential to the survival of the faith in an increasingly global, diverse world and to attract younger members and activists who generally expect cultural competency and value authenticity and confluence of mission with action.
- A lack of understanding of the value of the diverse perspectives and range of skills brought by religious professionals of color, who are often perceived as token hires and who are disproportionately also affected by paternalism, sexism, classism, heterosexism, and a bias toward the able-bodied.
- A lack of commitment to promoting a Unitarian Universalism that could come closer to meeting the mandates of our pillar first and seventh Principles.
- A lack of willingness to reach out to and retain the many people of color and younger activists who could find a home in the Unitarian Universalist tradition.

A fear of open conflict and assumption of “good intentions” increased the damage done by institutional racism and other forms of oppression within our Association.

Racism, as the definition cited above notes, is not about intention—it is about impact. In our conversations about these events, we noted that direct and accountable communication was often lacking and that a discomfort with open conflict exacerbated tensions around racial difference. We include just a few examples here:

- Information about how the hiring happened was closely held and even employees who were present in interviews were not clear as to what the process or criteria were that were used to hire.
- Female candidates and candidates of color were not given direct feedback about their status in the process—an example of this was that a number who were not finalists in the process believed that they were.
- Those who challenge assumptions or biases were labeled as problematic or trouble-making.
- Breaks in relationship that occurred because of the conflicts continue to this day because key people left and ended all contact rather than continuing to engage across conflict.
- A female candidate of color, Christina Rivera, faced and continues to face a series of threats to her personhood and professionalism, the latest being an anonymous note accusing her of being focused only on issues of race as a professional. This is a common experience for people of color who raise issues around racism and oppression. Her children have also been targeted as fair game for comment.
- The white man awarded the position, Rev. Andy Burnette, was also mocked and objectified, including having his picture featured with the label “white supremacist,” which resulted in unnecessary ostracism (such as not being invited by the Board to their end-of-the-year dinner) as well as serious stress and health consequences for his family members.
- Resignations precluded the opportunity for further dialogue and full information disclosure. Instead the events were tried in the court of conjecture and social media.
- The perceived need to keep these secret compounded the traumatic response of religious professionals of color, who have experienced and witnessed their peers deal with a perceived need to “keep the congregation from getting upset” as a way to deny them and congregations an open conversation about performance. This has been used as a tactic when a small group is removing a religious professional of color from their position.
- The dynamics of white supremacy culture also limit opportunities for collegiality for religious professionals of color.

Clear and consistent systems of accountability were missing, and accountability to the mission and purpose of Unitarian Universalism was not seen as preeminent by many.

The level of informality and lack of documentation in these events was concerning. Examples are included in the bullets below. In addition, various players saw themselves as accountable to their own integrity or to their colleagues rather than to the larger mission, or even the standard processes, of the Association. The impact of years of stress between the Board and the president of the Association, as well as between religious professionals of color and the existing systems, was evident. Some examples:

- Hiring processes were inconsistent and undocumented. Informal systems tend to bias those who have power in existing power networks that privilege those who have been in power.
- A common frame for understanding how power and privilege work was not present in the system. While “diversity” was recognized as a goal, no clear processes were established to advance power sharing or to place professionals of color in leadership positions.

- Key members of the staff discussed the advantages of informal systems of recruitment, which allowed them to directly attract white people they perceived brought particular talents.
- Severance agreements were made without key Board members' involvement, including the UUA's financial advisor, who raised concerns about learning of this information at a Board meeting.
- Religious professionals of color were more likely to see their accountability as to the larger mission of Unitarian Universalism, which made these deviations from what seemed like open process more spiritually damaging.
- People of color in Unitarian Universalism have no clear recourse or path to obtain reparations when events cause them to bear the burden of a system.
- White participants in these incidents also have no place to turn to for greater understanding of biases or systemic oppressions about which they may never have had cause to learn.

Widespread disregard of existing systems and policies shows a lack of trust in existing systems, which have not been intentionally redesigned to reflect the complexities of an emerging multicultural Unitarian Universalism.

Upon beginning the interviews, we noted that many participants in the system did not choose to honor policies on paper as far as hiring practices. In a *UU World* article, acting chief operating Officer Sarah Lammert said she learned about the severance packages on the first day she stepped into her interim position when Limpert resigned. While the UUA's severance policy, "as written, is fair," she said, "I don't think it's good to go outside the procedures in the way that happened here. I can't defend any of it." Other examples include:

- Informal method of consulting colleagues in hiring left people confused about their roles and feeling undervalued.
- There was "systems beating" in the system—people felt the system was so broken that they did not need to honor it. This occurs when systems are seen as fundamentally biased.
- The UUA Board chose to disregard its own rules, which prohibit sitting Board members from applying for open positions at the Association.
- White participants often saw themselves as more capable operating solo than any system that could be put in place and so disregarded them. Some religious professionals of color saw them as so broken that they did not need to respect them.
- Severance packages, which generally are not put into place when people resign voluntarily, were negotiated.
- An emphasis on legality and a fear of lawsuits dominated rather than the need to honor the covenantal values of our faith.
- The appointment of a non-traditional tri-presidency of Revs. Sofia Betancourt and William Sinkford and Dr. Leon Spencer provided some relief; however, their term in office was centered around the spiritual, emotional, and practical fallout from the spring's events.

Informal systems perpetuated white-centeredness in hiring.

Hiring systems used within the Association and reported through the interviews were informal and did not use a consistent set of hiring practices. Procedures that were in place were not followed. Emphasis was placed on personal recruitment and practices. Confusion about the nature of the process and widespread disillusionment about the existing hiring processes led to disregard of written policies and ad hoc policies, which did not create a process in which those outside the mainstream could participate.

