

Widening the Circle of Concern: Intro through Trends

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Preface

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 modeled.
- 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.

Members and Staff of the Commission on Institutional Change

- **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. Elías 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.

Introduction

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.

For the events that led up to the convening of the Commission, see Appendix 1.

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 been 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

“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

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.*