
II. Beyond Categorical Thinking

UUA Equal Opportunity policy

Fair participation by everyone in social and economic life has been a cherished Unitarian Universalists vision for centuries. Prophetic leaders of both denominations were among the foremost advocates of abolition, women's suffrage, civil rights, and prison, hospital, and labor reform. Today we lead in welcoming of gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transgendered persons into our membership and ministry. We can take pride and inspiration from this heritage.

At all times, however, Unitarian Universalists have practiced the very evils we sought to reform. We are not immune from prejudice and bigotry. Self-interest, fear, and ignorance may lead us to shun the "other" who is different or seems threatening. Sometimes it is hardest to act on our principles when our own congregations, not "society," will be affected.

In 1989, the UUA General Assembly adopted a resolution making Equal Opportunity in ministerial settlement the policy of the UUA. In that resolution, the GA supported the Department of Ministry's policy of sending lists meeting Equal Opportunity criteria. At the same time, the GA urged member congregations to accept assistance from the UUA in achieving Equal Opportunity in ministerial selection. The goal is not to wipe away prejudice by passing a resolution; it is to call on everyone concerned with ministerial settlement to be fair *in spite* of prejudice.

The UUA Board of Trustees implemented the GA's intent by creating a program called "Beyond Categorical Thinking." BCT is a program of the UUA Department of Faith in Action that helps congregations confront prejudice before it limits their ministerial search. It encourages congregations to trust that they, too, can break old barriers and stereotypes. All congregations, whether or not they think they have a "problem," are encouraged to avail themselves of this important service of the UUA.

The UUA Board also asked that search committees include, on the congregational survey, a question similar to this one:

The bylaws of our association of congregations say: "The association declares and affirms its special responsibility, and that of its member societies and organizations, to promote the full participation of persons in all of its and their activities and in the full range of human endeavor without regard to race, color, disability, sex, affectional or sexual orientation, age or national origin... (C-2.3)"

Do you believe that your congregation can affirm this principle in its search process? If not, please elaborate.

If these results, or other signs, suggest that your search may be discriminatory, you will be encouraged to schedule a BCT program.

The "Beyond Categorical Thinking" Weekend Program

The "Beyond Categorical Thinking" weekend program designed to promote inclusive thinking and to help prevent unfair discrimination in the ministerial search process. It is one of several efforts that the UUA is making as part of our institutional intentional effort to attract, affirm, and serve a diverse membership.

Because the ministerial search is a refined selection process and involves a certain amount of discrimination, search committees and congregations should be aware of the ways in which they may inadvertently make discriminations that are unnecessary and unjust.

These discriminations are those made on the basis of a minister's age, physical ability, race, gender, or sexual orientation. These aspects of a minister's identity are not indicators of a minister's skill, leadership style, or probability of a good match with a congregation. Therefore it is important that congregations entering the search process understand the risks of discrimination so that they may select the best minister they can, and make such a selection congruent with our corporate commitment to non-discrimination and inclusiveness.

The weekend includes a Sunday morning worship service and a three-hour workshop. The workshop is designed to help participants examine their own ableism, ageism, heterosexism, racism, and sexism.

Visits are made by teams of two trained Beyond Categorical Thinking leaders who themselves represent some of the diversity we advocate. These individuals (ministers, seminary students, lay persons, and UUA staff) have examined their own fears and prejudices about racism, sexism, heterosexism, and ableism. They have learned effective methods to address these fears in themselves and in our Unitarian Universalist congregations, and are committed to increasing the diversity of our movement.

Travel costs for the team are paid by the UUA; we ask that each congregation contribute \$250 towards the honoraria paid to team members.

The approach that Beyond Categorical Thinking seeks to explore is the healing of oppressive dynamics that divide us and prevent us from sharing our real gifts with each other.

Some Questions and Answers About the Program

When is the best time for a visit?

Ideally, visits should be scheduled between the time of the congregational survey being completed and before pre-candidating visits begin.

How are visits scheduled?

Visits should be requested from the UUA's Transitions Office with at least six weeks lead time. It helps if the congregation can offer three possible dates, avoiding holiday and/or vacation weekends. Dates chosen should be ones on which the entire Search Committee will be available.

When will we know the date of the visit?

Scheduling a visit generally requires that the program's administrator contact several people to find a team available for one of the proposed dates. This can take 10 to 14 days. After the team is selected, you will be notified both by phone and in writing of the date and team members.

Who should attend?

Our expectation is that the entire Search Committee will attend both the workshop and the worship service. Members of the governing board and committee chairs are urged to attend, and an invitation should be extended to the entire congregation.

What about the worship service?

The team will provide the sermon, and choose both the hymns and reading(s). The congregation is responsible for the welcome, announcements, chalice lighting, candles of joy and concern, offertory, and all choral and instrumental music for the service. Details of the service will be arranged between the team contact person and the Search Committee coordinator.

When should the workshop be held?

Most congregations choose to have both the workshop and the worship service on Sunday. They generally schedule lunch shortly after the service, and then move right into the workshop. Some congregations choose to have the workshop on Saturday afternoon or early evening, and may offer congregants the opportunity for a brief discussion period with the team after the Sunday morning worship service.

What are the congregation's obligations?

Send a sample order of service to the Team Contact Person.

- Provide lunch for the team if workshop is held on Sunday.
- Supply newsprint, easel, markers, pencils and/or pens for the workshop.
- Publicize the program through congregation newsletter, announcements, etc.
- Mail a check for \$250, payable to the UUA, with the Visit Request form.

More information and an application for a visit are available at
<http://www.uua.org/leaders/leadership/transitions/bct/index.shtml>