- In the Southern regional lead hiring decision, hiring practices were informal, with people of color and women being brought on to be "thought partners" but without the input of an actual search committee. Some of those who were asked to participate in interviews felt as if the decisions had been made previously.
- The hiring decision in question was made by Rev. Scott Tayler. While others were involved in the interview process, they were not given a voice in the final hiring decision.
- While progress was made to increase both the percent and number of employees of color, a marked lack of people of color in higher level and leadership roles limited the impact of the change and reinforced a culture of tokenism.

Religious professionals of color—and women—were not given direct or honest feedback.

Racism and sexism can operate in subtle ways, which were seen in this set of events. White managers reported the desire to provide opportunities for people of color within the system, and yet they perpetuated bias by their inability to give direct feedback to people of color who were candidates for positions. As Rev. William Sinkford, who served as one of the tri-presidents, observed, the issues around race were amplified by other issues around paternalism. "The culture of supremacy is not just about race; it is also about patriarchy," he observed. Interim moderator Denise Rimes said the Board did not "ensure that all issues were placed out in the open."

- Power hoarding and the way that people in power controlled information led to at least two candidates believing they had been told they were finalists when they were not.
- Models of leadership that could have incorporated new approaches were not considered or embraced, such as the idea of a co-lead in the Southern Region.
- Those participating as candidates in the process were not given clear feedback as to how they were faring in the process. An example of this is that all the people we spoke to who were candidates in the search process believed they were finalists.
- Two candidates who were not white men were both under the impression that they were finalists when they were not.

Lack of multicultural competency at the regional staff level has a disproportionate impact on religious professionals of color.

The Southern regional lead hiring decision brought longstanding concerns of religious professionals of color to the forefront—and in the year that has passed since these events, a number of religious professionals have shared that they were not able to get critical support from regional staff, which resulted in early termination of positions. The staff of the Unitarian Universalist Association lack a common frame for understanding systemic racism, sexism, heterosexism, ableism, and other oppressions, and regional staff without this understanding cannot effectively aid a religious professional of color who might be in need of support against a congregation also wrestling with embracing a different kind of leadership.

- The UU Ministers Association culture around collegiality and the “good officer” system, which is supposed to support ministers in times of conflict with congregations or with colleagues is also not multiculturally competent. The inability to understand the dynamics around the service of religious professionals of color makes most of those professionals unwilling to seek assistance from either system and makes them more vulnerable to negotiated settlement.
- Regional staff hold key functions, such as start-up weekends or negotiated settlements, that determine what happens to religious professionals of color.
- Continued loss of religious professionals of color this year shows the urgent need to address the inadequacies in the regional staff system.
- Competency in dealing with issues around race was clearly not seen as a competency critical to being a lead field staff.
- What is the right “fit” for a position depends on whether you see the job as moving toward stated goals for inclusion or whether you see it as supporting the existing white-centered culture of congregations.

Without a clear and accountable process of resolving these issues, events and individuals were tried in the court of social media, which resulted in confusion and targeting and vilification of individuals and did not promote a greater sense of what had gone wrong.

Just within this one incident, extensive harm was done to many relationships and people because of racial bias, unclear expectations, lack of common goals, and a method for addressing wrongs done. What must not be forgotten is that this was just one among many that occur every year and that people of color are aware of within our Association. The lack of safety for truth telling has meant that religious professionals of color are carrying an unsustainable amount of tension. Ironically, the positive development of a growing number of religious professionals has led to those same religious professionals of color collecting more and more stories about damage done to those same professionals, especially because they are too often placed in congregational systems ill-equipped to handle a different leadership style in a productive way. These dynamics also hurt white participants. Some examples:

- Christina Rivera paid a high price for speaking out against a system she believed could not see her skills.
- “Victimhood doesn’t look good on you” was one statement posted on Rev. Andy Burnette’s Facebook page and his family, including his children, suffered from his becoming perceived as the symbol of white supremacy culture. His relationships with other members of the UUA Board with whom he served were deeply damaged.
- The lack of participation by key members such as President Peter Morales and the one who made the hiring decision, Rev. Scott Tayler, helped fuel rumors and divisions and, when combined with social media accounts, led to their almost complete isolation from Unitarian Universalist community.
- The resignation of the UUMA executive director Don Southworth and the death of moderator Jim Key in a time of great turmoil in the nation as well added to a sense of damage and decline for the UUA.
- Without clear leadership and process, social media became a source of judgment and condemnation.
- Terms of the settlements were not clearly explained or accounted for, and key people were not consulted, such as the financial advisor for the Association.

Truth must come before reconciliation and transformation, and truth telling is still dangerous for religious professionals of color.

The Board charged the Commission with examining the relevance of “truth and reconciliation” processes to key events in the Associations’ recent past. While we spent some time researching these processes as they have been used in a number of nations and municipalities to resolve issues related to damages from racial conflict, we find that the circumstances of the UUA may require a different kind of response. Some observations:

