

Widening the Circle meeting Notes, Wednesday 2/2/22 Religious Professionals

Our discussion focused on religious professionals and upcoming USG leadership transitions through the lens of WTC, and we continued to refine and add to our list of USG goals and actions.

Hopes and observations about our WTC process and its impact so far:

I hope all our WTC work will help us be more open and vulnerable in our search for interim and settled ministers.

I see changes already stemming from this work, shout-out to Lois and Worship Arts team, we already have more diverse sources in our worship services.

WTC process has already made us more mindful in worship planning, events planning, and now in our ministerial and music director searches.

2/13 Widening the Circle anti-oppression worship service will be led by USG congregation members who have marginalized identities, including POCs.

Andrea B. explained the 2-step ministerial search process: 1) create search committee for interim minister; the UUA has an established matching and vetting process for interim minister candidates. Goal is to have an interim minister in place by August 1, 2022. UUA recommends keeping interim in place for 2 years. The first year is for grieving and letting go; the second year, for a new search committee to seek candidates for a settled minister. The USG Board then chooses a candidate to be voted on by the USG membership. Most ministerial candidates want to see a 90-95% affirmation rate [“yes” votes] in order to accept the position.

The UUA website includes handbooks to guide searches for both interim and settled ministers. Congregations are expected to complete a training called Beyond Categorical Thinking, a 3-hour program provided by trainers from the UUA, developed in the 1980s in response to bias experienced in ministerial search processes. Search committees, the board, and other church leaders are expected to attend, and all others in the congregation are strongly encouraged to do so. We anticipate holding this program in summer 2023; applications to participate would have to be submitted by September 2022. The high value of getting a large number of congregants to participate was discussed.

Comment: “We need to be prepared to pay what the right person is worth” for both ministerial positions and for the music director position. As the WTC materials note, financial barriers to entry to service as religious professionals are generally higher for people with marginalized identities.

Discussion of the Avatar – themes touched on included:

Cultural inclusion/cultural appropriation discernment. An article proposes the idea of a congregation making a donation/reparations each time the congregation performs hymns written by enslaved people.

This avatar’s story is “a horror story.” More anti-oppression training of our congregation is needed before hiring process for settled minister.

I'm aware of 2 people of color who experienced alarming things in the past year or so; they did not want to describe their experiences even anonymously.

We need to remember that we are working to widen the circle to welcome and include all under-represented people, not just people of color.

The work of the Right Relations Task Force that is being chaired by Amy Birge-Caracappa may include putting into place a process to address situations like what happened with reactions to then-intern minister Connie Simon.

Not all of us at this meeting know that history, and suggested that we could learn from the experiences of all the ministers and interns of color who have served USG. It was described briefly how, after then-intern minister Simon spoke from the USG pulpit about her own experiences of racism at the UUA and at USG, some people at USG said hurtful things to her, some threatened to leave USG, and these experiences were very painful for Rev. Simon.

Suggestion that we ask other leaders of color at USG for feedback on their experiences. Observation that there is value in white congregants examining how their own behavior could unwittingly cause pain to leaders or staff of color, and shared an example of wondering after the fact whether his spontaneous positive comments to a leader of color might actually have caused hurt.

USG goals and actions already proposed, with new additions:

T3 goal – Continuing Education in anti-oppression. Add USG staff to list of folks who ought to participate.

T3.1 action – maybe consider biannual trainings, instead of annual, as a more realistic scenario for participants.

T3.2 – For 2023, the Beyond Categorical Thinking program could be the anti-oppression training we urge everyone to attend.

Add line in USG budget for anti-oppression trainings, allocate enough money annually

L1.1 Action – Encourage everyone at USG to engage with at least one USG group doing anti-oppression work. We already have many options: ERC, anti-racism book group, and more.

G2 Goal – GA participation.

G2.1 Action. Provide funding for USG folks to attend GA. Right now, Eric informed us, there is a GA fund but it's not well publicized. It currently has \$175 in it. But Sullivan Fund is "for the needy", we could have a conversation about whether this could be tapped to provide funds for GA attendance. Andrea B: each spring the Board sets budget priorities. I could put on the list more substantial funding to go into special projects GA fund. This would apply to 2023 GA, not 2022. Jim, who is chair of the Sullivan Fund committee, said in the past the fund has been tapped to help USG community members; the usual process is for individuals to request help, by communicating with the minister, for specific problems. Using Sullivan for GA could be "a last resort," ideally we'd have a dedicated GA fund.

New possible goals and actions:

Ensure we have an established fair compensation practice for staff, including interns and professional staff. Make goal explicit according to UUA guidelines. The personnel policy does not have this commitment in writing. Suggestion that maybe the Board should pass a resolution to put our fair compensation practices in writing.

We all agreed to ask the Board to adopt this as a policy.

Apply early to Beyond Categorical Thinking so we can choose and block off/protect the weekend designated for it.

Next meeting, we'll cover the next two chapters of the Widening the Circle document, which will keep us on schedule to complete review of the entire document in June, the end of USG's fiscal year.