

## **Congregations and Communities Session 1 (WtC 6)**

**Introductions** (5 mins) Plan for the meeting, Q&A

### **Opening Words**

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... And second, 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." -from WCC Report, pp. 39-40

**Check In** (10 mins) How are you thinking about Widening the Circle since we last met?

**Review of Governance Goals** (15 Mins)

**Discussion** (55 mins)

### **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.

**Question:** Discuss which of these we are already engaged in and which of these we might like to add.

### **Widening the Circle Report Recommendations**

***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.

Your Leadership Team (LT) feel these are addressed by these proposed Theology actions:

**Action T4.2:** Increase congregational knowledge & use of the Covenant of Right Relations through publicity & education

**Action T4.3:** Develop practices that increase accountability to the Covenant of Right Relations

**Action T4.4:** Consider revisions to the Covenant of Right Relations that address microaggressions

**Action T4.5:** Consider creating a Right Relations Task Force to implement & support these ideas

### **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.

Your LT feels these are recommendations to the UUA and we include them just so we're including all of the recommendations. If we have a point person/Denominational Affairs Committee, as in proposed Governance Action G3.4 "Have an active denominational affairs point person/committee that talks about our connection to the denomination throughout the year," that would ensure we see all relevant communications.

### **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."

## Possible Questions for Multiculturalism Audit

- On a scale of 1 to 10, how important to the work of your committee is working to help USG 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]

**Question:** Without focusing on the specifics of the above questions in this meeting, is an audit like this something Widening the Circle could ask committees to do some time in the next year? What might be the benefits and barriers to implementing this? What framework might we need to put in place to make this possible?

## 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.

- **Action:** Make caucusing for all diverse identities 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.

**Question:** For USG, focusing on the first bullet, could we have a goal of promoting caucusing opportunities for people with diverse identities? And also perhaps a group for white people. Could ASD work on this? The rest seem to be for the UUA.

## 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.

Also, UUA level, but given that one of our Theology goals is to have all church leaders participate in anti-oppression/multicultural sensitivity training annually, it seems like we are in support of their assistance with this.

**Check Out** (10 mins) What we do you want to make sure we cover at the next meeting? Are we ready for the next chapter?

## Closing Words

"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." -from WCC Report, words of Dr. Natalie Fenimore, p. 41