- While the Commission charge includes: “Establish a ‘truth and reconciliation’ process to create a climate of honesty, accountability, and disclosure essential to our learning and multicultural growth as an institution,” most religious professionals of color do not feel safe to tell their truths because of what they have experienced from congregational leaders, colleagues, and many of the systems set up to support them.
- The lack of true anti-oppression, antiracism orientation on the part of regional staff and good officers through the Ministers’ Association has been particularly damaging to religious professionals of color, which is, in part, why the events around this hiring decision became such a lightning rod for criticism. As part of the conversations we have elicited, it has become clear that the Association’s credentialing system for religious professionals and its systems for developing lay leaders do not take into account the dynamics of oppression and its systemic effects.
- No process exists for redress when damage due to institutional racism is done, whether that damage is done to people of color or white participants. Trial in the court of social media is not a workable alternative to a real process.
- No consistent resources are available for religious professionals of color (or others) who experience traumatic stress as a result of the lack of clarity of mission around racial inclusion and the gap between our aspirations and our actuality.
- No data is available on the number of religious professionals employed at the congregational level or the types of positions, other than in the ministry, and these statistics are also not easily obtained. That an Association that claims to wish to become more diverse does not track data that most corporations now track is puzzling.
- Since we began our work, more religious professionals have lost their positions or are in conflict with congregations, and the existing systems remain inept and inadequate at offering them help. The loss of any religious professionals of color among us is costly.
- The time for “reconciliation” may be passed. What may be needed is what author Melvin Bray calls a “truth and transformation” process, which looks at not reconciling us to equity under an outmoded system but reimagining a new system of equity, inclusion, and innovation.

A Final Note

This report and the accompanying video recording are not flawless. Perfection is neither an aspiration nor an achievement as it comes from a cultural model we reject. We conducted this work in good faith and within the boundaries of limited time and assistance in the hopes that these general insights may be helpful.

Our gratitude for the staff assistance provided by Marcus Fogliano, Rev. Danielle Di Bona, Stephanie Carey Maron, Rob Molla, and Carey McDonald.

Recommendations for Action

The events around the Southern regional lead hiring decision encapsulated larger tensions faced by religious professionals of color in the Unitarian Universalist Association. Religious professionals of color are uniquely qualified to help our Association move into a more authentic expression of itself, and support of these professionals must be a priority if we are to be who we aspire to be. What happened in the spring of 2017 was that a conversation that had been carried on for decades by religious professionals of color met the public discourse of the Association, largely in a social media frame in which we do not have well-defined standards of behavior. Mainstream Unitarian Universalism was not aware of the amount of pain and trauma being held by the communities of color in the Association, which erupted around these events.

The concerns and grievances raised were not new: a marginalized set of professionals had been speaking about them only within their own braver and safer spaces yet the events of 2017 propelled a number of these leaders into saying publicly what had been said in people of color spaces for many years. As we stated before, this incident is a “holon” that contains the issues that result from practices that center whiteness and is only one incident. In our continued work, we will continue to explore the themes we raise here. We make these specific recommendations out of a sense of urgency that the longer we wait, the more the service of religious professionals of color becomes untenable and the more religious professionals of color find themselves unable to offer their gifts. Specifically, we call for:

1. A clear set of goals for multicultural transformation translated to action at the congregational level is needed. The current governance system in 169Appendix I the UUA needs to be examined because wasting energy in in-fighting

between the Board and the presidency is a waste of resources at a time when we are struggling to keep interest in institutionalized religion alive, especially among younger generations, who do not tolerate inauthenticity. The president of the Unitarian Universalist Association and the Board of Trustees should set a clear set of goals for a Unitarian Universalism that embraces the fullness of a transformative multiculturalism as a fulfillment of our principles and heritage. We need the common understanding of power and privilege as well as a sense of urgency around transforming the Association.

2. The president and the Board should make policies and set practices that allow for best hiring practices to promote a diverse workforce. They should also acknowledge the critical role that religious professionals of color play in moving Unitarian Universalism to reflect the multiracial dynamics that are rapidly spreading across our nation. These professionals hold a perspective of what a transformed and multicultural Unitarian Universalism could be and are often the only conduit our predominantly white congregations have to understanding a way of being that is more authentic. All policies and processes adopted should be observed by all involved and exceptions should be granted only under extreme circumstances. Clear goals for hiring and inclusion should be set that reflect not only the current situation but set out a clear plan for going forward.
3. Anti-oppression best practices should be the standard of practice for all leaders of the Association, paid and unpaid, especially those who are helping congregations navigate new ways of leadership such as regional staff and interim ministers. All such leaders should also understand the role of productive conflict. These gate keepers are essential to ensuring the conditions in which religious professionals of color and other professionals from marginalized groups can succeed in the UUA's white-centered culture.
4. President Susan Frederick-Gray and her administration have already put in place new hiring procedures. All the hiring policies and procedures, including the new ones, should be assessed through an anti-oppression lens; the expanded and improved policies put in place should be examined as a key part of the racial audit.
5. Congregational life staff, who are the direct link to the congregations, are critical, especially in times of transition, and should be culturally competent, skilled in conflict resolution, and aware of the impacts of trauma. All interim ministers and other volunteers and paid staff working with transitions should have anti-oppression training and be skilled in navigating the dynamics around race. Congregations who are already attempting to transform should be supported and offered resources, as should any congregation employing a religious professional of color.
6. Clear processes should be established so that people who have concerns and injuries can know how they can be addressed and the widespread culture of secrecy can be broken. Congregations that have been abusive to professionals should be named publicly and a record of their action maintained as information for future candidates. Processes should include forums for reconciliation conducted by people with an ability to understand a diversity of experiences. A grievance procedure for religious professionals of color must be established. Ways to privilege covenant over legalities should be explored.
7. Until such time as all regional staff can have anti-oppression competency, a special team that is trauma-informed should be brought in when religious professionals of color are in conflict with congregations.
8. Funds should be set aside to support the development of religious professionals of color and to provide for their education, development, and healing from injury by congregations as their presence is so critical and the cost of serving so high for them.
9. The process of credentialing warrants a deep examination and should be a special focus of the racism audit being conducted by the Commission on Institutional Change. This should include a look at the Ministerial Fellowship Committee and its procedures and the accessibility of credentialing for all religious professionals.
10. The relationships between the Unitarian Universalist Association Board, president, staff, and congregations all need examining as true transformation is needed at all levels to move toward justice making and liberation and fulfilling the aspirations of the Unitarian Universalist faith. Change at the Associational level is only helpful if it impacts the experience of people in Unitarian Universalist congregations and communities.

