**fdo-webinar-black-lives-of-unitarian-universalism-january-2017.mp4**

SUSAN LAWRENCE: Hi, everybody. I'm Susan Lawrence with the UUA's Faith Development office. And we have today our monthly webinar. And we're going to talk to the Black Lives of Unitarian Universalism organizing collaborative. Collective? Collective! On the screen with me is Kareem Watson, who is also in the Faith Development office. And we coordinate and present monthly webinars.

And I'm going to introduce and turn you over to our presenters today. We have Kenny Wiley, who is with the BLUU organizing collective. And Takiyah Nur Amin, who is also with the collective. And Kenny is a senior writer with UU World, and he's also a DRE. Takiyah, I don't have your extra creds, so please feel free to share them. And I think we'll turn it over to Takiyah for an opening reading.

TAKIYAH NUR AMIN: Wonderful. Thank you so much. I'm actually going to be doing the opening words as an invocation that I found online from Kristen Harper. But before I get there, I will say that in addition to being a member of the BLUU organizing collective, which I've been a part of not even a full year yet-- I became a member of the team last year after General Assembly. But in addition to the work that I do with BLUU, I'm actually a professor here at the University of North Carolina in Charlotte. I'm a former RE assistant, been on adult RE committees, and an alum of the Multicultural Leadership School. So I'm happy to be here.

For our opening words, I would just ask everyone to get comfortable wherever you are. Take a nice, deep breath. "I do not wish to breathe another breath if it is not shared with others. The breath of life is not mine alone. I brought myself to be with you, hoping that by inhaling the compassion, the courage, the hope found here, I can exhale the fear, the selfishness, the separateness, I keep so close to my skin. I cannot live another moment, at least not one of joy, unless you and I find our oneness somewhere among each other, somewhere between the noise, somewhere within the silence of the next breath." [INAUDIBLE]

SUSAN LAWRENCE: All right.

KENNY WILEY: [INAUDIBLE]

I think from there, we're going to go into a little bit of an explanation about Black Lives of Unitarian Universalism. I know that some folks who are at the webinar or watching this recording might not be familiar with what BLUU is at all. The Black Lives of Unitarian Universalism developed after the July of 2015 Movement for Black Lives convening in Cleveland, Ohio and deciding to come together to work collectively to provide support, information, and resources for black UUs and to work together to expand the role and visibility of black UUs within our faith community.

I was not in attendance at those early conversations, but Kenny, can you shed a little light on the early development around BLUU?

KENNY WILEY: Yeah, definitely. So I was-- there's a core team of leadership, which I know to Takiyah will say a little bit more about, but it sprouted like a lot of resistance has always, which is to say in terms of connection and people who knew each other, and so the original leadership team, we had three people who were at the Movement for Black Lives convening in Cleveland. And I think what's most important about it is that it's a group of black folks who are deeply in Unitarian Universalism and do so in very different ways.

And I think, without getting too far ahead of the presentation, the other big thing about the leadership is that it's folks who are very involved in the movement for Black Lives more broadly and in different ways. So you have Takiyah who is an academic and has been, as she said, on every committee. You have me as a religious educator and writer. You have Leslie Mac, who is the activist, you might say, along with when Lena Gardner, who is as well. And Reverend Carlton Smith was huge in the-- and then you had Elandria Williams, who was on the UUA board. So it's a group of folks who don't do things the same way but come together for a similar vision, and that is to center black lives within our faith.

TAKIYAH NUR AMIN: I think it's important, too, for people to understand that we are an organizing collective, which means we are a group of working folks who are volunteering our time to do the work of BLUU and that the work that we've done so far has really been in response to the needs of black Unitarian Universalists as they've been communicated to us. The things that we've done, the things that we plan to do, which we'll talk about a little bit in this presentation are things that haven't just been sort of from the brains of the organizing collective. It's been from the conversations we've had with black Unitarian Universalists in our own congregations, conversations we've had online in our digital spaces, conversations that we've had at General Assembly. And then we come back together as an organizing collective and try our very best to honestly reflect those conversations and then meet the needs of fellow black folks in this faith community.

KENNY WILEY: Yeah. Yeah, and I would just add really briefly about connection. About I mean, we all know the demographics, and a lot of us are isolated, even if we're in a racially diverse city, maybe our congregation you know has six black members, eight, two. I don't know. It depends. And this is a way for us-- not just the leadership, but also anyone who is involved in Black Lives of UU more broadly-- to feel a part of a bigger congregation, a bigger community. And it's been really huge.

TAKIYAH NUR AMIN: That's been a really strong point, because we've heard from so many black UUs around this issue of isolation, particularly UUs that have families where they might be the only black family in their entire congregation, and so that also speaks to concerns that they have about religious education and identity development in our faith, which I'm sure we'll talk about a little bit during the Q&A.

