

Introduction from Sarah Spencer, leader of Social Justice Committee:

I want to start off by saying that we have a very nice congregation. Our members deeply care about one another and show that in action as well as in speech. However, the statistics of our population do not represent the statistics of Oak Cliff. A big percentage of our church is white, over the age of 50, and has some college education. Our hope is that we can take time to learn about how this is true of many UU congregations, reflect on why it may be true specifically in our case, research how we can improve, and put forth the long and robust effort of implementing new practices as a congregation which will enrich us individually (thereby also improving our lives outside of church) as well as grow our church. In the years that I've attended, I have seen services led by and devoted to embracing cultures different than whites. Even when white people lead religious education, I've heard them speak about other cultures histories and beliefs and use resources written by people who represented those cultures. We do well, but we have room to grow, and growth takes intentional effort. I ask that we commit to this process and devote the time and resources needed to see progress. It is not enough to simply wish things were better for people of color, or even to share information on the injustice done to them. We have the ability to take concrete actions, not only to provide true havens for people of color to take a rest from daily wounding messages, but also to stop perpetuating systemic oppression. This is just the beginning of a conversation which should result in a plan formulated and carried out by all the committees of this church.

All of the following information comes from a report sent from the UUA to our congregation called Widening the Circle of Concern Report of the UUA Commission on Institutional Change June 2020.

If you want to purchase a physical copy of the book, go to: <https://www.uuabookstore.org/Widening-the-Circle-of-Concern-P18686.aspx>

For a free online version: <https://www.uua.org/uuagovernance/committees/cic/widening>

All quotation marks indicate reference to the Widening the Circle report. Some sections reference organizations or other reports, and links to those are provided in the following summaries. Names next to the topics indicate who read the section, summarized it, and will speak about it in front of the Board.

#1) Trends: Sarah Spencer

We, as an entire congregation, need to focus on inclusion and multicultural competency.

We need to heal religious wounds from our individual pasts and spend more time talking about the tenets of our faith that bind us together so we can have a "sustaining faith."

"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."

If we do not invest in new technologies and methodologies, we will not understand generational differences. I think we have the technology part covered, but what new methodologies should we incorporate?

Be accountable to how we have taken advantage of people of color in past; use inclusive language.

#2) Theology: Ford Peay

Overall argument: Social justice needs to be realized more strongly in UU theology's tradition and future; UU theology needs to be fully present in lived church experiences, especially in social justice initiatives.

This chapter foremost acknowledges a disengagement with UU theological traditions. This disengagement manifests materially in lack of funding for seminaries. It also manifests congregationally, in churches where overvaluation of freedom of belief, or shared "antipathy toward rejected beliefs", has weakened potential bonds of shared positive belief.

Another manifestation of congregational disengagement with UU theology is the lack of progress specifically in cultivating antiracist cultures within the church, relative lack of foregrounding POC voices in church theology, and generally in lack of progress toward reparation of inequities toward all oppressed groups.

The chapter frames these goals as inherent in Unitarian Universalist theology, as one of the original Unitarian "heresies": the call to realize the Kingdom of God on Earth. Coherent, liberatory theology and the actualization of justice are interdependent.

#3) Governance: Jamiese Martin

"Take-aways

While at the local and regional level, our structures can be too informal, perpetuating a club-like mentality of leadership, our overly complex governance system makes change difficult.

Change, agility, and innovation are needed for Unitarian Universalism to survive.

Black people, Indigenous people, and people of color encounter ignorance and aggression in many Unitarian Universalist organizations, and the lack of a common commitment to anti-oppression and multicultural work makes such service hazardous.

We have a history of disbanding bodies and then not reinstating them, as happened with our continental youth and young adult programs. We must address this need.

We need a congregational polity that serves us rather than blocks progress.

We need covenantal understandings among all affiliated Unitarian Universalist organizations about the need for equality, inclusion, and diversity initiatives.

We need to refocus the resources we have on critical areas of leadership that lead to more inclusive and equitable practices."

#4) Congregations and Communities: Johnnie Chapman

This is a chapter summation of the Commission on Institutional Change's report entitled *Widening the Circle of Concern*. This chapter, *Congregations and Communities*, is one of the many chapters that looks at the trends effecting many UU congregations---dwindling membership, decrease financial donations and participation. A factor contributing to this trend is the inability of Unitarian Universalist congregations and Unitarian Universalist Association to address issues of equity, inclusion and diversity. The younger generation having grown up in a

different world values a faith that actively engages in moving in the direction of inclusion, equity, and diversity.