Appendix II: Recommendations

Theology

Recommendation

Re-engaging with our theological legacy and its use today will both ground our efforts to welcome all who are drawn to our faith and provide resources for resilience for Unitarian Universalists in these difficult times.

- **Action:** Center the theological work of Black scholars, Indigenous scholars, and scholars of color, both professional and lay, whose knowledge is resonant for our times.
- **Action:** Provide more resources for lay leaders who wish to engage in theological conversation.

- **Action:** Equip our theological schools to engage in the work of continued education.
- **Action:** Form collaboration between our theological schools, Association of congregations, and professional associations to develop resources for professionally applicable theological training.

Recommendation

Reinterpretation of our theological legacies in these times should be liberatory and articulate our commitment to affirming and welcoming those who have been marginalized in our larger society and within our communities and organizations.

- **Action:** Resource multigenerational efforts within Black/Indigenous/people of color communities to develop rituals of healing and other worship materials to be used in congregations, regions, and national gatherings.
- **Action:** Direct resources toward UU theological schools and scholars engaged in theological exploration focused on an understanding of the need for the affirmation and protection of all.
- **Action:** Provide ministers, religious educators, and other religious professionals with access to continuing education that helps them take in and teach new theological concepts.

Recommendation

Acknowledgment of anti-oppression work as a theological mandate is essential. We need to resurrect, research, document, and teach the words of Black people, Indigenous people, people of color, LGBTQ individuals, women, and others who have been largely lost though their presence has been with us throughout history. These constitute a valuable tool for our times.

- **Action:** Further incorporate and reclaim accounts of Universalist, Unitarian, and Unitarian Universalist leaders of color and Indigenous descent in Tapestry of Faith resources to serve a more diverse children and youth population.
- **Action:** Encourage collaboration between the Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association, Association for Unitarian Universalist Music Ministries, and Liberal Religious Educators Association on a virtual library of resources for liberatory worship anchored in cross-cultural competency.
- **Action:** Develop standards for ethical cross-cultural uses of worship materials from other traditions, and those previously developed by the Council for Cross-Cultural Engagement should be updated and discussed by religious professional associations.

Recommendation

Education about the covenantal nature of our faith will allow communities to support and nurture one another as the overall US climate becomes more hostile to and disinterested in a life of faith.

- **Action:** Provide support from regions to prioritize developing congregational covenants tied to mission and goals and including aspirations for equity, inclusion, and diversity.
- **Action:** Spread promising practices around addressing disruptive people and microaggressions as a barrier to covenantal community.
- **Action:** Develop resources for training on engagement with, rather than avoidance of, conflict as a part of change and transformation.

Governance

Recommendation

The Board of Trustees and the president of the Association should articulate clear goals, plans, and measures toward a liberatory Unitarian Universalism for our times.

- **Action:** Review the regional system to see which regions are working well and address those that are not, as this structure is critical to efforts to spread best practices of diversity, equity, and inclusion.
- **Action:** Complete the Article II review as mandated by the UUA bylaws with the call for diversity, equity, and inclusion as a lens used.

- **Action:** Adopt an implementation plan toward the areas of this report with annual targets and outcomes through 2025, with an annual review of progress toward these goals, with these goals reported at General Assembly and to the congregations.
- **Action:** Articulate the tools for power analysis that enable leaders to understand and rebalance power at all levels of Unitarian Universalism. Build on the existing work of the Unitarian Universalist Association’s Board of Trustees and develop a methodology that can be used at all levels of Unitarian Universalism.

Recommendation

Governance within the Association needs streamlining, as outdated and duplicative structures exist. The unnecessary complexity of the current Unitarian Universalist governance structures is biased toward the more privileged, who have the time and resources for extensive volunteerism.

- **Action:** Reexamine the current governance structure and identify changes that will allow a more agile and flexible structure that can meet the challenges of a rapidly changing religious landscape. The review should include a reexamination of the recommendations around the roles of the president and the moderator that were contained in the 1993 report by the Commission on Governance, chaired by Rev. Dr. Wayne Arnason.
- **Action:** Form an alliance of UU organizations, including professional associations and affiliated groups, committed to creating equitable, inclusive, and diverse practices to allow learning, collaboration, and development of a common set of standards.
- **Action:** Establish covenantal agreements with affiliate organizations that also understand the need for accountability, adaptability, collaboration, faith grounding, and continued education toward equity, diversity, and inclusion.
- **Action:** Repurpose the resources of the JTWTC toward the anti-oppression goals of this report. (The JTWTC should not be disbanded until a new structure is approved.)
- **Action:** Provide an expanded opportunity for youth and young adult leadership development and programming at the Associational level, with a grounding in equity, inclusion, and diversity and responsive to the challenges these generations face today.

Recommendation

Misconceptions about the nature of our congregational polity should be addressed as they are used to empower individual ministers and lay leaders to maintain a stagnant and exclusionary status quo.

- **Action:** Promote a more accurate understanding about what congregational polity is, especially its covenantal nature and its relationship with our belief in the inherent worth and dignity of people and their ability to participate in decision making through a values frame.
- **Action:** Audit leadership experiences, including online spaces tooled for accessibility across income levels, and make strategies for equity, inclusion, and diversity a part of these, as well as accurate information about the covenantal nature of congregational polity. Make practical education in anti-oppression work part of all UUA regional gatherings.
- **Action:** Incorporate principles of covenant into anti-oppression work across all UU organizations.