Want to talk about some of the highlights to date, in terms of things that BLUU organizing collective has done. One of the first visible acts that the Black Lives of UU organizing collective really put out into the public was crafting the seven principles of black lives. These principles really guide the work, and they're sort of the guiding ethos of what BLUU endeavors to do. And we find that those principles speak very deeply to the principles that we affirm and covenant to uplift and uphold as Unitarian Universalists. So these seven principles are not a replacement for, but they are in addition to the principles or guiding ideals that shape our faith and allow us, as black Unitarian Universalists, to be living more deeply into our faith through the work that we're doing with BLUU.

We hosted an explicitly black healing space at General Assembly last year.

KENNY WILEY: Oh, did we.

TAKIYAH NUR AMIN: Kenny, can you talk a little bit about that? About t It was a life changing opportunity.

KENNY WILEY: Yeah, so in Ohio we cultivated a space. It was a room kind of tucked away. But it was more than just a room. And it was a place where black folks could go to be. And that room is where Takiyah and I first got to talk. And you know, it was this sort of-- imagine a cookout in a conference room. I mean, it was very sterile in terms of the aesthetics, and yet just that feel of-- it was like I was sitting in a lawn chair just talking.

And what I was really amazed by was the level of theological discussion. Sometimes it was just shooting the breeze, and other times-- I think there's sometimes a stereotype, and maybe understandably as the trash by, of all black UUs or black Christians who left or whatever, and what I found in that space was there's something I think we all intellectually know, but you could feel it-- black atheists and agnostics and black UU Christians and black UU Buddhists just coming together to really have a space. And the other thing I would add about that space is it was a place to breathe, and that a lot of times I think black folks' in our faith are isolated, and then other times maybe simultaneously we're super visible or hyper-visible, which is to say that we show up and people are super-pumped, maybe like overly pumped, and we're put on the spot.

And the explicitly black space was a place to just be one of several. And you could talk a lot. You could talk not at all. You could just listen. You could sing. And so I think folks found that it was incredibly, incredibly moving.

TAKIYAH NUR AMIN: You know, one of the things that I would also say about that explicitly black healing space is I remember going to my first GA several years ago when it was hosted in Utah.

KENNY WILEY: I was at that one too.

TAKIYAH NUR AMIN: That was a good one.

KENNY WILEY: Yeah, it was.

TAKIYAH NUR AMIN: I was a delegate for my congregation. It was my first time there. I loved seeing the depth and breadth of my faith community. But the overwhelming whiteness of GA is a real thing. It is a real experience that a lot of black UUs have talked about and shared about. So that explicitly black healing space was important, not because people don't want to participate in GA, but you need a space where you don't feel on display or your kind of minoritized presence is kind of raining down on you in particular kinds of ways. So it was wonderful to have that explicitly black healing space.

BLUU facilitated the registration and attendance of black UUs from across the country. And that's important to note, because a lot of those black folks told us that they would love to participate more broadly in our faith and in General Assembly, but financially that was not a feasible reality for them. And so BLUU did the work to ensure that black folks could be there. And I have to say, having gone to GA in the past, that last year might've been some of the largest black presence we've seen at a General Assembly in a really long time. And a lot of that owes to BLUU's work.

We also hosted a BLUU workshop track at General Assembly last year, which was really exciting. I was especially pleased with the workshop that we did around anti-blackness. One of the highlights of the BLUU workshops was we would so often be in a space talking [AUDIO OUT] UUs. And at the same time, we had concurrent spaces going where other people of color were in workshop dialogue, as well as white allies in workshop dialogue. We also facilitated a worship service at GA last year as well. [AUDIO OUT]

KENNY WILEY: You cut out just a bit. Did you say about the worship service?

TAKIYAH NUR AMIN: Could you talk a little bit about the worship service?

KENNY WILEY: The closing worship? Yeah, well, let's see. Other than perhaps the best rendition of "I Need You to Survive" in the history of all time by Glen Thomas Rideout, it sort of sprouted from the previous General Assembly in 2015 in Portland, and sort of ending with that energy around when we had a protest outside the conference center in Oregon. And I give a lot of credit to the UUA staff for saying, let's end GA on a really positive note around Black Lives Matter, and so this was a service that Leslie Mac and Elandria spoke in and planned with what Carlton and Lena, helping out with the backstage planning. And it was really amazing to me to be a part of something that felt both really Unitarian Universalist and really black. And to feel that simultaneously and then to be able to share that with black UUss from around the country, but also with our faith siblings of other races as well, was just a really cool experience. And that mattered a lot to me and to a lot of people. And I guess I only wish that more of General Assembly had gotten to experience, because, of course, by Sunday afternoon a lot of folks have gone home or are on the way home. But it was amazing.

