

Widening the Circle of Concern, session 2 - Theology (2)

Chalice Lighting

“...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

Two things we need to address, but these meetings may not be the best place:

- Engaging our Covenant/Guiding Principles (maybe this is one of our recommendations)
- Offering Identity Based Caucuses to discuss the Feb 28 worship service (maybe a sub group works on this)

UUMA Guiding Questions: Kent (5-10)

Addressing questions asked at the local UU Minister's group meeting: What does theology mean to you? To Us? What's liberation theology? What is UUism's liberational message/s to people?

What takeaway message most resonates with you?

Where are you finding liberation theology? Movies, books, podcasts, etc?

Check In: (5-10mins)

Share what impacted you in the reading or in the Feb 28 worship service or other thoughts about the report that you have had since we last met. Or do you have any new/different understandings of theology?

Discussion about Recommendations

1.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.

Guiding questions: What shift would happen in our communities if we were to be intentional about understanding, interpreting, and sharing with others our views of our movement's theological container?

2. 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.

We need to articulate a theology of liberation, experimentation, and innovation grounded in our UU 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.

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.

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.

- **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.

Guiding questions: How would such a mandate find expression in our worship? In congregational life? In our community relations, particularly amongst marginalized folks?

3. 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. 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.

Guiding questions: How do you understand the significance of being a covenantal faith for the present and future thriving of the faith.

4. 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.

Guiding questions: What are the barriers to their implementation and what changes are needed in order to overcome them?

Check Out (5 mins)

What would you like to see us do at the next meeting? Are you interested in Identity based groups to discuss February 28 worship service?

Closing Words

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.