Congregations and Communities

Recommendation

Covenant and commitment, not comfort, should be the binding fabrics of UU congregations and other communities.

- **Action:** Prioritize workshops on covenants of right relationship and curate models of covenants for congregations and communities of different sizes and demographic profiles.
- **Action:** Equip leadership development efforts at the Associational or regional level with information on how to facilitate needed conflict and how to promote racial equity.

Recommendation

The UUA Board and the president and administration should continue to prioritize efforts to create communications channels and strengthen regions, clusters, and other structures in which congregations can live into true congregational polity, the lack of which has exacerbated conflicts and created unnecessary distractions from mission.

- **Action:** Continue to develop new channels for communication with congregational leaders, including enhanced or regular virtual convenings for those interested in learning best practices in diversity, equity, and inclusion.
- **Action:** Work to make regional gatherings and structures possible and to regularize them across the country so that there is some consistency and they can be used to provide a common framework for anti-oppression work and other needed changes.
- **Action:** Send an annual communication to all congregations about the number of congregations, with membership data, including the number of congregations with fewer than thirty people, as this is the number of people required to charter a congregation today. Also include the number of intentional and alternative communities serving those historically unable to thrive in our mainstream congregations, such as people of color, LGBTQ people, and young adults.

Recommendation

The UUA Board should look at the best way to provide ongoing active governance for congregations as the current General Assembly system is too costly and cumbersome for many to participate, as this disproportionately affects people of color.

- **Action:** Make caucusing for people of color standard, and offer administrative support at regional and cluster events to allow more space, contact, and support for those who are often “the only one” at the congregational level.
- **Action:** Fully implement the regional system, making space for clusters of congregations interested in equity to form.
- **Action:** Convene General Assembly as a biennial gathering and on the off years, set and keep a schedule of regional meetings, with these meetings occurring at least biennially and perhaps more frequently by teleconference.
- **Action:** Ensure that regional/ district staff are fully trained and demonstrate multicultural, antiracist, and anti-oppression competency to act as a resource for congregations and lay leaders in their antiracism work. Continuing education work in anti-oppression techniques should also be required.
- **Action:** Explore providing delegate status to members of alternate covenantal communities serving those less welcomed by current congregational cultures.

Recommendation

Development of a common frame of anti-oppression training and multicultural competency is needed for all regional staff, those trained to advocate for UU professionals during times of conflict, and regional boards and entities to help prevent injury and wrongdoing.

- **Action:** Begin a “Promising Practices” program to recognize congregations that have made progress in becoming more equitable, inclusive, and diverse.
- **Action:** Identify and curate anti-oppression resources that are appropriate for congregations of different sizes, geographies, etc.
- **Action:** Create methods of interaction between congregations to promote sharing of learning and promising models for equity, inclusion, and diversity work as well as models for accountable justice work. Ensure that all regional staff are trained in this work to be able to seed best practices.

Hospitality and Inclusion

Recommendation

New structures to provide leadership education to UU leaders are needed and should include multicultural hospitality practices as foundational.

- **Action:** Include scholarship funds in congregational budgets to allow leaders of color, Indigenous leaders, and other leaders under-represented in the congregation to attend affinity groups and national meetings where they will be able to connect with others who share their identity and Unitarian

Universalist faith.

- **Action:** Curate and amplify best practices for training ushers and greeters, board members, worship assistants, and other lay leaders in intercultural competency.
- **Action:** Contract with the identity-based groups such as DRUUMM, TRUUsT, and EqUual Access to develop a new certification program for congregations ready and willing to take on the work of being diverse, inclusive, and equitable. Such a process could make sure there is congregational dialogue about these issues as educational experiences to help create a common vocabulary and analysis of what is needed.

Recommendation

Convening for volunteer leaders at the regional and cluster level should be emphasized to allow support for marginalized groups, including people of color.

- **Action:** Develop a curriculum for multimedia presentation that provides resources to document contributions of people of color and Indigenous people to Unitarian Universalism and also traces the history of the involvement of these marginalized people who have contributed to Unitarian Universalism since its earliest decades on this continent. Building upon and also tracing the histories found in the writings of Rev. Dr. Mark Morrison-Reed and others, these resources should be in an accessible format that allows for easy delivery to congregations.
- **Action:** Provide support for DRUUMM to continue the work they have begun to connect people of color caucuses and encourage caucusing at the congregational level. A list of all congregations who are engaged in caucusing and who have ongoing people of color or other identity caucuses should be maintained by the UUA as another way to communicate with vital populations within and across our congregations.

Recommendation

Providing resources to promote young adult and youth convenings that include support and caucusing for those with marginalized leadership is essential.

- **Action:** Provide funding for an annual convening of youth and young adults of color across Unitarian Universalism that builds on and expands the reach of the Thrive program, including virtual gatherings to provide ongoing support.
- **Action:** Invest in concurrent convenings of white youth and young adults interested in sharpening their skills at supporting and co-journeying with youth and young adults who are of color or Indigenous.
- **Action:** Include funding for youth and young adults, Black people, Indigenous people, people of color, disabled people, transgender people, and others of limited financial means to attend Associational events in congregational budgets as this will allow them more contact with people who share their identity.

Living Our Values in the World

Recommendation

A liberatory faith will remember the mandate from our theological legacy: to privilege those most affected in our justice work, which should follow the voices of those most at risk.

