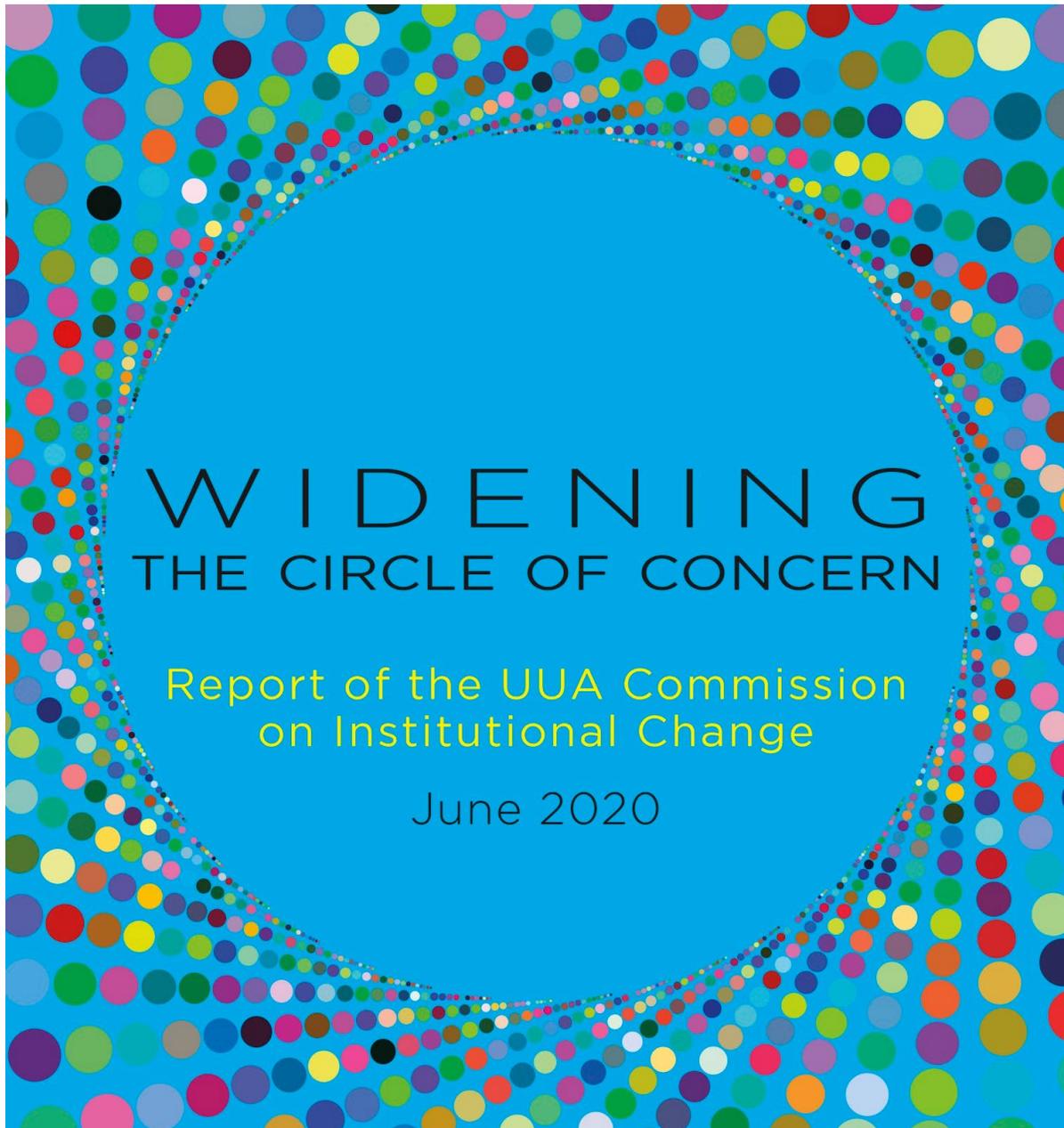


Widening the Circle of Concern Study/Action Guide



This Study/Action Guide is a collaboration of the Commission on Institutional Change, the Liberal Religious Educators Association, Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association, and the Unitarian Universalist Association's Lifespan Faith Engagement Office.

Widening the Circle of Concern

Study/Action Guide

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Widening the Circle of Concern

Getting Started



Goals

Unitarian Universalist congregations and communities are invited to:

- Understand the reasons the report was commissioned and the events that led up to its commissioning.
- Explore why the community or congregation has chosen to engage in studying its recommendations.
- Take actions toward implementing the recommendations.

Deciding to Study the COIC Report

Widening the Circle of Concern: Report of the UUA Commission on Institutional Change must not be viewed as simply an academic exploration into the current state of the prevalence of White Supremacy Culture within Unitarian Universalism. A mere sociological interest in the Commission on Institutional Change (COIC)'s findings would be an insult to the commissioners' hundreds of dedicated hours of work and would treat as entertainment the re-traumatization of those who gave painful testimony. Instead, as a people of faith, Unitarian Universalists must approach this report with the humility and resolve of a truth and reconciliation council. We must understand that, as a "living tradition," our faith's survival depends on its relevance, and relevance depends on accepting and addressing the truth of the findings of the Commission. To fully accept this truth with integrity *requires* action at every level of our movement.

Initiation of study/action and advocacy for it might come from a ministry team, other staff, a social justice committee, or established or emerging lay leaders. In any case, the study/action effort should be understood as a ministry effort related holistically to the entire faith community.

Before convening a dedicated group within your community or congregation to study and respond to the COIC report, it is recommended that:

- The congregation is informed about the report and encouraged to read it in its entirety.
- Sunday worship has invited and guided deep exploration into why this community or congregation wishes to be actively involved in the changes recommended by the Commission. Worship may have raised questions such as:
 - What is the history of communities of color within our city and state. What role has our community or congregation played in that history?
 - What are predominant attitudes toward the work of "widening the circle" within our community or congregation?
 - What possible pushback will we witness? Who is likely to push back? How will others of us respond?

- Leadership—ministry team, staff, and lay leaders—are certain that they have sufficient “buy-in” of the community or congregation. The prevalence of white supremacy culture ensures that in our faith communities there is likely to be some resistance. However, if a sizable and/or influential contingency of the congregation objects to this undertaking, leadership must first devote time to some pre-work. We recommend you develop a strategy to educate across the community on the need for and the importance of racial equity work before moving into this study/action.

Forming a Task Force

Once the above recommendations are resolved, leadership may convene a group of volunteers to study and lead congregational response to the COIC report. The group should include members who are trusted by the community or congregation to become a sort of “task force” which will help develop and oversee enactment of the recommendations of the Commission well beyond the discussion prompted by this guide. For this reason, the need for an open-ended commitment of time and energy must be made crystal clear to volunteers before they agree to join the study/action group.