One of the first actions of the Commission on Institutional Change was to secure from UUA president, Rev. Dr. Susan Frederick-Gray an analysis of the decline of the number of congregations over the past ten years. This analysis underscored the need for large-scale systemic change. Progressive minded working-age adults expect practices of equity, inclusion and diversity and that multicultural congregations are on the rise. Testimonials of UU members show that congregations may not know about the experiences of fellow UU member that are people of color. This is the case because minority and marginalized members have experienced a lack of safety when honest. A sampling of testimonials collected reports a superficial commitment to people of color, few people of color are members, and that there is microaggressions that go unanswered by leadership and congregants, alike. It was observed that institutions purpose is to preserve traditions and customs which make it difficult for institutional change which is needed to ensure our faith growth and survival.

The research done by the Commission suggested five areas for focus:

- 1) The new generations of members expect anti-oppression practices that the culture of many congregations are not keeping pace with those expectations.
- 2) Congregations must act as independent **and** in coordination, covenant, and communion with other congregations. UUA is to serve as facilitator of this communion and provide help and resources in the creation of learning communities.
- 3) What is critical but lacking is a covenantal understanding with one another and with UUA to make institutional changes and join with other congregations in the doing the work of creating equity and inclusion.
- 4) Congregations need promising practices to support oppressed and marginalized groups. Caucusing has been determined to be very important in moving toward a more inclusive Unitarian Universalism.
- 5) The goal should be to develop a congregational model with new practices around equity and diversity to serve future generations. This new model should include other complementary community models that support what is available in congregations.

A case study of The First Parish of Malden (Massachusetts) provides a look at how the above points were applied in enacting their commitment to welcome younger, more diverse leadership and grow their congregation.

Additionally, this report provided congregational practice recommendations and action items to increase inclusion, equity and diversity. To gauge their efforts, some congregations conduct congregational audits. Unity Church-Unitarian of Minnesota conducts audits and publish annual

audit reports measuring their work. A racism audit tool used by Mt. Diablo Unitarian Universalist Church in California is also included in this report.

Take-Aways (as included in this chapter)

- Congregations that choose to engage to increase equity, inclusion, and diversity are leading the way into the future.
- Too often congregations must do this challenging work by themselves when learning communities would be easy to form.
- Curated resources, learning circle, and funding to develop needed tools should be a priority for UUA-led efforts under the leadership of the Liberal Religious Educators Association.
- Anti-oppression tools as well as conflict facilitation are essential to leadership development efforts, and leadership development is needed in the complex and often conflictual context of leader today.
- None of this can be accomplished without better communication between the Unitarian Universalist Association and the congregations it serves.
- Regional gatherings could touch more Unitarian Universalists and help provide a common frame of reference.
- Regional staff should provide a consistent structure for work on diversity, equity and inclusion.

“Questions for Multiculturalism Audit

On a scale of 1 to 10, how important to the work of your committee is working to help MDUUC 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, false sense of urgency, assuming a right to comfort, and individualism.”

Liberal Religious Educators Association <https://www.lreda.org/>

#5) Hospitality and Inclusion: Kathy and Scott Grey

"The opposite of racist isn't 'not racist.' It is 'antiracist.' " - Ibram X. Kendi, How to Be an Antiracist

Background and Trends

- UUs repel many of the people we want/need for growth
- Our predominantly white congregations see themselves as welcoming, but in reality are not
- When we are inhospitable to one group, we are seen by other marginalized groups as inhospitable to them as well
- Once equitable practices begin, people feel welcome quickly
- Diversity does not need to mean marginalization for the old guard

Stopping Harm, Restoring Relationship, Responding to Microaggressions and Oppression

Microaggression definition: A comment or behavior that demeans someone because of their culturally marginalized identity; often unintentional

- Examples are given
- Dos and Don'ts for white allies
- Possible ally responses

For People of Color: When Times Get Tough

Suggested practices to "build on a legacy of resilience and audacious hope"

Recommendations

- Leadership education is needed and should include multicultural hospitality practices.
- New practices around hospitality are needed to stop repelling BIPOC and other marginalized groups.
---> People need us and we suck at welcoming them <---
- Suggested actions
 - Scholarship funds for underrepresented leaders

- Pursue best practices for training lay leaders in intercultural competency
 - Contract with identity-based groups to develop a congregation certification program
- Convening of volunteer leaders at regional and cluster level should be emphasized to allow support for marginalized groups
 - Actions are suggested

An Invitation to Conversations for Liberation — key thoughts

"We are at a moment of great power and potential in UUism...meaningful change is hard...we recommit ourselves to a fully inclusive and anti-oppressive community..."