- **Action:** Study income inequality and racial history in areas served by Unitarian Universalist communities as well as the impacts of injustice on Black, Indigenous, and people of color communities.
- **Action:** Expand accountable service-learning and action-education trips to allow real-life contact with difference and a hands-on experience of inequalities as this kind of action learning reflects generational learning norms. Screen justice trips to ensure that they are not tourism but rather actual service-learning experiences with an action-reflection model that includes preparation in anti-oppression practices for every trip that will cross cultural barriers and boundaries. Encourage legacy trips such as the Living Legacy tours and border trips.
- **Action:** Develop and apply antiracism and anti-oppression approaches for Unitarian Universalist justice organizations, including state advocacy networks. This will allow for accountable partnerships at the international, national, and state levels.
- **Action:** Consult with identity-based groups on justice issues that affect their demographics disproportionately. This will allow the UUA and other UU communities to be in accountable relationships with Black, Indigenous, and people of color communities. Ground accountability in organizations rather than individuals.

Recommendation

Through its regional structures, the UUA should promote education for those who would accompany and co-journey with Black, Indigenous, and people of color communities and their leaders and groups to ensure more competency in this area.

- **Action:** Identify and spread partnerships that illustrate how to be allied across lines of race and class so that this can become a standard practice in Unitarian Universalist justice work.

Recommendation

Develop more theological resources to center our justice work in our faith and make clear the interconnection between action in the world and spiritual development.

- **Action:** Articulate the faith basis for our justice work both within our communities and to the larger world. If we can engage our theological schools and other theologians in doing this, it will offset the tendency to approach justice efforts from a paternalistic basis.
- **Action:** Support theological schools that articulate a Unitarian Universalist liberation theology that calls for accountability and reparations, deepening our approaches to inequities.

Recommendation

As people of faith, our call to collective justice work, through accountable partnerships, is our salvific path.

- **Action:** Amplify models of effective and accountable partnerships with organizations led by people of color as well as other marginalized leaders as part of the Promising Practices Congregation recognition at each General Assembly.
- **Action:** Learn from and take note of the work of organizations led by Black people, Indigenous people, and people of color on the issue of climate change, as these communities have been (and are now) feeling the effects of these issues for generations.
- **Action:** Deepen and strengthen connections with Black, Indigenous, and people of color–led organizations in the area of immigration.
- **Action:** Encourage donations to organizations led by people of color and Indigenous people who are working on justice issues critical to our faith beliefs at the congregational level.

Religious Professionals

Recommendation

We need to reduce the barriers to entry for those who seek to serve as religious professionals. This is true for all people, but these barriers are especially damaging for Black people, Indigenous people, people of color, and other marginalized people, who tend to have fewer financial resources due to historic and continuing patterns of discrimination.

- **Action:** Create alternative paths to religious leadership, including certification in spiritual direction, ministerial apprenticeship, and scholarship funding for credentialing in non-ministerial professions.
- **Action:** Allow for ordination at the Associational level rather than only in congregations, to honor the diversity of ministries that exist but may not be easily supported at the congregational level.
- **Action:** Continue the practice of reporting on diversity and inclusion in hiring at the UUA, and an annual report on the demographic data of employment at the congregational level, collected as part of the annual certification process, should be made to the Board of Trustees and the General Assembly each year as a benchmark for the willingness of congregations to engage directly with these issues in a national context that is increasingly diverse.
- **Action:** Maintain a database of all religious professionals who are Black, Indigenous, or people of color, and consider maintaining it for other identity groups struggling within our professions. Track time for completion of certification, pay levels, and length of tenure.

Recommendation

Improving the quality of livelihood for religious professionals who are Black, Indigenous, and people of color should be an ongoing goal, recognizing the particular demands of serving a predominantly white Association and its congregations and communities.

- **Action:** Continue the investment in gatherings and professional development for religious professionals who are Black, Indigenous, and people of color. Consider ways to maintain these by job type online every quarter as a way to provide more effective support.
- **Action:** Provide resources for those who struggle with the impacts of emotional and spiritual harm as a result of serving as religious professionals in Unitarian Universalist settings.
- **Action:** Codify that all interim ministers will have anti-oppression training based in experience and not just literature review and that multicultural competency will be part of accreditation as an interim minister. (For example, invest in strengthening the UUMA's Committee for Antiracism, Anti-oppression, and Multiculturalism.)
- **Action:** Implement the UUA Conflict Transformation Team, which can intervene when issues of racism or other forms of oppression are part of the narrative. This team needs to be consistently trained and available throughout the country now as religious professionals of color continue to face traumatic situations without needed support.
- **Action:** Refine and use consistent hiring and firing processes for UUA staff and promote models to recommend them to congregations seeking to hire religious professionals of color. Offer resources to ministers and other religious professionals of color when conflicts arise at the congregational level as well.
- **Action:** Identify resources to treat the trauma associated with encountering racism, sexism, homophobia, and transphobia as religious professionals who are Black, Indigenous, and people of color.
- **Action:** Re-examine the compensation guidelines to look at the differential between ministry and other professional positions. While recognizing the higher costs of obtaining a master's in divinity, compared to other forms of credentialing for religious professionals, and differences in authority and responsibility, huge differentials should be addressed in this era of income inequality.
- **Action:** Maintain a list of congregations that have had unsuccessful ministries with religious professionals who are Black, Indigenous, and people of color or ministers with other identities marginalized among us. Identify congregations that allow lay leaders or religious professionals to misconduct repeatedly in a transparent fashion and as part of the search process and make this information available to those in search.
- **Action:** Continue the development of a Common Code of Ethics for all religious professionals and conduct training for congregational boards, personnel committees, and other leaders to spread understanding of best practices.

Recommendation

Lifelong learning is the standard for all religious professionals, and this learning should address generational and multicultural awareness.

- **Action:** Develop a fund to support the development of resources for ongoing education on anti-oppression practices and learning modules as part of the continuing education required for all ministerial candidates and ministers to combat white supremacy culture, racism, and other systemic oppressions as well as for other religious professionals.
- **Action:** Allocate resources to retool and update the Beyond Categorical Thinking program, which helps congregations assess their readiness for more diverse ministries. It has not been updated to reflect current issues and needed competencies.