TAKIYAH NUR AMIN: Yeah, and I don't want to point that you made there, Kenny, to get lost. One of the things that we've heard from black UUs across the country in the work that we've been doing with BLUU is these people are very aware that Unitarian Universalism is their faith identity. For some, it is their chosen faith identity. But one of the challenges that a lot of black UUs talk about is not having worship experiences that are culturally relevant or that are affirming, in terms of their own kind of cultural values and aesthetics, as black people-- that's people of African descent in the world.

And so we really strive to create things that sit at the intersection of black identity in all of its diversity and shades and experiences, as well as at the intersection of who we are as a faith community. For us, the work of BLUU is about living more fully in our faith as black folks who are Unitarian Universalists, because for us, those aren't separate things. It's not are you black first, or are you Unitarian Universalist first? For us, that's a shared and concurrent reality that we share with black UUs all across the country.

KENNY WILEY: Yeah. Yeah, and what I will long hold from that worship experience is that feeling of-- so often, I'll go to black Christian church with my extended family, and the music will just make me feel so alive and so full. And then the sermon will start. I'm like, oh right, this isn't my theology. I'm not this, as much as I culturally I identify with it. And so to then hear Leslie Mac's sermon, to then hear from a Elandria Williams, who's been going to General Assembly since the '90s, it was like, yes, this is fully something that's mine, including that faith component.

TAKIYAH NUR AMIN: Continuing through the highlights, we made it a point to endorse the vision for Black Lives policy platform and release a statement about it early on in the development of Black Lives Matter and the larger movement for Black Lives. There was often a critique outside of those communities that folks concerned with the intersection of Black Lives and our relationship to policy or our relationship to the state-- that policy demands or our policy platform needed to be articulated. I'm not sure if people outside of the movement for Black Lives understood that the folks who are working in the context of Black Lives Matter and other similar organizations, like Black Youth Project, these people are, like myself, like Kenny, like those of us on the BLUU organizing collective, people with jobs and lives and families and commitments who are really volunteering and using their time to try to foment a movement for freedom and access, equity, and inclusion in our society. And so it took a little while to gather together over 50 organizations to craft a comprehensive policy platform under the banner of the movement for Black Lives. And it was important for BLUU to go ahead and endorse that policy platform, as we see an alignment between the issues that are raised there and the issues that we know black people are facing in our own faith community.

OK, we co-sponsored the Revive Love tour and several Fortify the Movement workshops hosted in conjunction with Standing on the Side of Love. It was important to us to be in solidarity with other folks of color and white allies. So we provided resources and physical witness at the No Dakota Access Pipeline, or the NODAPL, demonstrations. Lena

Gardner and Leslie Mac from the BLUU organizing collective-- we made it a point to ensure that they would have the resources to participate in and provide leadership for the recent 20117 Women's March on Washington. They were down there. Lena K. Gardner is actually one of the women of color who is a part of the lead team and the organizing mantle for the Women's March-- the historic Women's March-- that we all just witnessed. And it was wonderful to know that they were down there with other people of faith, with other UUs, with other women who are working to foment a much more just and equitable society for all of us.

And perhaps one of the highlights that folks are familiar with-- we put forward the historic quest for the Unitarian Universalist Association to fund our short-term organizing meetings as well as to commit $5 million in long-term support for black Unitarian Universalists. And I want to be clear that that commitment around long-term support is not a decision that the BLUU organizing collective is going to make. People have asked us questions about, well, what are you all deciding to do with those funds, and how are they going [INAUDIBLE]? And our response to that is we don't have the answer to that question. It will be what black Unitarian Universalists decide to do with those resources. And we'll have a clearer idea of that coming out of our convening.

We are having the first ever Black Lives of UU convening specifically for black Unitarian Universalists coming up in just a few weeks-- March 9th to the 12th. Over the course of four days together, we will co-create spiritual nourishment and healing through ritual, worship, and pastoral care. We will make sure that we have black ministers from our faith community present to provide pastoral care to attendees. As a community, we will help design what we want for ourselves and our faith now and for the future. So we're really excited about having the opportunity to gather with black UUs all across the country, some of whom still strongly identify as Unitarian Universalists but haven't been active in brick and mortar congregations for several years because of some of the isolation that we talked about. We've been reaching out to those folks as much as we can and pulling them together back into the fold so we can have some really serious conversations about what our movement, what our faith community looks like going forward, centering the needs and interests of black UUs.

I know one of the things that Kenny and myself are both excited about is the involvement of young people at the convening. Kenny, you want to talk about that?