The first session includes a covenanting process based on “[The 8 Guidelines for Equity and Inclusion](#)” from VISIONS, Inc. Since some of the questions in this Study/Action guide may elicit difficult conversations, covenanting (and re-covenanting) is important to bring the group back to our original intent and commitments. Choose or pre-screen trusted leaders who have a track record of skill and commitment to these or similar guidelines.

Implementing the Study/Action Program

There are eleven sessions in this guide, each corresponding with chapters of the COIC Report. The recommended time length for a session is 90 minutes.

At this writing, during a time of global pandemic, it is recommended that all meetings happen virtually. For this reason, it is recommended *not* to attempt a discussion of more than one chapter per meeting to avoid over-doing screen time.

The task force or group may want to choose a couple of capable co-chairs or co-facilitators to lead the group in interacting with each chapter; the group should choose co-facilitators who have an interest in ending white supremacy culture within Unitarian Universalism. Or, the group may decide to share the responsibility of facilitation equitably, on a rotating basis.

It is important for the group to commit to the process of this guide in its entirety and to read and consider each chapter of the report in sequential order. Adhering to the process will help to fully ground the congregation or community’s transformational work of implementing the recommendations.

Ensure that each member of the task force receives or purchases a copy of the Widening the Circle of Concern report – either [in print from the inSpirit UU Book and Gift Shop](#) or the [free copy available on UUA.org](#). The copy available on UUA.org also includes audio clips of sections being read aloud.

Notes to Facilitators

Each session asks that a recorder be appointed to document the group's responses. In your final session and after this program of study/action, the facilitator will use a compilation of recorders' notes to revisit concrete suggestions that participants have made for the congregation to respond to the COIC recommendations. Make sure notes are taken, and saved, with this future need in mind.

Each time, before the group gathers, facilitators should take the time to reflect personally on the quotes and questions they will present: Meditate or journal about any hopes and anxieties for the process and its outcomes. Reflect on the holiness of transformative change work. Enjoy humility and gratitude for the opportunity to take on this role.

Widening the Circle of Concern

Session 1: Theology



Goals

Participants will:

- Explore Liberatory Theologies through the lens of the COIC report and its findings.
- Apply the findings to the context of your community.
- Articulate the importance of Liberatory Theologies to how we live our UU values in our personal and communal lives.

Materials

Chalice and something with which to light it

A copy of *Widening the Circle of Concern: Report of the UUA Commission on Institutional Change* (2020)

Newsprint and markers (if in-person) or a computer to post and agree upon covenant and to record contributions in the discussion period.

Preparation

Read the front matter of the COIC report (beginning with the Preface). Read the first chapter (Trends) and the Theology chapter.

Identify a recorder for this session.

Review "[The 8 Guidelines for Equity and Inclusion](#)" from VISIONS, Inc. Prepare to share them with the group when you propose them (be ready to screen-share if online; write on newsprint if in person). Decide how much time you will spend on amending and affirming the covenant and plan a process for participants to amend it. Note: You will need to save the covenant that the group agrees to during this session, for use in all future sessions.

Prepare a chalice and something with which to light it.

Chalice Lighting

Say that you will share a call to worship that was written, by Viola Abbitt, for [The Promise and the Practice](#), a packet for Sunday worship centering voices of Black Unitarian Universalists, published by the UUA in 2017.

Toward a Place of Wholeness

We are Unitarian Universalists.

When we lift up our Seven Principles, some of us think of them as a form of theology—but they are more important to our collective than that:

they do not tell us what we should believe; they tell us how we should **be**.

They tell us how we should act in the larger world and with each other.

We are brought here today by the fact that Unitarian Universalism has fallen short of the image that was presented to the world, and to many of those who embraced this religion.

But we are also brought here today by the truth that Unitarian Universalism has shifted course to move toward a place of wholeness: a place that perhaps never existed for us as a denomination.

It has been a long, and sometimes unforgiving road to today. But we are here today because we are mindful of that past, and because we have hope for the future. We want the practice of this faith to be a fulfilling manifestation of its promise.

Open your hearts. Seek new ways of understanding.

Come, let us worship together.

Light the chalice.

Covenanting

Tell the group that, before diving into the COIC report and recommendations, they must together agree on guidelines for how they will work together to study and implement the report. Say that the guidelines, or covenant, can be viewed as a living document that can be amended and revised throughout the group's work.

Offer "[The 8 Guidelines for Equity and Inclusion](#)" from VISIONS, Inc., one of the organizations that assisted the UUA Commission on Institutional Change. Invite the group to agree to them as guidelines that particularly work for multicultural organizations. Lead a brief process for amendments to the guidelines that people feel are important. If needed, ask the group to "try on" these guidelines rather than engaging in a long process of reworking them.

Choose someone to record and display the agreed-upon guidelines—on newsprint if meeting in-person; via computer if meeting online. Save the agreed-upon guidelines for use in future sessions.

Discussion

Invite the group to start this discussion by sharing their particular understandings of the meaning of theology and how it contributes to or gives shape to their personal lives. Then, as a group,

reflect how you have witnessed Unitarian, Universalist, and Unitarian Universalist theologies expressed, or not expressed, in the programs of your congregation.

Note that this study/action that the group is beginning is neither focused solely on justice nor solely on spirituality. Say that the report raises the point that “Justice-seeking practices cannot be used as surrogates for deepening our spiritual lives” (p.10). The report notes that justice-seeking disconnected from spiritual practices and spiritual reflections may lead down the path of burnout.

Now offer another point from the report: The report discusses our movement’s lack of investment in sustaining our inherited theological tradition and a failure to nurture a fertile ground for its development. We read, “In an age when so many struggle to find meaning, a community formed through a set of commonly held beliefs can form a stronger bond than one formed through antipathy towards rejected beliefs (p.14).” Lead a discussion on the following questions, reminding the volunteer recorder to note responses.

- How can we as a community move away from an attitude that puts emphasis on rejected beliefs? How can we embrace a posture of working through honest and robust engagement? How can we move toward commonly held beliefs and practices based on our inherited tradition?
- What kinds of programming and activities could help members of our community to gain a rich and deep understanding of Unitarian, Universalist, and Unitarian Universalist theologies? In what ways could we intentionally and courageously make space for learning from people often marginalized in our communities?

Say you will next invite the group to address the COIC recommendations presented in this chapter. Lead a discussion using these questions:

- The first recommendation questions a prevalent assumption among UUs: “that you can believe whatever you want and be a Unitarian Universalists.” Our shared faith is a covenantal faith that presents us with a theological container in which we can hold multiple religious belongings and theological understandings. 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?
- The second and third recommendations call us into an encounter with the liberatory potentials of our theological inheritance. It asks us to acknowledge anti-oppression work as a theological mandate of our faith. How could such a mandate find expression in our worship? In our congregational life? In our community relations, particularly alongside marginalized members of our faith as well as in the larger community?
- The fourth and last recommendation reminds us of the covenantal nature of our faith. How do you understand the significance of being a covenantal faith for the present and future thriving of the faith?
- Reflecting on the four recommendations in this chapter, what are the barriers to their implementation, and what changes are needed in order to overcome them?