Educating for Liberation

Recommendation

The Unitarian Universalist Association and other national UU organizations should prioritize the development of resources that allow Black people, Indigenous people, people of color, and other targeted groups to address the effects of today's racism and other oppressions on their minds, bodies, and spirits.

- **Action:** Continue to prioritize support for gatherings of lay leaders of color and religious professionals of color, including continued funding for the Finding Our Way Home gathering for religious professionals and regional and national DRUUMM events. Resource efforts to address physical, emotional, and spiritual injuries caused by systemic racism.

- **Action:** Curate new online resources to address the impacts of systemic oppression and white supremacy culture. These resources, including worship resources, inSpirit meditation manuals, video archives, and other tools should be made available and funded to allow for easier distribution.
- **Action:** Develop peer networks to collect and create trauma-informed resources for Black/Indigenous/people of color to address the spiritual issues of systemic oppression, to be used at the annual gathering of religious professionals of color and in online settings.

Recommendation

Resources and tools to ensure a variety of entry points into the spiritual work of embracing one's own identity and the identity of others should be curated and, where not available, developed. Resources on healing religious wounds and productive conflict engagement are also needed as a core part of faith development.

- **Action:** Offer resources to address the healing of religious wounds, which many Unitarian Universalists bring in from past religious experience and which sometimes restrict the deepening of our shared Unitarian Universalist faith.
- **Action:** Include funds to purchase equity, inclusion, and diversity resources in congregational budgets, since many existing curricula are fee-based to allow the developers, often people of color, to be supported in this work.
- **Action:** Develop training in inclusion, equity, and diversity for boards, nominating and membership committees, and other key leaders at the regional level, both in-person and virtually.
- **Action:** Promote intergenerational partnerships within Black/Indigenous/people of color communities to provide mutual mentorship and support to address wounding because of systemic oppression.

Recommendation

A comprehensive path to understanding the work of equity, inclusion, and diversity should be developed and maintained as part of faith development.

- **Action:** Increase the repositories of worship resources that center the voices of people of color as well as others marginalized within our Unitarian Universalist culture.
- **Action:** Develop tools that allow congregations to hold conversations across generations about issues of inclusion, with the goal of recognizing the evolution in our Living Tradition and that spiritual developmental needs change over time.
- **Action:** Begin a renewing certification program similar to the Welcoming Congregation program for congregations, emphasizing lifespan learning in diversity, equity, inclusion, and anti-oppression similar to the Our Whole Lives curriculum.

Innovations and Risk-Taking

Recommendation

The Unitarian Universalist Association should fund, spread, and curate the ideas of those congregations working for many decades now to become more inclusive, equitable, and diverse and amplify this work at the General and District Assemblies.

- **Action:** Work with funders to establish grant programs for those developing practices and technologies for inclusion.
- **Action:** Provide learning circles and virtual learning circles for groups of white people interested in learning how to be accountable to Black people, Indigenous people, and people of color and co-journeying with them.

Recommendation

Assistance to congregations supporting circles or caucuses involving Black people, Indigenous people, or people of color as well as young adult groups within their local context should be prioritized.

- **Action:** Amplify community practices building diverse, equitable, and inclusive spaces throughout General Assembly as "Promising Practices."
- **Action:** Develop a new annual award to be presented at General Assembly to individuals, congregations, or other groups or communities for innovation in counter-oppression work.

- **Action:** Provide resources and a coaching program for congregations interested in retooling their forms of worship, leadership, and accountability. This can include small and shrinking congregations willing to redirect existing resources toward new groups such as young adults, LGBTQ people, or Black people, Indigenous people, and people of color.

Recommendation

Funding is needed to ensure that Black leaders, Indigenous leaders, leaders of color, and leaders from other marginalized groups with lower financial resources can be engaged and provide leadership into a more inclusive future. We need to continue to figure out ways to use the leadership, expertise, and life experience of Unitarian Universalists who are Black, Indigenous, or people of color or have other marginalized identities, as they are very valuable in designing faith-based experiences that speak to resilience and inclusion in an increasingly diverse context.

- **Action:** Examine the ability of volunteer leaders in certain key positions—such as moderator, General Assembly Planning Committee members, and UUA Board of Trustees members—to recoup lost income on a needs basis and to pay for child care and other service-related expenses.
- **Action:** Fund leaders who are Black, Indigenous, and people of color to develop new worship materials, including curation of music with guidelines for how to use music in a culturally competent manner.
- **Action:** Revive a focus on cultural competency and cultural borrowing in all religious professional associations to counter the cultural appropriation that can come with efforts to become more equitable, inclusive, and diverse.
- **Action:** Continue to prioritize resources about inclusion, equity, and diversity written by Black people, Indigenous people, and people of color in Unitarian Universalist publications, including

Skinner House books.

- **Action:** Provide funding in congregational budgets to allow leaders who are Black, Indigenous, and people of color; younger leaders; and those without means access to funds for child care, travel, and other expenses so they can participate in leadership and decision making in all aspects of our Association.

Recommendation

New settings and structures for worshiping and convening for Black people, Indigenous people, people of color, and youth and young adults should be funded, including new communities.

- **Action:** Convene a learning group for people of color, youth and young adults, and other marginalized groups interested in experimenting with new ways of worshiping and convening that better suit their cultural norms.
- **Action:** Provide learning circles and virtual learning circles for groups of white people interested in learning how to be accountable to Black people,

Indigenous people, and people of color and co-journeying with them.