NOTE: Note all of this includes youth and young adults

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MY COMMENT: In true UU fashion, way too many words were used to convey a simple concept: We must do better to be the church we want to be. Recognizing the problem is obviously the first step. Suggested action items may be difficult at this time in general, and for our small church of limited funds, but we are a smart, resourceful group.

#6) Summary-Living Values: Alice Kinsey

Internal Focus vs External Focus.

In thinking about creating change, identifying and addressing the following are needed:

- Personal Level
- Interpersonal Level
- Institutional Level
- Cultural Level

Recommendations:

- To privilege those most affected in our justice work, which should follow the voice of those most at risk.
- The UUA should promote education for those who would accompany and co-journey with Black, Indigenous, and people of color communities and their leaders and groups to ensure more competency in this area.
- Develop more theological resources to center our justice work in our faith and make clear the interconnection between action in the world and spiritual development.

- As people of faith, our call to collective justice work, through accountable partnerships, is our salvific path.

Take-aways:

- We need to center justice work in accountable partnerships.
- The lens of diversity, equity and inclusion should be applied to all areas of justice work.
- Accountable partnerships are dependent on our ability to educate ourselves.
- Accountability should be to organizations with which we have partnerships.
- Anti-oppression work is a necessary foundation for justice work.

#7) Religious Professionals: Sarah Spencer

https://www.uua.org/files/pdf/f/findings_related_to_the_southern_regional_lead_hiring_april_2017.pdf

“No process exists for redress when damage due to institutional racism is done, whether that damage is done to people of color or white participants. Trial in the court of social media is not a workable alternative to a real process.” Brainstorm what ways we can attempt to redress these past pains.

It is very expensive to become a UU minister, since it requires a Master’s in Divinity. People of color are often in non-ministerial roles and require extra degrees or credentials even then to prove they are qualified. They face inequities and abusive conditions in congregations and outside of church. A better strategy, called a team approach, elevates church leaders who are not ordained clergy, such as religious educators, worship leaders, and membership and administrative professionals. Many churches don’t have money to adequately pay for those positions. This report advocates for offering Apprentice Track to ministry that does not involve Master’s in Divinity, but 250 contact hours approved by the region in which the same 16 areas of ministerial practice are learned.

“We need to be sure that we do not ask people of color to exist in toxic work conditions.”

Ministers should be expected to have continuing education after their first 3 years (in which it is mandatory), especially for multicultural competency.

We need to continue research to hold all congregations accountable to hiring people of color and paying and treating them decently. Quit using the “nondisclosure clause” when firing a person of color to cover up less than adequate reasons for firing, if not veiled racism. Create a standard hiring and firing process for all congregations. Determine employees, congregants or congregations that have been racist and require them to have multicultural training and anti-oppression training.

Sites I found while researching anti-oppression training: <http://aorta.coop/workshops/webinars/>

<https://www.organizingforpower.org/anti-oppression-resources-exercises/>

<https://beautifulrising.org/> <https://www.uua.org/racial-justice/curricula>

#8) Educating for Liberation: Sarah Spencer

UU White Supremacy Teach-In movement <https://www.uuteachin.org/teachins> and <https://www.uua.org/justice/dismantle-white-supremacy>

VISIONS, Inc. module: Modern Oppression and Internalized Oppression Theory and Behaviors
<https://www.visions-inc.org/uploads/1/1/7/0/117018765/is-reconciliation-possible-july-2017-3.pdf>

<https://www.visions-inc.org/> for webinars, podcasts, and blog

Multicultural UU communities: <http://www.druumm.org/> <https://druumm.onefireplace.org/>
<https://www.blacklivesuu.com/> <https://www.aaihs.org/transformational-faith-the-black-lives-of-unitarian-universalism/>

“Children [and adults] need positive and empowering conversations about race to overcome bias and internalized oppression.” We must “work to end ‘anti-blackness’ and unconscious bias.” “One barrier to doing anti-oppression work can be shame.” “Guilt is not an effective agent of change.” We must let go of the ‘mastery’ culture and accept that we still have learning to do, and that’s ok. The antidote to racism is “the work of self-discovery and learning about the systemic effects of oppression.”

One barrier is that resources are not easily identifiable, which is why I’ve included so many links in these summaries. Uua.org is a goldmine of free resources. Another barrier is cost. It may take a little time to find something for free or at an affordable cost, but it can be done and is worth the search. We already have the advantage of living in the metroplex, which means many and diverse resource options.