Closing and Next Actions

Invite the group into a closing ritual: Ask volunteers to read aloud the Take-Aways at the end of the Theology chapter. You may extinguish the chalice while participants read.

Remind the group that both study and action are the purposes of this group. Offer a quick check-out. Ask the following questions and invite each participant to take a moment to reflect and then to respond in one sentence to any of these:

- What is one idea you want to continue to think about before our next discussion?
- What are the short-term actions we should consider or take to translate this discussion into action?
- What are the longer scope actions?
- What is an element that makes the hard work meaningful and worthwhile for this group?



Widening the Circle of Concern

Session 2: Governance



Goals

Participants will:

- Explore Unitarian Universalist governance practices through the lens of the COIC report and findings.
- Apply the findings to the context of your community.

Materials

Chalice and something with which to light it

A copy of *Widening the Circle of Concern: Report of the UUA Commission on Institutional Change* (2020)

The text of the covenant guidelines to which the group agreed, on newsprint if in person or accessible as electronic text to share if online

Newsprint and markers (if in-person) or a computer to record discussion contributions

Preparation

Read the Governance chapter.

Identify a recorder for this session.

Prepare a chalice and something with which to light it.

Post the covenant the group agreed upon in the previous session. (If in person, post newsprint; if online, plan to “share screen” and/or post the covenant guidelines or a link to them in the chat.)

Optional: Prepare more deeply by exploring these readings which are referenced in the COIC report:

- [The Cambridge Platform](#)
- [Interdependence: Renewing Congregational Polity: A Report by the Commission on Appraisal](#), Unitarian Universalist Association, June 1997

Chalice Lighting

Share these words by Rev. Marta Valentin, and light the chalice.

Spirit of Compassion

Isn't it amazing
how we crave to know an outcome
before its time
even as we accept
that we cannot know
how anything will go?
We do not know if the mounds of obstacles
will become dirt cleared away
or earth made into mountain...
We do not know if fresh air will degenerate
into a stagnant suffocation
or be sucked out of lives
longing to breathe freely and easily...
if the deserts will spring a true oasis
or continue to offer a false vision of survival...
if the shores will be flowing invitations
into unfathomable freedoms
or a fearfully ebbd withdrawal
of even the tiniest hospitality...
We who walk on ground taken for granted
we who speak of an Earth that has no borders
ask for guidance as we aid those in need
as well as those who would obstruct our care.

Spirit of Compassion

strengthen our resolve to carry forth
this ministry
regardless of the reality of the decisions
made to seemingly thwart our efforts.
Let us, in one grounded body
strong in our Unitarian Universalist faith
in solidarity with those whose lives
are most at stake,
resolve never to give up this fight for them
nor for our country.
Let ours be the voices that demand
a true accounting of these legal human beings.
Let ours be the hearts that resolve
whether through light or dark times

to stay the course
no matter what
no matter how long.

Let our love be the kind they have been waiting for.

Discussion

Take a moment to review the group's covenant. Ask the group if anything should be added or amended. If there is consensus, add or amend the covenant and save the changes.

Make sure a recorder from the group is ready to document discussion.

Note that on p. 28, the chapter discusses how an organization's informal structures privilege the status quo. Invite discussion:

- What informal structures do we have in our community that might be functioning in this way?

On p. 34, the chapter observes that overly complex structures can be a deterrent for change, especially when a community has a shrinking pool of volunteers. Invite discussion:

- Are any of our community's structures duplicative or unnecessarily complex?
- How do we encourage practices towards diversity, equity, and inclusion in the work of our groups and governance?

Say that the chapter discusses the importance of congregational support for wider-UUA change work through regional involvement. Discuss the following set of related questions:

- How is our community participating in regional work? How are we influencing the direction of our region of the UUA and holding it accountable to these goals?
- One of the recommendations is for more support across congregations for youth and young adult leaders. How are we tapping into the resources available, regionally and beyond, especially for youth and young adults of color?
- How do we reach out to leaders from other congregations around building our skills to provide greater diversity, equity, and inclusion in our community? How might we partner with other congregations or communities and if we did, what would be a good first task?

On p. 36, misconceptions about congregational polity are discussed.

- How do we educate our community members on congregational polity instead of assuming that they are informed?
- When does our community make opportunity to discuss this?
- How do we discuss it with those new to our community?

Which of the actions suggested by this chapter seem relevant to our community? What would be the first task? What are the barriers to implementation?

Closing and Next Actions

Invite the group into a closing ritual: Ask volunteers to read aloud the Take-Aways at the end of the Governance chapter. You may extinguish the chalice while participants read.

Remind the group that both study and action are the purposes of this group. Offer a quick check-out. Ask the following questions and invite each participant to take a moment to reflect and then to respond in one sentence to any of these:

- What is one idea you want to continue to think about before our next discussion?
- What are the short-term actions that we should consider or take to translate this discussion into action?
- What are the longer scope actions?
- What is an element that makes the hard work meaningful and worthwhile for this group?



Widening the Circle of Concern

Session 3: Congregations and Communities



Goals

- Examine congregational and community-based practices through the lens of the COIC report and findings.
- Apply the COIC recommendations to the context of your community.

Materials

Chalice and something with which to light it

A copy of *Widening the Circle of Concern: Report of the UUA Commission on Institutional Change* (2020)

The text of the covenant guidelines to which the group has agreed, on newsprint if in person or accessible as electronic text to share if online

Newsprint and markers (if in-person) or a computer to record discussion contributions

Preparation

Read the Congregations and Communities chapter.

Identify a recorder for this session.

Prepare a chalice and something with which to light it.

Post the group covenant. (If in person, post newsprint; if online, plan to “share screen” and/or post the covenant guidelines or a link to them in the chat.)

Chalice Lighting

Light the chalice as you share these words from “Work in Commitment and Love” by Viola Abbitt, from the UUA WorshipWeb:

As we light this chalice [this evening], may it serve to give us clarity of purpose and illumine our way as we set about doing the work of this congregation, in commitment, in cooperation, and in love.

Discussion

Take a moment to review the group's covenant. Ask the group if anything should be added or amended. If there is consensus, add or amend the covenant and save the changes.

Make sure a recorder from the group is ready to document discussion.

Lead a discussion of these questions:

- The shaded box on p. 47, Recommended Congregational Practices to Increase Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion, details six actions that can be taken by congregations. Discuss which of these you are already engaged in and which of these you might like to add..
- An important part of this chapter (shaded box pp. 40-41 and pp. 48-49) is understanding congregational polity and the covenantal understanding of each congregation's relationship with the UUA and other congregations.
 - Discuss how you understand these relationships.
 - How well do you think they are understood in the broader congregation?
 - What actions can you take to build shared understanding?
- There is a case study of a congregational audit on pp. 52-53.
 - Is this something your congregation should consider?
 - What might be barriers to implementing this?
- There is a case study of a congregation that intentionally focused on welcoming a younger and more diverse leadership team on p. 45. Read the excerpts from their identity documents and reflect on your own.
 - In what ways are they similar and what ways are they different?
 - When was your congregational covenant last renewed?
- Which of the suggested actions related to this chapter seem relevant to our community?
 - What would be the first task?
 - What are the barriers to implementation?