KENNY WILEY: Yeah, I do. And I think more broadly-- you know, I imagine we'll say this a few more times before our time together ends-- but if you're listening live or later on, if you take away one thing from this-- I hope you take away more-- it's that we need folks to help get the word out about the convening, because a lot of folks listening in may not be black, but you know black UUs. You're connected to the folks in your congregation or in area congregations. And though right registration is going pretty well so far, I'm amazed at how many folks haven't heard about this. And I think it speaks to that level of isolation. And one of the things that we'll be doing is we will be having youth content for children and youth. So

For high school youth, thanks to the southern region and also the UUA Youth and Young Adult Office, we're going to be able to have programming for black youth, high school youth who attend, which I think is really essential, because a lot of what we'll be doing, as Takiyah said, is figuring out what is our future as black UUs? What do we want to advocate for? What we want to do with and for each other? And we want youth at those conversations. And we know that there are conversations that 15, 16, 17-year-olds need to have with a couple adult supporting, instead of around dozens of us, who can take up all the air in a room.

So we think that time all together in all ages is important, and then also time where we sort of get to, as the saying goes, huddle in our age cohorts, which leads into we're going to be talking a lot about generational-- that there's black UUs who lived through the black empowerment controversy, and then there's folks, like me, who came along 20 years later. And we're going to be in conversation.

So we're still in process around exactly who's going to be leading that, as far as youth programming. But it's going to happen. And I'm really excited about it.

TAKIYAH NUR AMIN: Kenny, can you talk a little bit about who can sponsor or chaperone a young person at the convening?

KENNY WILEY: Yeah, so my understanding is that if you are-- Takiyah, you're actually going to have to help me out a little bit on this. You actually may know this answer better than I do. I like the set up, but I think you've got it better than me.

TAKIYAH NUR AMIN: I think it's important to know that we recognize that there are youth and young adults in our congregations who are black who might have parents or guardians who are not. And we don't want those young people to feel like they can't participate or be a part of the convening. So we'll make sure that there are folks on site to support youth and young adults who are participating in the convening. All of that will be addressed. We will also provide some information and resources if there are folks who are coming who are not black or who are bringing youth. We'll make sure that there are resources available, so that they'll kind of know where to spend their time or things that they can do while it is that we are in those meetings, because the convening is specifically for black Unitarian Universalists.

So we understand that some black folks have mixed race families, have mixed race young folks. And we're open and supportive about that. But the conversations and the planning that we're doing is really intentionally designed for black-identified Unitarian Universalists to be in that space.

So if you are a parent, or you want to bring a young person or chaperone a young person, I would encourage you to go to the BLUU website and pay attention to the registration details for the convening. Everything is there. It's very straightforward in terms of how you can submit a registration for yourself or for a young person.

I also want to be clear that we do have some funding available, just like with General Assembly last year. Lot of black folks who were trying to get to GA last year, as I mentioned, didn't necessarily have the financial resources to get there. BLUU has us set aside some funds to assist people with travel and lodging for the convening. So if you know somebody who is trying to attend, we don't want anyone to feel like funds are a reason that they can't participate. This meeting is too historic and too important. So encourage them to submit a registration, and there is actually space on the form for them to articulate their financial needs or financial requests.

KENNY WILEY: Thank you, yeah.

TAKIYAH NUR AMIN: Oh, you're welcome.

KENNY WILEY: You said it better than I would have.

TAKIYAH NUR AMIN: You know what? That's why we're [AUDIO OUT]

KENNY WILEY: That's right.

TAKIYAH NUR AMIN: In case anybody doesn't know, you can find us online at www.blacklivesUU.com. if you're specifically looking for information about the convening, it's www.blacklivesUU .com/convening2017. But there's a big button on our home page that'll take you right to the convening [AUDIO OUT] very excited about it-- very excited about it. And I'm seeing here in the chat box a little request that we send our visuals for the convening over to the folks at LREDA. So we'll make sure that that happens. as well. Thanks so much for that.

We want to move to questions and answers. I want to encourage folks who have questions to just type your questions into the chat box. And we will do our best to field them. This is the fun, spontaneous part, so if you have questions about BLUU, if you have questions about faith development, being a religious educator that has specific concerns about engaging around identity development for youth of color, Kenny and I are both educators. So we're happy to engage your questions at this time. Type away, people. We're excited.

Does BLUU have any official or unofficial relationship to DRUUMM? We do not have a formal covenant relationship with DRUUMM. We have a mutually supportive relationship with DRUUMM. At our last BLUU retreat, which was in New Orleans in October of 2016, the BLUU team was down there doing some advanced planning in preparation for the convening. We had a meeting with the folks at DRUUMM. We'd already met informally with the folks at DRUUMM at General Assembly last year, as well. Some of us are active in the BLUU collective as well as DRUUMM members, so there is no tension or negativity or problem there. We mutually support DRUUMM's projects. DRUUMM is supportive of our projects.

And we have an active working relationship with DRUUMM. DRUUMM is actually going to be engaged in helping us spread the word about the convening, as well. So as of right now, we don't have an official relationship, other than a mutually supportive, loving, warm, "we're all in the same faith community working for equity and justice" relationship.

