

## 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](#).*

*Also at this link <https://files.meadville.edu/files/resources/bc-stopping-harm-flyer-s.pdf>*

*Microaggression* is a term coined by psychologist Dr. Derald Wing Sue and it refers to a comment or behavior that 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-journeymen 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-journeymen 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.