Closing and Next Actions

Invite the group into a closing ritual: Ask volunteers to read aloud the Take-Aways at the end of the Congregations and Communities chapter. You may extinguish the chalice while participants read.

Remind the group that both study and action are the purposes of this group. Offer a quick check-out. Ask the following questions and invite each participant to take a moment to reflect and then to respond in one sentence, uninterrupted, to any of these:

- What is one idea you want to continue to think about before our next discussion?

- What are the short-term actions that we should consider or take to translate this discussion into action?
- What are the longer scope actions?
- What is an element that makes the hard work meaningful and worthwhile for this group?



Widening the Circle of Concern

Session 4: Hospitality and Inclusion

Goals

- Consider hospitable and inclusive practices through the lens of the COIC report and findings.
- Apply the findings to the context of your community.

Materials

Chalice and something with which to light it

A copy of *Widening the Circle of Concern: Report of the UUA Commission on Institutional Change (2020)*

The text of the covenant guidelines to which the group has agreed, on newsprint if in person or accessible as electronic text to share if online

Newsprint and markers (if in-person) or a computer to record discussion contributions

Preparation

Read the Hospitality and Inclusion chapter.

Identify a recorder for this session.

Prepare a chalice and something with which to light it.

Post the group covenant. (If in person, post newsprint; if online, plan to “share screen” and/or post the covenant guidelines or a link to them in the chat.)

Chalice Lighting

Share these words by Ibram X. Kendi, from his book *How to Be an Antiracist*.

The opposite of racist isn't 'not racist.' It is 'anti-racist.' ... One either allows racial inequities to persevere, as a racist, or confronts racial inequities, as an anti-racist. There is no in-between safe space of 'not racist.'

Light the chalice.

Discussion

Take a moment to review the group's covenant. Ask the group if anything should be added or amended. If there is consensus, add or amend the covenant and save the changes. Make sure a recorder from the group is ready to document discussion.

Ask the group:

- Who is responsible for greeting and welcoming in our congregation?
- What kind of education or dialogue is held with them?"

Now invite the group to imagine a first encounter with the congregation, either physically or virtually. What might people notice or experience? Collect impressions from the group. Ask:

- Based on this, who would feel most welcomed? Why?
- Who might question their welcome? Why?"

Next, form two- or three-person small groups and invite them to undertake a mini-audit of how your congregation presents itself to newcomers and visitors. Ask each group to appoint a note-taker. Instruct groups to examine the congregation's newsletter, website, and recent sermons:

- Look for words like "we," "everyone," "our" and consider both who is meant and how a reader might understand who is meant. Who is the "we"?
- Look for words like "others" and phrases like "surrounding community" that make a distinction between this faith community and someone else. Who is the someone else?
- Beyond noticing words and phrases, give careful thought to their meanings and messages.

Bring the groups back together. Invite each group to report one observation that struck them.

Now lead a discussion on these questions:

- What can we say now about how language can intentionally or unintentionally include or exclude?
- What harm can happen because of it?
- How hard was it to look at our congregation in this new way?
- What would it take for this new mindfulness to become the intentional practice of our community?

Together, answer these questions:

- In the congregation, how do people learn about affinity group opportunities for BIPOC across the broader Unitarian Universalist movement, such as Black Lives of Unitarian Universalism (BLUU) and Diverse and Revolutionary UU Multicultural Ministries (DRUUMM)?
- Is there a congregational or local UU cluster BIPOC affinity group? If so, how do people of color in the community learn of its existence?

Closing and Next Actions

Invite the group into a closing ritual: Ask volunteers to read aloud the Take-Aways at the end of the Hospitality and Inclusion chapter. You may extinguish the chalice while participants read.

Remind the group that both study and action are the purposes of this group. Offer a quick check-out. Ask the following questions and invite each participant to take a moment to reflect and then to respond in one sentence, uninterrupted, to any of these:

- What is one idea you want to continue to think about before our next discussion?
- What are the short-term actions that we should consider or take to translate this discussion into action?
- What are the longer scope actions?
- What is an element that makes the hard work meaningful and worthwhile for this group?



Widening the Circle of Concern

Session 5: Living Our Values in the World



Goals

- Examine what it means to live out our values, through the lens of the COIC report and findings.
- Apply the report's findings to the context of your community/congregation and also within the larger geographic communities you serve.

Materials

Chalice and something with which to light it

A copy of *Widening the Circle of Concern: Report of the UUA Commission on Institutional Change* (2020)

The text of the covenant guidelines to which the group has agreed, on newsprint if in person or accessible as electronic text to share if online

Newsprint and markers (if in-person) or a computer to record discussion contributions

Preparation

Read the Living Our Values in the World chapter.

Identify a recorder for this session.

Prepare a chalice and something with which to light it.

Post the group covenant. (If in person, post newsprint; if online, plan to “share screen” and/or post the covenant guidelines or a link to them in the chat.)

Chalice Lighting

Share these words, from “The Missing Remnant” by Rev. Sofia Betancourt:

The good news is that we are in control of what we do with our daily living period. If we, each one of us, represent a missing remnant in the fabric of our collective future—then together we can lean into a possibility that we have yet to fully experience in human

history. A collective wholeness. An unassailable good. That is the kind of salvation I am here to fight for in the small moments of every single day.

Now share these words, from DeRay Mckesson in *On the Other Side of Freedom*:

Protest is telling the truth in public. Sometimes protest is telling the truth to a public that isn't quite ready to hear it. Protest is, in its own way, a storytelling. We use our bodies, our words, our art, and our sounds both to tell the truth about the pain that we endure and to demand the justice that we know is possible. It is meant to build and to force a response.

Light the chalice.

Discussion

Take a moment to review the group's covenant. Ask the group if anything should be added or amended. If there is consensus, add or amend the covenant and save the changes.

Make sure a recorder from the group is ready to document discussion.

Invite the group to consider: What is the difference between a charitable approach to social action and a justice orientation? Ask the recorder to note responses in two columns titled "charity" and "solidarity."

Discuss these questions:

- How does this congregation/community go about learning about the experiences of those we seek to serve in our justice work?
- How does our congregation follow the lead of those most affected?
- Who are the Black, Indigenous, and people of color whose lead we follow, and on what issues? On what other issues might our congregation seek to follow them?
- To what organizations led by Black, Indigenous or other people of color is our community accountable?
 - Who are we in relationship with?
 - If we have no accountable relationships or no relationships at all, what can we learn from that?
 - What are some important lessons from our community's history?
- What are the other groups led by people with marginalized identities to which we can be accountable?
- How do we continue to educate ourselves as a congregation/community about issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion?