KENNY WILEY: So I just posted a link to a maybe 2 and 1/2 minutes, maybe less, video that was filmed at General Assembly. And it's sort of a really good introduction to why we do the work we do. And so just if you are wanting something to show to your congregation or faith community about Black Lives of UU or you want to send to someone who may potentially attend the convening, that video in that chat box is a really helpful way to see and to feel. It starts with a chant-- "I love my blackness"-- the Pastor Danny Givens, who's from Minnesota, led. And so much of what we're doing is about affirmation of self, affirmation of faith, that this faith belongs to us. And you can really see that and feel that in that video. So that's a resource for folks.

So questions, because otherwise, I mean, Takiyah and I can always just kick it and chat, but--

TAKIYAH NUR AMIN: I see we have a question here, Kenny, about resources--

KENNY WILEY: There we go.

TAKIYAH NUR AMIN: --that will help support identity development for mixed race children in a family that is adopted into white families that are in the congregation. And you know, that's not uncommon in our congregations, for us to find white families that have adopted black children or mixed race children. Any thoughts around resources for identity development?

KENNY WILEY: I don't know about specific resources, actually. I have general thoughts, which may or may not be helpful, but I'm actually not sure. If anyone else in the chat-- I know we have lots of educators, or anyone else in chat-- knows of stuff, you know, I think we're all working together here. Susan, you got something?

SUSAN LAWRENCE: Yeah, I'm going to bust in. There's a lot of stuff I've spotted throughout Tapestry of Faith. But more importantly, people might like to know that Elizabeth [INAUDIBLE] has convened a group of educators, parents, and youth of color to talk about resources for trans-racially adopted UU youth. And I'm a white mother with a child who's from Ethiopia, so she is black. And I think I'm in there for two reasons-- because of my personal experience in [INAUDIBLE] as well as my educator experience.

There are a number of you who've been active in some of these national that people have been describing who have come up as UUs, who can speak personally to the child part of this. And Elizabeth has us assessing resources and investigating them and looking to see what could be updated and [INAUDIBLE] on how to get the resources to the people who need them. Well, I guess I'm saying look for stuff. We're working on it, is what I'm saying.

If you actually put your email in there, I can tell you more about how to do that, if you put your email in the chat box. Thanks.

TAKIYAH NUR AMIN: I see a question here. Thank you, Susan. There's a question here about black folks who attend a congregation regularly but aren't members, and would they be welcome at the convening? Our response to that is absolutely, yes. One of the things that we've talked about that's been kind of a challenge, in terms of Unitarian Universalists identity development, is that for many other kind of religious communities or religious identities, their identity isn't necessarily tied to place. What I mean by that is you will have people who identify as Christian, whether they've attended a congregation or church in the last 50 years, whether they're a church member or not, they still identify as Christian.

My mother is Muslim. I come from a multi-faith family. Whether my mother is attending the mosque actively or not at any given time, she still identifies as a Muslim person.

One of the challenges we're finding is that Unitarian Universalist identity has for quite some time now really been tied to congregational membership or affiliation with a congregation. And there are historical reasons for that. But the kind of isolation that black folks in particular face, even when they're present or active in a congregation, suggests that we might need to rethink who's a Unitarian Universalist and who's not, whether they've signed the book at one of our congregations, or not.

So if you know black folks who've been visiting at your congregation, they've been around for a little while, they have a demonstrated interest in Unitarian Universalism, absolutely please do encourage and invite them to attend the convening. We'd love to connect with them. We'd love to talk to them more about BLUU. And it may actually be that the reason why they haven't signed the book yet is because they have some specific concerns or reservations that they'd like to talk to other black UUs about.

KENNY WILEY: Yeah, I would only add that I think my hope is that folks invite people with whom they have relationships. And you know, I hope it goes without saying, but it may not, that know I got a question on Facebook about, there's this black person who came once to my church, should I tell them about the convening? I was, like, well, I mean do you know anything about them? And they said, oh, I've never talked to them. And it's like, well, then maybe start there. That said, I think it is important to get the word out far and wide, just to have some tact when we do. So I just wanted to add that.

TAKIYAH NUR AMIN: I see a question in the chat about suggestions for non-black people of color who want to support BLUU. Recognizing that there are some shared experiences around isolation and hyper-visibility, but not necessarily the exact same challenges that black folks face and wanting to know how to exercise ally-ship, I will tell you that in the short run, we really need everyone's support, no matter how you identify, with spreading the word about the convening. That's going to be kind of job number one between now and that first full week in March. So anything you can do to spread the word, to make announcements, to put it on your Facebook, to share it with folks directly via email in cyberspace. All of the information, as I mentioned, is on our website at blacklivesUU.com. Spreading the word around the convening is job one.

The second thing that I would mention is that while we're not doing a full workshop track this year at General Assembly, we will have a presence this year at GA. We are doing a couple of workshops and a worship service. So making sure that you visibly support and attend those workshops, visibly support and attend BLUU-sponsored events-- and the information about what we'll be doing at GA will be more public and present after the convening.

