

THE WIDENING THE CIRCLE OF CONCERN TASK FORCE OF THE UUCB BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Purpose

The goals of The Widening the Circle of Concern Task Force of the UUCB Board of Trustees are

- to read and analyze Widening the Circle of Concern, a report created by UUA's Commission on Institutional Change and presented at the 2020 UUA General Assembly¹
- and, based on our analyses, to make specific recommendations to the Board and congregation that align with the Commission's charge to support "long-term cultural and institutional change that redeems the essential promise and ideals of Unitarian Universalism."²
- and, as we keep ourselves accountable to the Commission's urging that anti-oppression work is a theological mandate, it is also our duty to keep our Unitarian Universalist Association accountable. We are in a reciprocal relationship.

Background to the Report

In a three month period—from March through June of 2017, a cascade of events thundered through UUA, shaking up the leadership structure, galvanizing UU congregants, religious educators and ministers who, in their outrage, called out white supremacy and racism, and called for significant changes. Good trouble had once again come to Unitarian Universalism.

The following history has been compiled by Elizabeth Mount and Melissa Rosales:

The announcement of a new hire—a white man—in the Southern Region led to conversations at Finding Our Way Home, a conference of people of color who were

¹ <https://www.uua.org/ga/off-site/2020/business/general-session-3> and <https://www.uua.org/uuagovernance/committees/cic/widening/trends>

² York, J., McDonald, C., Johnson J. M., "Commission on Institutional Change's final report is a critical waypoint, not the end of the journey." UU World, Fall, 2020, Vol. XXXIV, No. 3, p. 55.

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religious professionals in Unitarian Universalism. The prevailing hiring practices for leadership level positions were questioned, as were UUA's repeated decisions to hire white people over people of color. UUA president Peter Morales subsequently put out a statement regarding the controversy, hoping to settle things down. Instead his words inflamed the issue and highlighted the ways in which the UUA had historically dismissed people's calling out racism and sexism in the UUA. Religious educators (LREDA) spoke to the hurt they experienced over longstanding issues around power differentials and perceptions of professionalism between religious educators and ministers.

Black Lives of UU (BLUU) and Diverse and Revolutionary UU Multicultural Ministries (DRUUMM), along with other groups and white UUs, including Allies for Racial Equity (ARE), joined together in solidarity to call for investigation and change.

Amid the controversy, Peter Morales resigned.³

In a letter to the UUA Board, Unitarian Universalist Minister Association (UUMA) Executive Director Rev. Don Southworth expressed disagreement regarding funding for BLUU and made a series of statements which hurt and angered many. ARE wrote a strong response, condemning his remarks.

“...we are compelled to challenge the white supremacy woven throughout Rev. Southworth's Easter letter to the UUA Board...”⁴

At their meeting in Spring, 2017, the UUA Board took up issues related to oppression and white supremacy. Over the next six weeks, White Supremacy Teach-ins took place in over 650 congregations (including at UUCB).

UUA Moderator Jim Key resigned, citing health concerns, and passed away about two weeks later. Rev. Southworth also resigned.

Interim UUA co-presidents, Rev. Sofia Betancourt, Rev. William Sinkford and Dr. Lean Spencer, released a statement that large severance payments had been made

³ <https://www.uuworld.org/articles/peter-morales-resigns>

⁴ <https://www.facebook.com/notes/allies-for-racial-equity/on-the-actions-of-uuma-executive-director-don-southworth/1707287709287470/>

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to staff who had resigned. Subsequently, UUA formed the Commission on Institutional Change. Its charge was to investigate white supremacy in UU spaces and to establish a truth and reconciliation process. After three years of interviews, surveys, focus groups and submitted testimony with over 1000 UU participants, the Commission compiled the data into the document, Widening the Circle of Concern.⁵

Results and recommendations are made in ten areas—theology, governance; congregations and communities; hospitality and inclusion; living our values in the world; religious professionals; educating for liberation; innovations and risk taking; restoration and reparations; accountability and resources. The following are some interesting comments about the report, made at the 2020 GA—the entire presentation can be found by clicking on the link below.⁶

The interpretation of our theological legacies in these times should commit to affirming and welcoming those who have been marginalized in our larger society and within our communities and organizations. Acknowledgment of anti oppression work as a theological mandate is essential. We need to resurrect, research, document, and teach the words of Black people, Indigenous people, people of color, LGBTQI individuals, women, and others who have been largely lost throughout history. These constitute a valuable tool for our times.

Amidst this pandemic and rebellion, we face a historic crisis that will be a test of our systems, structures, and communities. Radically addressing these issues head on will position us to respond to the social changes ahead, and more important than the survival of our denomination, our legacy as a faith tradition, as well as the integrity of our members will be judged by history against how we responded to this moment.

Congregations that choose to engage to increase equity, inclusion, and diversity are leading the way into the future.

While the majority of recommendations and action items listed in the report pertain to the national organization, the report contains many ideas and items

⁵ <https://www.uua.org/book/export/html/43821>

⁶ <https://www.uua.org/ga/off-site/2020/business/general-session-3>

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which are applicable to individual congregations. UUA has urged all congregations to read, process and consider implementation of the report's suggested actions. This work is crucial for our congregation to do.

**UUCB's Widening the Circle of Concern Task Force
Progress to Date**

The Task Force, whose members represent a variety of UUCB programs,⁷ is composed of Rev. Michelle Collins, Suzette Anderson-Duggan, Susan Blair, Victoria Bowen (co-facilitator), Lynne Henderson, Albert Kueffner, Elaine Miller, Lonnie Moseley, Melissa Rosales, Cordell Sloan, and Helen Tinsley-Jones (co-facilitator).

Our Zoom meetings are held on Tuesdays, 7-9 pm, at two to three week intervals. To date, we've met five times. The next meeting is on 10/13.

Our process is to read through the report, chapter by chapter, with each member choosing salient passages and ideas, which we then discuss. Notes are taken, summaries made, with particular emphasis on capturing important themes and offering specific recommendations, which are entered into a google doc. We will make periodic reports to the Board and to the congregation. On completion of our processing and analysis of the report, we will prepare a written summary of findings and recommendations for action plans for UUCB. This will be presented to the Board and the congregation.

The Task Force is not open to new members. We contracted at the first meeting to be covenantal, to maintain confidentiality as we develop trust and go deeply into this challenging work. The Task Force, however, welcomes and encourages comments and questions from the congregation. Please contact

Victoria Bowen, victoriabowen903@gmail.com or 510-525-7773 and
Helen Tinsley-Jones, htinsleyjones@yahoo.com or 510-334-1633.

⁷ Interim Ministry, Board of Trustees, SCJ, Choir, Humanists, LFDC, POCC, WOWS, Anti-Racism Task Force, Membership, Family Ministry, Chalice Circle Leadership Team, Nominating Committee, Program Council, UUCB Moves, Adult Education, Communications Team, Fellowship Database Team, Worship Associates, Transition Team, and Honoring Indigenous Peoples Group