Closing and Next Actions

Invite the group into a closing ritual: Ask volunteers to read aloud the Take-Aways at the end of the Living Our Values in the World chapter. You may extinguish the chalice while participants read.

Remind the group that both study and action are the purposes of this group. Offer a quick check-out. Ask the following questions and invite each participant to take a moment to reflect and then to respond in one sentence, uninterrupted, to any of these:

- What is one idea you want to continue to think about before our next discussion?
- What are the short-term actions that we should consider or take to translate this discussion into action?
- What are the longer scope actions?
- What is an element that makes the hard work meaningful and worthwhile for this group?



Widening the Circle of Concern

Session 6: Religious Professionals



Goals

- Discuss relationships with and between religious professionals, through the lens of the COIC report and findings.
- Apply the findings to the context of your community.

Materials

Chalice and something with which to light it

A copy of *Widening the Circle of Concern: Report of the UUA Commission on Institutional Change* (2020)

The text of the covenant guidelines to which the group has agreed, on newsprint if in person or accessible as electronic text to share if online

Newsprint and markers (if in-person) or a computer to record discussion contributions

Preparation

Read the Religious Professionals chapter.

Identify a recorder for this session.

Prepare a chalice and something with which to light it.

Post the group covenant. (If in person, post newsprint; if online, plan to “share screen” and/or post the covenant guidelines or a link to them in the chat.)

Optional: Read the anthology of writings by UU religious professionals of color, *Centering: Navigating Race and Authenticity*, and consider recommending it to the group.

Chalice Lighting

Share these words, from “I Too Am Beautiful” by Kristen Harper, published in *UU World*:

My inner spirit wrote: "I have spent my life watching you, seeing your accomplishments, living the way I think you want me to. I have watched the way you move and the way you talk. I have listened to your story and learned your history. I have sat patiently as you explained your politics, your religion, your philosophy of life. I have walked with you on a journey of faith waiting for my turn to share, to explain, to lead."

Look at me - I am black and you are white, but (and) I too am beautiful.

Look at my face, my hair, my clothes - they may be different but aren't they (they are) worthy of your gaze?

Look at my walk, the way my hips sway to the music in my soul, the way my proud neck tilts to the sun, yes look at me

Look at my darkness, it contains light and love, rebirth and growth

Look at my pain, don't turn away

Look at the way you see me, I am human, I have tears and fears, I have laughter and joy

Look at me and walk with me - I too am beautiful.

Now share this piece, by Leslie Takahashi:

Walk the maze within your heart: guide your steps into its questioning curves.

The labyrinth is a puzzle leading you deeper into your own truths.

Listen in the twists and turns.

Listen in the openness within all searching.

Listen: a wisdom within you calls to a wisdom beyond you and in that dialogue lies peace.

Light the chalice.

Discussion

Take a moment to review the group's covenant. Ask the group if anything should be added or amended. If there is consensus, add or amend the covenant and save the changes.

Make sure a recorder from the group is ready to document discussion.

Share, from p. 87 of the COIC report, "Religious professionals of color are essential to a more equitable, inclusive and diverse Unitarian Universalism." Then, say, "The presence of diverse faces and voices as religious educators in Unitarian Universalist congregations and communities models a commitment to diverse community. Diversity of Unitarian Universalist religious leadership is welcoming and invitational."

Now read this quote from the dedication that William Sinkford a past president of the UUA, wrote for the book, *To Wake, To Rise: Meditations on Justice and Resilience*:

“...to Pauline Warfield Lewis, the religious educator at First Unitarian Church in Cincinnati, Ohio, who welcomed me into Unitarian Universalism in 1960. Mrs. Lewis was the only African American at the initial gathering of the Liberal Religious Educators Director’s Association meeting in 1955. She inspired generations of young people by modeling a commitment to diverse community and to the blessings of pluralism, grounded in concrete and specific love and care for one another.

Now say, “The COIC Report names benefits to Unitarian Universalism and our faith communities of a healthy representation of people of color in religious professional roles. However, the report also names difficulties religious professionals of color face in establishing and maintaining careers in our faith.”

Read this quote from p. 87 of the report:

“In order to ensure inclusivity, equity, and diversity within the body of religious professionals, we need to take specific steps to ensure the quality of livelihood for religious professionals who are Black people, Indigenous people, people of color, and other ministers (religious professionals) from oppressed groups. It is not consistent with our values to harm, abuse, or damage the health and well-being of our employees.”

Together, process these questions:

- Do any religious professionals of color serve your community, in capacities such as minister, religious educator, musician, membership professional, or administrator? How do you know an individual holds an identity of color?
- If you do, have the bodies that supervise them (e.g., board, committees on ministry or personnel) read this chapter?
- What groups or individual leaders in your congregation have the most influence on the recommended actions outlined in this chapter? How can you encourage them to become engaged?
- How do your congregation’s hiring practices and policies support or not support religious professionals from “marginalized/traditionally under-represented communities/identities”?
- Do you know of policies and practices to minimize micro-aggressions? Trauma? Disrespect? Harm? Abuse?
- Does your congregation or community support or encourage the participation of religious professionals of color in supportive collegial groups? Finding Our Way Home? UU Professional Chapters for Identity Groups?

Closing and Next Actions

Invite the group into a closing ritual: Ask volunteers to read aloud the Take-Aways at the end of the Religious Professionals chapter. You may extinguish the chalice while participants read.

Remind the group that both study and action are the purposes of this group. Offer a quick check-out by asking the following questions, inviting each participant to take a moment to reflect and then to respond in one sentence to any question:

- What is one idea you want to continue to think about before our next discussion?
- What are the short-term actions that we should consider or take to translate this discussion into action?
- What are the longer scope actions?
- What is an element that makes the hard work meaningful and worthwhile for this group?



Widening the Circle of Concern

Session 7: Educating for Liberation



Goals

- Explore lifespan religious education that is liberating, through the lens of the COIC report and findings.
- Apply the findings to the context of your community.

Materials

Chalice and something with which to light it

A copy of *Widening the Circle of Concern: Report of the UUA Commission on Institutional Change* (2020)

The text of the covenant guidelines to which the group has agreed, on newsprint if in person or accessible as electronic text to share if online

Newsprint and markers (if in-person) or a computer to record discussion contributions

Preparation

Read the Educating for Liberation chapter.

Identify a recorder for this session.

Prepare a chalice and something with which to light it.

Post the group covenant. (If in person, post newsprint; if online, plan to “share screen” and/or post the covenant guidelines or a link to them in the chat.)

Chalice Lighting

Light the chalice and offer these words by Rev. Dr. Natalie Maxwell Fenimore:

We seek to be a home for all who desire our company.

We seek to make a welcome for all those in search of our good news.
Come, come, little children, teens, young adults, adults and elders.
Come families in great diversity.
Come to this loving home and safe harbor - but not to find a place to escape the world.
This is a community of engagement – and of creativity.
We come together to create boldly – dangerously.
We must create the Beloved Community with an awareness of how difficult it is –
because it is deep ministry. It is ministry that challenges us to bring our whole selves and
engage deeply and for the long haul.
Our faith, our tradition, must call us into community. Our task is to create spaces where
we might know and value each other.
Let us listen to our stories.