So kind of two things in the short run would be to support getting the word out about the convening. Can't stress that enough. And be on the lookout for the work that BLUU will be doing at General Assembly this year.

I would also say everybody on the BLUU organizing collective has been engaged in doing speaking presentations and engagements and workshops. You can retain us if you're interested in having a presentation about BLUU, either virtually or having us come to a small group or congregational setting. We've done some of that work. And so if you are aware of BLUU and think that people in your congregation need to know more and have a chance to hear from us or see us, we're totally open to doing that, totally open to that kind of work.

KENNY WILEY: So I'm seeing that DRUUMM will have a General Assembly track geared for black-identified and non-black people of color. So that's something to add, as well. So Takiyah, where do you want to head from here?

TAKIYAH NUR AMIN: There's a question about whether or not black trans youth would potentially find a cohort at the convening. I want to say yes to that. I want to say yes to that. But ultimately, it would depend on how many black trans youth find out about the convening and come to be a part of the event. I will say that we recognize the necessity of upholding intersectional identities. We understand nobody is ever just one thing at a time. We have queer-identified people who are members of the BLUU organizing collective. And so it's important for us while we foreground our blackness-- our blackness is elastic. Our blackness is inclusive, and we understand that it wraps around people with a range of gender identities all across the spectrum. And so we certainly don't want anybody feeling unwelcome at the event and are very careful to think about that in our programming and in our work.

KENNY WILEY: And something to add-- to go back, I think it Yvette who asked it in the chat-- this sort of connects with the conversation. Something that's really important to Black Lives of UU, to go along with intersectional identity, is to be clear that our struggles are not identical and that depending on how much privilege or how marginalized we may be because of our identities-- my work within Black Lives UU is different from Takiyah's work, because it's really important for me, as a man, to be clear that I have benefits because I'm a man and to amplify the voices of black women, to amplify the voices of trans folks, and so that's going to be explicitly a part of conversations at the convening, at General Assembly, and at everything we do, because it's not enough, because, frankly, when you see movements just be about one thing, then we've seen straight black men take over movement spaces before. And we want to be very clear that that's not what we do, because what we do is we lift up black women. We lift up trans folks who are the leaders of our movement, and to make that known.

TAKIYAH NUR AMIN: That's absolutely true. And we do the best that we can to try to always be [INAUDIBLE] and mindful about who is representing BLUU, whose voices are being privileged in any conversation. We try really hard to be equitable around that and also to allow people to really operate in their giftings and in their areas of interest. I mean, Kenny has a real passion for working with young people and for youth identity development as it relates to race and our faith, that kind of sits at that crossroads. And so when there are opportunities for us to have meaningful conversations about that, we ought to make sure Kenny is at the center of that conversation and really at the forefront of the work that we're doing.

I'm actually playing with and discerning a call towards ministry right now. My two interests are adult religious education and doing chaplaincy work, particularly in hospice settings. So my interests are also about the kind of faith identity and what it means to shape faith identities as Unitarian Universalists in the 21st century, whether they are bound by the walls of a congregation or not. And so when we're having those kind of theological conversations, it's important for me to kind of bring my voice forward [INAUDIBLE] contributing. And the people on the OC have really made a lot of room for that.

There was a question. Kenny, did you want to follow up at all?

KENNY WILEY: Nope, you nailed it.

TAKIYAH NUR AMIN: OK. There's a question in the chat about will folks from BLUU will be able to consult with congregations around black identity issues? I'm not sure exactly what is meant by that, but we have consulted with congregations around a range of issues, ranging from being more welcoming, thoughtful, and inclusive, around working with folks of color in general and black folks, in particular, in their congregational spaces. I'm actually in conversation right now negotiating the details to work with a congregation-- I won't name names-- in Virginia that has been having some challenges around the relationship between the congregation and the wider community as it relates to Black Lives Matter and the BLM banner at the church and all of those things.

So yeah, there are people on the team who are interested in and compelled to do that work with congregations. If you're interested in maybe bringing in a person from BLUU, or myself, or Kenny, or someone else on the OC, there's a Contact Us link on our website. Feel free to send a contact through, or you could email us directly. It's just our first names. I'm Takiyah@blacklivesUU.com. He's kenny@blacklivesUU.com. You can tweet us [INAUDIBLE]. To hear from you. Go ahead.

KENNY WILEY: Right. Yeah, so that question from Sarah could mean a lot of things. And I'll say that I know that folks on the collective have had some conversations around-- there's a lot of times there's questions around the fact that you can have a conversation with 3 black adults but 12 black children, because of-- we mentioned earlier-- transracial adoption or a biracial family, and the white parent brings the kids to church. There's all sorts of situations. And so we've done a lot of-- well, I can speak for myself that I've had a lot of conversations with people around that.