This section encourages us to “build in ongoing work relative to trainings, coaching, conversations and support groups.” VISIONS, Inc. (whose website is above) says the challenge is that individual UU congregations are autonomous from the UUA, but we can agree that when the UUA gathers research and identifies something to be addressed and changed, as this report does, then we should heed that advice. This section lists modern “isms” and internalized oppression behaviors, which are expanded upon in the VISIONS link above. One problem people of color expressed to the UUA is not having representation or a safe haven at church, which is why I listed the multicultural community websites. How can we facilitate support groups for our members who are people of color?

It’s noted that even if damage has been done in the past, we can empower the members we have harmed, and we should focus on having power with them and not over them. It’s suggested to fund people of color going to this retreat to allow them to express grievances and begin to heal: <https://www.uua.org/multiculturalism/retreat>. “Resources in healing religious wounds and productive conflict engagement are also needed as a core part of faith development.” “It requires a willingness to acknowledge and accept mistakes [and have] emotional maturity.” Lessons should be varied in length, because shorter lessons are easier to access. The UUA has been asked to “begin a renewing certification program similar to the Welcoming Congregation program, which emphasizes lifespan learning in diversity, equity, inclusion and anti-oppression.” Would our congregation be able to qualify for that certificate? What can we do to prepare? As much as some may cringe thinking of structure or organization, there are many resources available online which can easily be used as a curriculum for our sermons for a long length of time. Maybe every other week the talk is about this, and the alternating weeks are whatever anyone else would like to speak about. This should not be limited to just one person giving these talks, but it is good for all to follow one curriculum.

#9) Innovations and Risk-Taking: Sarah Spencer

<https://www.uuabookstore.org/Mistakes-and-Miracles-P18521.aspx> (\$22 per book)

<https://www.amazon.com/Mistakes-Miracles-Congregations-Road-Multiculturalism/dp/1558968415>
(\$10 Kindle version)

Considerations for Cultural Borrowing: Questions

<https://www.uua.org/multiculturalism/introduction/misappropriation/23371.shtml>

This section mentions having “Promising Practices.” I searched the UUA site and found this:

<https://www.uuabookstore.org/InterreligiousInterfaith-Studies-P18385.aspx> (specifically The Promising Practice of Antiracist Approaches to Interfaith Studies by Jeannine Hill Fletcher under III. Challenges and Choices) Also: <https://www.amssa.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/202-Promising-Practices-and-New-Directions-in-Multiculturalism-and-Anti-RacismProgramming.pdf>

“A model in which we pay a minister’s health insurance yet expect a director of religious education’s needs to be provided for by a spouse is not a viable model. The practice of paying wages that do not recognize the debt with which seminarians graduate is not sustainable.” I understand that we are seriously struggling with finances right now, but how can we plan for the future to meet the financial needs of our workers? “Work with funders to establish grant programs.”

It’s suggested that the UUA “develop a new award to be presented at General Assembly to individuals, congregations, or other groups or communities for innovation in counter oppression work.” How else can we honor the culturally embracing work that we do?

It’s recommended that we “convene a learning group for people of color, youth and young adults, and other marginalized groups interested in experimenting with new ways of worshiping and convening that better suit their cultural norms.” Also, provide learning circles for white people interested in learning how to co-journey with people of color and other marginalized groups.

“The limited resources we have should showcase and spread successful innovations because such change is critical for our survival as a faith tradition.”

#10) Restoration and Reparations: Mavis Belisle

This chapter opens with the acknowledgement of the ongoing genocide, oppression, and exploitation of Black people and people of color so pervasive in this system. It places responsibility with religious practices such as missionary colonialism and religious oppression.

It notes that Unitarian Universalism has a mixed history, from abolition activity to the civil rights movement, including minstrel shows and its own oppression of Black people.

It calls for adoption of new principles for reparations: Resources to be directed toward investments need to accomplish reparations as well as transform and shift our culture and practice toward more inclusion, diversity, and equity; risks to be born by our systems and institutions and not just individuals; promoting practices should be identified, curated, and made available as models; and a more uniform, flexible, and culturally competent regional structure is essential to support this institutional change at the congregational level.

It also speaks of restitution, defining that as well.

It then cites a number of recommendations for achieving these goals.

Also recommended is development of a conflict transformation team.

The final section is a case study about a parish in Needham, Massachusetts, dating back to the late 1700s, finding the existence of slavery there. It included the minister, and the use of a slave in the upkeep of the church itself.