Discussion

Take a moment to review the group's covenant. Ask the group if anything should be added or amended. If there is consensus, add or amend the covenant and save the changes.

Make sure a recorder from the group is ready to document discussion.

Say that the report recommends that faith development in our congregations intentionally align with the concept of “education for liberation.” Unitarian Universalist education for liberation has these foundations:

- A theological or principled mandate for justice, equity and inclusion, the celebration of diversity
- “Power with” rather than “power over”
- Lifelong collaborative learning
- Welcoming and centering the narratives of those thought of as marginal by the majority culture

Ask the group, “What do you think of those foundational assumptions? Affirm? Question? Dispute? Critique?” Allow all who wish to respond to briefly do so.

Now ask, “Understanding that ‘education’ does not only happen in formal religious education programs, but is a component of all aspects of congregational life, how would you say our congregation aligns with education for liberation?” Invite discussion.

Then say, “Narrative and storytelling are central to human learning. The stories we tell, pass on, and teach form our religious identity (along with other identities).” Lead a discussion with these questions:

- Does your community hear, tell, know the stories of Black, Asian, Indigenous, Latinx, LGBTQ Unitarian Universalists?
- What difference does it make to know those stories?
- If you do not know them, how will you get to know them?
- To whom will we be accountable in terms of borrowing or retelling these stories?
- How can we engage respectfully with stories that do not belong to our community?

Refer to the recommendation the report provides at the bottom of p. 97. Say, “The report suggests that congregations obtain and use resources and tools to ensure a variety of entry points into the spiritual work of embracing one’s own identity and the identity of others. Resources on healing religious wounds and productive conflict engagement are also needed as a core part of faith development. This sort of education for liberation could be a source of a dynamic and invigorating set of spiritual practices.”

Lead the group to explore opportunities for the congregation/community to more intentionally embrace education for liberation, using these questions:

- Have you or your community experienced religious wounds and/or non-productive conflicts that “interrupt” engagement with discussions of education for liberation?
- Can you envision and articulate dynamic and invigorating spiritual practices that would be resources for educating for liberation?
- Can you/do you see a need for intentional and perhaps separate spaces for Black/Indigenous/ People of Color to worship, learn and grow in Unitarian Universalist community? Would you/could you support this in your community or congregation?

Note that the report recommends that “a comprehensive path to understanding the work of equity, inclusion, and diversity should be developed and maintained as part of faith development.” (p. 98) Ask the group:

- How would this be implemented in this congregation or community?
- What person or group in the congregation/community is responsible/accountable for developing a plan?
- What person or group is responsible/accountable for maintaining and continuing on the path?

Closing and Next Actions

Invite the group into a closing ritual: Ask volunteers to read aloud the Take-Aways at the end of the Educating for Liberation chapter. You may extinguish the chalice while participants read.

Remind the group that both study and action are the purposes of this group. Offer a quick check-out by asking the following questions, inviting each participant to take a moment to reflect and then to respond in one sentence to any of these:

- What is one idea you want to continue to think about before our next discussion?
- What are the short-term actions that we should consider or take to translate this discussion into action?
- What are the longer scope actions?
- What is an element that makes the hard work meaningful and worthwhile for this group?



Widening the Circle of Concern

Session 8: Innovations and Risk-Taking



Goals

- Discuss innovative practices through the lens of the COIC report and findings.
- Apply the report's findings to the context of your community.

Materials

Chalice and something with which to light it

A copy of *Widening the Circle of Concern: Report of the UUA Commission on Institutional Change* (2020)

The text of the covenant guidelines to which the group has agreed, on newsprint if in person or accessible as electronic text to share if online

Newsprint and markers (if in-person) or a computer to record discussion contributions

Preparation

Read the Innovation and Risk-Taking chapter.

Identify a recorder for this session.

Prepare a chalice and something with which to light it.

Post the group covenant. (If in person, post newsprint; if online, plan to “share screen” and/or post the covenant guidelines or a link to them in the chat.)

Chalice Lighting

Light the chalice.

Share these words of Brittany Packnett Cunningham, from an interview with The Undefeated (theundefeated.com)

I'm not an entertainer. I'm not an athlete. I'm not someone who said, 'I want to be a star.' I really just love my people a lot. And I love black children a lot. And I want to see us live. I want to see us thrive. I want to see us enjoy the kind of life that our ancestors fought for. And that's the way that I was raised. I feel like every time I'm able to access some of

that joy, I try to hold on to it in my personal life. I just want to see us all be able to live lives of full humanity, 'cause that's what we deserve.

Discussion

Take a moment to review the group's covenant. Ask the group if anything should be added or amended. If there is consensus, add or amend the covenant and save the changes.

Make sure a recorder from the group is ready to document discussion.

Say, "The report lays out several demographic and generational changes that are impacting expectations of our congregations and how we can meet those needs." (p. 102)

Then, invite the group to identify how these trends are affecting your congregation or community and to note any responses the congregation has already made to them. If no responses have been made, discuss responses the congregation may wish to make or how the congregation might better understand the expectations of young adults, young families, and BIPOC.

Next, affirm that the congregation, like most faith communities, relies heavily on volunteer time and talent. Say that the recommendation on pp. 106-7 lifts up the need for funding BIPOC leadership so that the experiences of people of color can be meaningfully included in all aspects of our Association. Engage discussion:

- How inclusive is the leadership in your congregation?
- What actions can the congregation can take to remove barriers for those whose leadership is missing?

Note that the actions suggested on p. 107 refer to learning circles as important ways to share innovations that are working within and among our communities. Lead the group to assess:

- Is our congregation connected with any regional or local groups to enhance our learning and to feed our appetite for experimentation?
- Where is there opportunity to support learning circles within our community?

Closing and Next Actions

Invite the group into a closing ritual: Ask volunteers to read aloud the Take-Aways at the end of the Innovations and Risk-Taking chapter. Extinguish the chalice while participants read.

Remind the group that both study and action are the purposes of this group. Offer a quick check-out by asking the following questions, inviting each participant to take a moment to reflect and then to respond in one sentence to any question:

- What is one idea you want to continue to think about before our next discussion?
- What are the short-term actions that we should consider or take to translate this discussion into action?
- What are the longer scope actions?
- What is an element that makes the hard work meaningful and worthwhile for this group?



Widening the Circle of Concern

Session 9: Restoration and Reparations



Goals

- Explore practices that are restorative and that offer reparations, through the lens of the COIC report and findings.
- Apply the findings and recommendations to the context of your community/congregation and also within the larger geographic communities you serve.