But primarily so far, I feel like more of what we do is around community building with black UUs more directly. And because it's a faith where people know each other, in our other work, we do all kinds of stuff with the faith, but that's not to say that we wouldn't be open to working with congregations about their culture, about how welcoming they are, about music. There's always questions about music, as far as building multicultural space, so just some things to add.

TAKIYAH NUR AMIN: Yeah. Yeah, that's absolutely true. Sarah thank you for amplifying your question. You talk about would BLUU be available or helpful in helping a congregation perhaps think about how to be supportive of the Black Lives Matter movement, understanding nuance, not stepping in where they might not belong as majority race folks. Those are conversations that we've had. Those are conversations that we can assist with facilitating. It's also not uncommon now that some of the congregations with which I am familiar have developed SURJ chapters-- the Standing Up for Racial Justice organization. I'm saying SURJ, S-U-R-J-- which seems to be a really vibrant, thoughtful organizing space for white folks, especially white allies, especially in terms of fomenting support for the movement for Black Lives.

The answer to your question, Sarah, is yes, we'd be happy to help with that work. And we can do it onsite. We can do it virtually. We are committed to helping build community within this faith, because the other thing that I want to lift up, and I can feel it-- my theological hat is kind of sliding on--

KENNY WILEY: It always does.

TAKIYAH NUR AMIN: One of the challenges that we've had is talking to some black UUs who sort of feel like Unitarian Universalism belongs to white people, like it works best if you white folks are somehow at the lead, that Unitarian Universalism as a faith belongs to white folks, and we should just be glad that they let us in the living room. You just be glad that white folks let black folks and other people of color into the space.

And the truth is that's not really true, historically or contemporarily. We too have been architects of this faith. We too have been architects of the theological kind of wranglings that shape Unitarian Universalism up to this point. And we will most certainly be a part of what it is going forward, if it is to have a future. So if Unitarian Universalism as a faith is going to have a future, that future will be not just white, but it will be black and brown and cis-gendered and transgendered and everything else. And we're really serious about ensuring that everyone is aware that we're not leaving. We're not going nowhere.

KENNY WILEY: Right.

TAKIYAH NUR AMIN: This faith is ours. This faith is ours. So to the extent that we can assist anybody around that kind of growth and faith development, we are here for it.

KENNY WILEY: Yeah, and because we, as organizing collective, but more broadly, are so familiar with Unitarian Universalism in its many forms, I think that something that I personally am really interested in is helping congregations, helping communities understand their own culture. And that is to say, and I know many folks know this, a lot of times UU churches being predominately white think that they are culture-less, that they are the norm. And so one of the ways to support BLUU is to help your faith community see you do have a culture, right? Everyone has do clap at church, do you not clap? Does anyone ever talk back during the sermon, or is it totally silent? And black folks, we have all kinds of experiences, but these are things that we come in, and we notice. And congregations that are aware of who they are and what they do and getting outside of just traditional congregations, faith spaces that are aware of themselves tend to be more welcoming, because they understand that people come from all different kinds of circumstances, and they're used to different things. And something that I've been a part of a lot of conversations with black UUs about is understanding that UUs have culture. They have a way of being. And so do we, as black UUs.

TAKIYAH NUR AMIN: There was a question earlier about whether BLUU will have a presence at the UU regional spring meetings. I don't know anything about the regional spring meetings. If somebody wants to hip a sister to the skip, drop a link in the chat box, or feel free to shoot an email. I would love to be a presence. I'm sure other people on the OC would love to be, as well, if they haven't been planning already. But I don't know what the deal is going down. So those folks who are in the know, be sure to let us know about the UU regional spring meeting, and we'll do what we can.

There was a question-- I think this is good, Kenny, for each of us to ask about kind of favorite things to read, books or other resources, to inform to get informed around black UU theology. I will share that one of my favorite resources, because it's super-accessible, is the Sankofa Archive. The Unitarian Universalist Sankofa Archive is its official name. Sankofa is a word from the Akan language spoken predominantly by people who live in Ghana, West Africa. Sankofa means it is not taboo to go back and fetch what you forgot. It's a principle about learning from one's past in order to shape one's future.

So the Unitarian Universalist Sankofa Archives is actually maintained that Meadville Lombard, one of our theological schools. You can find it through the Meadville website. I'll drop a link in the chat. And there are resources in that Sankofa Archive. The special collection includes a repository of documents, biographic profiles, worship resources, and photographic images. And it celebrates the lives of ministers and laity of Native American, Asian and South Asian, Pacific Islander, Middle Eastern, Hispanic descent, and members of the African diaspora, as well as those who identify as multicultural to multi-racial. And so that's sort of been one of my favorite places. There's a great timeline there around black involvement in Unitarian Universalism, going back to the late 1700s.