Restoration and Reparations

Recommendation

As an act of reparations, funding and administrative support for groups that allow Black/Indigenous/people of color and other marginalized groups to convene and gain the support necessary to worship and serve in predominantly white communities should remain a priority.

- **Action:** Establish a position to provide increased ongoing administrative and travel support to DRUUMM, BLUU, TRUUsT, and EqUual Access, the organizations currently representing many of the people whose identities are marginalized in Unitarian Universalism. This would allow the leadership of these groups to devote their time and effort to advocacy and programs that are necessary for their communities' sustainability and would ensure that important administrative functions, such as mailing lists, membership lists, and donation lists, are maintained for the long-term survival and growth of these vital organizations.

- **Action:** Maintain a list of all congregations that are engaged in caucusing and that have ongoing people of color or other identity caucuses at the Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations as another way to communicate with vital populations within our congregations.

Recommendation

Methods for encouraging and channeling productive conflict should be established and promoted to decrease harm.

- **Action:** Develop and curate resources for skill building in dealing with conflict and require competency in these skills of all regional staff to promote engagement with conflict rather than shutting down conflict, which often continues oppression.
- **Action:** Prioritize and report on the progress of the UUA's Conflict Transformation Team and document it as a model for congregational teams.
- **Action:** Ensure that those serving as mediators or good officers for all professional associations are educated about and skilled in conflict engagement.

Recommendation

Channels and procedures for identifying harm, making amends, and financial reparations should be established.

- **Action:** Provide funds to Black people, Indigenous people, and people of color for travel to and registration for General Assembly, regional assemblies, and other key gatherings such as youth and young adult programs, as well as to members of other groups that face marginalization, and frame this as an act of congregational reparations.
- **Action:** Develop the capacity to work with congregations with fewer than twenty-five members or that are closing their doors to accomplish redirecting their resources to the Association in some manner rather than making donations to their local community. Reserve these resources to fund next-generation communities and practices.
- **Action:** Study the reparations movement, and examine implications for institutions at all levels of Unitarian Universalism.

Recommendation

Widespread practices of acknowledging Unitarian Universalism's foundational complicity with racist practices, especially against Indigenous and Black people, are essential to understanding the need for continued support.

- **Action:** Develop an Associational fund for scholarships and travel funds for people of color, Indigenous, and other marginalized groups, especially transgender and disabled people, and those living below their area's median income to allow a greater diversity of people to be sustained while working toward credentialing as religious professionals and to provide support for a diversified religious leadership.
- **Action:** Support religious educators of color pursuing credentialing with financial assistance to enable these invaluable role models to be present for families in an era when a higher percentage of children in our nation than ever are of color or multiracial.

Accountability and Resources

Recommendation

Accountability should be embedded in the structure of the Boards of the Association and other key organizations, including all affiliated and professional organizations.

- **Action:** Include in the bylaws of the Unitarian

Universalist Association an explicit commitment to become anti-oppressive and equitable and to serve the full diversity of those who resonate with our theological tradition.

- **Action:** Initiate a Board-driven process to develop such a statement and present it to the General Assembly of Congregations for inclusion in the bylaws of the UUA no later than 2022.
- **Action:** Request that all Unitarian Universalist-related organizations examine their commitment to equity, inclusion, and diversity work and include such a commitment in their bylaws.
- **Action:** Using the example of congregations who have already adopted such statements, develop a sample statement for inclusion in congregational bylaws.

Recommendation

Ongoing monitoring is needed to ensure that work to counter bias and oppression is not interrupted again.

- **Action:** Adopt goals by 2021, report progress on these goals at GA each year, and codify this requirement in the bylaws.
- **Action:** Provide annual report to the General Assembly of Congregations by the UUA president on goals and progress toward those goals of equity, inclusion, and diversity.

Recommendation

The UUA should establish an ongoing independent body to identify systemic changes and monitor accountability on work toward equity, inclusion, and diversity. This body should be based on representatives of groups of oppressed people and should have direct representation on the Association Board.

- **Action:** Establish an independent body through a vote at General Assembly to consist of one representative and one alternate from identity-based groups, including DRUUMM, BLUU, TRUUsT, and EqUUal Access if they are willing to participate. Membership for this panel should be reviewed every two years to include all relevant groups and to make sure the groups that are included have membership lists and at least one membership meeting a year. In addition, the Nominating Committee should appoint two at-large members and the UUA Board of Trustees should appoint one member who will represent the group on the Board. This representative should be confirmed by a vote of the new body focused on accountability and systemic change.
- **Action:** Recognize accountable congregational partnerships for purposes of equity, inclusion, and diversity at the local congregational and community levels. Amplify practices that include long-term investments in relationships with and regular donations of financial resources to partners serving in communities that are under-resourced.
- **Action:** Provide a report to the Association annually at GA on a set of metrics to be submitted no later than the 2021 GA. Metrics could include the percentage of UUA employees who are Black, Indigenous, or people of color, or who hold other marginalized identities, the percentage of the budget that is devoted to our work on an annual basis, the number of complaints received around racial concerns, and the number of new intentional communities that have been created to support the values of new generations.

Recommendation

Those responsible for managing and negotiating in times of change and conflict should have training in anti-oppression work.

- **Action:** Identify best practices for inclusion, equity, and diversity for congregational nominating committees and make them available through all communications means and through leadership events.
- **Action:** Include training in anti-oppression practices as a standard part of interim minister training because of the opportunity to address issues of systemic bias during interim times.
- **Action:** Develop capacity within all good officer (and UUA regional staff) teams to lead and facilitate conversations around harm, injury, and conflict in anti-oppression practices.
- **Action:** Curate models of how to audit for oppressive practices at the congregational level.

Notes

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