Materials

Chalice and something with which to light it

A copy of *Widening the Circle of Concern: Report of the UUA Commission on Institutional Change* (2020)

The text of the covenant guidelines to which the group has agreed, on newsprint if in person or accessible as electronic text to share if online

Newsprint and markers (if in-person) or a computer to record discussion contributions

Preparation

Read the Restoration and Reparations chapter.

Download the [Feelings Wheel](#) from the Gottman Institute website. Share electronically or print copies for all participants.

Identify a recorder for this session.

Prepare a chalice and something with which to light it.

Post the group covenant. (If in person, post newsprint; if online, plan to “share screen” and/or post the covenant guidelines or a link to them in the chat.)

Chalice Lighting

Invite one or two participants who have not spoken in recent discussions to read the chalice-lighting words:

“What is needed is an airing of family secrets, a settling with old ghosts. What is needed is a healing of the American psyche and the banishment of white guilt. What I’m talking

about is more than recompense for past injustices—more than a handout, a payoff, hush money, or a reluctant bribe. What I’m talking about is a national reckoning that would lead to spiritual renewal.” — Ta-Nehisi Coates, “The Case for Reparations”

“We must move away from an idea of personal and individual ‘success’ and toward ecological economics, collective advancement, collective achievement, and collective wealth.” — Diallo Kenyatta, The Bro Diallo Show

Light the chalice.

Discussion

Take a moment to review the group’s covenant. Ask if anything should be added or amended. If there is consensus, add or amend the covenant and save the changes.

Make sure a recorder from the group is ready to document discussion.

State that reparations can be a hard topic and one that causes fear to arise. Invite the participants to check in about how they are feeling as they anticipate this discussion. Referring to the Feelings Wheel, ask people to spend a moment identifying the feeling family most present for them. The four feeling families are MAD, SAD, GLAD (including Peaceful, Powerful, and Joyful), and SCARED. Invite people to share one of the core words.

Discuss the following questions:

- What struck you in reading the chapter that pertains to our community? Which of the recommendations or actions seems most relevant?
- If you were to open a discussion about reparations within our congregation/community, what would you want to explore?
- Where would an ongoing conversation about reparations and restoration be held in the structure of our congregation/community?
- What would be the hardest discussion for us to have? What might be the cost of having it? What is the cost of not having it?
- What positive outcomes might occur if conversations about reparations that aren’t happening now were to be held?
- If our congregation were to open a conversation with our larger community about reparations and restoration, where would you want to start? What would be the next task to continue this conversation?

Closing and Next Actions

Ask people to revisit the Feelings Wheel. Invite them to check in about their most dominant feeling. Acknowledge that discussions of reparations and restoration are difficult and that they evolve in a community over time.

Invite the group into a closing ritual: Ask volunteers to read aloud the Take-Aways at the end of the Restoration and Reparations chapter. You may extinguish the chalice while participants read.

Remind the group that both study and action are the purposes of this group. Offer a quick check-out by asking the following questions, inviting each participant to take a moment to reflect and then to respond in one sentence to any question:

- What is one idea you want to continue to think about before our next discussion?
- What are the short-term actions that we should consider or take to translate this discussion into action?
- What are the longer scope actions?
- What is an element that makes the hard work meaningful and worthwhile for this group?



Widening the Circle of Concern

Session 10: Accountability and Resources

Goals

- Explore accountability to the work and resourcing of antiracist anti-oppressive multicultural practices, through the lens of the COIC report and findings.
- Apply the recommendations to the context of your community.

Materials

Chalice and something with which to light it

A copy of *Widening the Circle of Concern: Report of the UUA Commission on Institutional Change* (2020)

The text of the covenant guidelines to which the group has agreed, on newsprint if in person or accessible as electronic text to share if meeting online

Newsprint and markers (if in-person) or a computer to record discussion contributions

Preparation

Read the Accountability and Resources chapter.

Identify a recorder for this session.

Prepare a chalice and something with which to light it.

Post the group covenant. (If in person, post newsprint; if online, plan to “share screen” and/or post the covenant guidelines or a link to them in the chat.)

Chalice Lighting

Read the words of Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, from the COIC report, p. 129.

Take sackcloth of the darkest dye,
And shroud the pulpits round!
Servants of Him that cannot lie,
Sit mourning on the ground.

Let holy horror blanch each cheek,
Pale every brow with fears;
And rocks and stones, if ye could speak,
Ye well might melt to tears!

Let sorrow breathe in every tone,
In every strain ye raise;
Insult not God's majestic throne
With th' mockery of praise.

A "reverend" man, whose light should be
The guide of age and youth,
Brings to the shrine of Slavery
The sacrifice of truth!

For the direst wrong by man imposed,
Since Sodom's fearful cry,
The word of life has been unclos'd,
To give your God the lie.

Oh! when ye pray for heathen lands,
And plead for their dark shores,
Remember Slavery's cruel hands
Make heathens at your doors!

As you light the chalice, invite the group into a moment of quiet to honor this 19th century abolitionist, Black UU ancestor who went unrecognized for so long.

Discussion

Take a moment to review the group's covenant. Ask the group if anything should be added or amended. If there is consensus, add or amend the covenant and save the changes.

Make sure a recorder from the group is ready to document discussion.

Explain and assign roles for the group to create, between this meeting and the next, a ranked order of priority actions:

- A facilitator or another participant will review the cumulative notes from all of the sessions' discussions and make a list of the possible next actions the group has generated. On the list, this person will identify those actions which have already been taken and send this list to all participants.
- Each person in the group will review the list, select which actions should be top priority, and return their priorities to one person who will compile everyone's priorities to create a ranking, and prepare to share the ranking with the group at the next meeting.

Share, from p. 128: "Many people of color did not wish to share their individual experiences with the Commission because their stories had been told and retold to no avail." Ask the group: What feeling family (mad, sad, glad or scared) is evoked in you when you hear this, and why?

State that this chapter of the report emphasizes that we need accountability measures that are systematic, rather than personal apologies, because systemic change will help prevent harm from reoccurring. Discuss:

- Where do you see opportunities for systemic change (i.e. change built into the policies and practices, norms and customs of official bodies such as boards)?
- How is the commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion stated in the congregation's identity documents such as by-laws, mission statement, and policies?
- Is anti-oppression work part of the regular practices of the congregation?
 - If so, who engages in this work and who does not?
 - Is it a requirement for leadership?

On p. 132, the COIC report calls for “accountable community partnerships.” Lead a discussion using these questions:

- Where are the accountable community partnerships of your community to be found currently; that is, how does your congregation follow the lead of those most affected by economic, political, and other forms of oppression?
 - What practices and actions assure that these partnerships are maintained?
- How does the congregation financially support organizations led by Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC)?
- Has the congregation conducted an anti-oppression audit?
 - If so, when and how? How have its recommendations been implemented?
 - In what additional ways does the congregation report on its progress toward becoming more diverse, equitable, and inclusive?

Closing and Next Actions

Invite the group into a closing ritual: Ask volunteers to read aloud the Take-Aways at the end of the Accountability and Resources chapter. Extinguish the chalice while participants read.

Remind the group that both study and action are the purposes of this group. Offer a quick check-out by asking the following questions, inviting each participant to take a moment to reflect and then to respond in one sentence to any of these:

- What is one idea you want to continue to think about before our next discussion?
- What are the short-term actions that we should consider or take to translate this discussion into action?
- What are the longer scope actions?
- What is one action you can take to demonstrate greater accountability to BIPOC and other marginalized peoples?



Widening the Circle of Concern

Session 11: Where Do We Go from Here?



Goals

- Plan how you will guide the congregation or community forward to implement COIC recommendations.
- Prioritize actions and plan how you will engage others, using insights from previous meetings as to how the findings of the COIC report apply in the context of your community.

Materials

Chalice and something with which to light it

A copy of *Widening the Circle of Concern: Report of the UUA Commission on Institutional Change* (2020)

The text of the covenant guidelines to which the group has agreed, on newsprint if in person or accessible as electronic text to share if meeting online

Newsprint and markers (if in-person) or a computer to record discussion contributions

Preparation

Make sure the individual(s) assigned to gather the group's priority rankings for future actions are ready to present the results.

Identify a recorder for this session.

Set a date/time for a follow-up meeting as this group moves forward into implementing action plans based on the COIC recommendations.

Prepare a chalice and something with which to light it.

Post the group covenant. (If in person, post newsprint; if online, plan to "share screen" and/or post the covenant guidelines or a link to them in the chat.)

Chalice Lighting

Light the chalice.

Invite the group to listen in meditation as you or a volunteer read(s) "[Everybody Else](#)," by Jabari S. Jones (WorshipWeb).

On a spring day in Farmington, Maine, as I was walking downtown, I made my way through a line of cars that were waiting for the light. In front of me was a large Confederate flag flying from the back of a white pick-up. I crossed the street, not looking at who was driving the truck and went into the store. As I went about my business, I felt stunned; my mind stirred with thoughts and feelings, memories, and speculations. I felt fear, and anger, and curiosity; worry, and defiance, and humiliation.

As I stood at the register, I chatted with the older white woman behind the counter. "Hi, how are you today?"

"I'm good, how are you?" she replied. I paused, and then I told her about the truck with the flag.

She said something like, "Oh, yes, we have some of that around here, but don't let it upset you. Don't let it get to you."

I appreciated her gesture, her attempt to comfort me. At the same time, her gesture made me more uncomfortable. She was asking me to respect that person's right to fly that flag and shrug it off like everybody else. What she failed to see, or perhaps ignore in a gesture of "colorblindness" wrapped in the First Amendment, is that I am not like everybody else who walks in the shadow of that flag. I am from "away;" my hair is coarse; my skin is dark brown. I am a black man in Maine. In so many ways, I am not like everybody else around here. But I want to belong here. In so many ways, that flag represents the denial of my rights, my belonging.

It is impossible for me to blend in, to hide my black body, to "not let it get to me." I don't have the privilege of hiding from history. Because I am conscious, I know what it is; I know its name. It rides in the back of a pick-up truck, it proudly stalks around town like an alpha predator. It clings to me like a nightmare, while it seems like everyone else is walking through a dream. I point at the thing and say "Look!," and the crowd replies, "Yes, but..."

When I hear "Yes," I feel heard. When I hear "but," I become invisible; my life doesn't matter. It's this "but—," this disbelief in the truth of black bodies, this tolerance for something that is ugly and intolerant, that is the terror that "everybody else" allows to walk in their midst: a casual terror that I cannot escape any more than I can escape my own body, my own consciousness. A terror that makes all lives matter less. I struggle to wake up from the nightmare, and the dream that is its mirror image. I struggle to make my life matter, for black lives to matter, so that all lives will matter.

Discussion

Take a moment to review the group's covenant. Ask the group if anything should be added or amended. If there is consensus, add or amend the covenant and save the changes.

Make sure a recorder from the group is ready to document discussion.

Say:

The preface of the report states, “If [this report] is received as nothing more than a document, that will be a travesty and fresh source of injury to all who participated in offering and compiling the wisdom found here.”

Refer participants to the ranked priority list of next actions that was generated from their votes. (If online, a co-facilitator or the person who compiled the ranked list may share their screen.)

Ask the following questions:

- How are we generating an on-going discussion of theology?
- How can we audit our practices and governance structures? Who will be accountable for doing this?
- What are our welcoming and hospitality practices? How do we intentionally educate those who are the front-face of our community to embrace all who seek sanctuary among us?
- Where do we need to continue to learn? What are the means for further study and who is accountable for doing this?
- Where could a discussion of reparations occur within our community? Who will be responsible for holding this container?
- What body will monitor our progress and how will it be reported to our membership?

Closing and Next Actions

Offer these words from p.137 of the COIC report:

Our basic premise is that we can live into the full participation of those who have been most marginalized among us, we can create a responsive, vibrant Unitarian Universalism. A Unitarian Universalist faith marked by full equity and participation will continue to play a vital role in transforming lives and communities.

Then, say:

Now that we better understand the findings and recommendations of the Commission on Institutional Change, we have the opportunity to dig deep into our faithful practice of Unitarian Universalism by helping to transform our community and the lives of its members. Now the work of implementation begins. We will meet again on [pre-scheduled meeting date and time] to choose a few of the recommendations to set as goals to act on in this year and to plan how we will accomplish that.

Offer participants these matters to consider before the next meeting:

- In acting upon the recommendations, this group should recruit multigenerational involvement and share the workload across many groups within the congregation or community.
- There are many free and low-cost project management apps, such as Monday and Trello, that can help the group track each project and promote accountability.
- In addition to helping to create a more welcoming and equitable Unitarian Universalism, doing this work can be joyful and spiritually fulfilling. It can create new

friendships and strengthen existing bonds between groups and individuals. Blessings on this journey!

Close with words by Rev. Dr. Monica Cummings or words by Rev. William Sinkford, and extinguish the chalice.

Let It Be Done by Monica Cummings

Dear Unknown, Unknowable, Yet Known by Many Names

Keep us mindful that we are all related. That when one of us is ignored and treated with dis-ease, we all suffer. Today let each of us commit to welcome the stranger. Let us move beyond our comfort zones and connect with people labeled different and pushed to the edges of society. We can make a difference. We can transform lives. We can bring harmony and healing to the places and spaces where we live, work, and play. Let us keep our hearts and minds open and receptive to the still, small voice that calls us to stand witness for those who cannot stand, to speak the truth for justice for those without a voice, and to lead the way on the journey toward wholeness for those without sight. In the spirit of love, compassion, and community, let it be done. Blessed Be.

Only Begun by Bill Sinkford

Spirit of Life and Love, dear God of all nations:

There is so much work to do. We have only begun to imagine justice and mercy. Help us to hold fast to our vision of what can be. May we see the hope in our history, and find the courage and the voice to work for that constant rebirth of freedom and justice. That is our dream. Amen.