So for those of you who are thinking about not only kind of learning more about kind of a black UU theology but also how to infuse content and resources into the work that you're doing as educators, that Sankofa collection might be of interest to you. What's your favorite resource?

KENNY WILEY: Well, I've got three answers. Two of them will be really short. One, I got to plug UU World, being a senior editor. If you go into our archives and look up names like Mark Morrison Reed, look up names like Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, a 19th century activist and writer, the great thing is at the bottom of stories you can find stories like this, and you can find a lot of good stuff on UUworld.org. Oh, and there's a lot of black religious professionals who are authors and have written books or short stories or articles online.

And so you can dive in there. What I would say is for me, the best moment of General Assembly was the history workshop that I led along with Jackie C. Williams. And what was interesting was that Jackie and I talked about we wanted it to be less of going over the black empowerment controversy and more of the history that was in the room. And so what you had was a lot of black UUs, UUs of color, non-black UUs color, white UUs sharing their faith stories and journeys. And so I really invite those listening and watching to, in a way that feels right, not just hit up your local black UU and just, tell me everything, but to talk more about your faith stories and to listen more, because especially folks who are more marginalized in the faith-- black folks, other people of color-- have really fascinating stories of how they came to find this faith as theirs, and even if they grew up in it, how they found to reclaim it as theirs.

And so that's something I encourage everyone to share, regardless if you're white and watching or listening or a person of color, but especially the stories of UUs of color. And I have to say, having been in a lot of UU spaces, this is something that I think UUs of color tend to do much better, mostly because we just seem to share. I don't know at my own church a lot of the white UUs' stories. And so sharing our stories, I see Eric [INAUDIBLE] is on the call. And he often talks about the importance of storytelling to change reality. And I think that story listening can also be a really huge resource to learn black UU theology and UU theology more broadly.

TAKIYAH NUR AMIN: For our last kind of quick question, there was a question in that chat. I'm not sure if it's "Andrea" or "Ahn-drea" asking. Are Canadians welcome in BLUU at the convening? The answer is absolutely, yes. We would love to connect with black UUs who are Canadian. The more, the merrier. Everybody who identifies as a black UU, come on in the room. We want to be with you in New Orleans. And New Orleans is a magical place, in terms of the rich diversity of black diasporic presence. So come on and be there with us. Feel free to spread the word across the border in that way.

I am going to ask Kareem to come on back, if he could, to offer our closing words. And then I know Susan will have some announcements that she wants to make. But I've thoroughly enjoyed myself. I hope this was helpful. You know, sometimes when you sign on to do these webinars things, you never know how it's going to go. But I had a great time, and I hope other folks get something useful from this. Go ahead Kenny.

KENNY WILEY: Yeah, and I would just add that, you know, what I've been most fired up about right now is this listening courageously, this idea of hearing marginalized folks' stories and pain. And this is something that in Black Lives of UU we believe strongly in. We want to hear each other, because when we hear each other, we build faith community that feels like it can last. And so my hope is that all folks listening in can contribute to that and to help make spaces that are truly welcome for black Unitarian Universalists, and that starts with hearing stories and hearing pain.

KAREEM WATSON: Thank you guys so much. Very informative. I hope everybody got their questions answered and enjoyed the presentation. So I'll also be reading from Kristen Harper. It's called "I, Too Am Beautiful." Here it goes.

"My inner spirit wrote I've spent my life watching you, seeing your accomplishments, living in the way I think you want me to. I've 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 I, too, am beautiful. Look at my face, my hair, my clothes. They may be different, but aren't they worthy of your gaze? Look at my walk, the way my hips sway to the music of my soul, the way my proud neck tilt 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, and beautiful." Thanks.

KENNY WILEY: Amen.

SUSAN LAWRENCE: Thanks, Kareem. And I want to thank again Takiyah and Kenny. Thank you so much. What a great webinar. And we are doing a rerun, actually a fresh one, tomorrow evening. So if anyone online wants to quickly get others to sign up and call in, we'd love to see you tomorrow night, 9:00 PM, Eastern time for another attempt to rock a webinar like we just did. Thank you.

FDO has two topics lined up for February and for March. And if you're a webinar attendee, please sign up now. [INAUDIBLE] gender non-conforming children is our topic. For [INAUDIBLE] a panel of religious educators and people with personal connection to gender non-conforming children and families. And looking forward to presenting and taking questions there. And then in March, many of you may be familiar with the name Pat [INAUDIBLE] or the name Jan [INAUDIBLE], and both of them have been serving religious educators in the professional capacity for a while. And their jobs have both changed. So we're going to do an [INAUDIBLE] about what support UUA offers and whether it's Jan [INAUDIBLE] if there's something you want to pursue. And that's in March.

And all the registration, including our archives from even this webinar we just complete and previous ones for the past several years, are all on [www.UU.org/re/teachers.webinars](http://www.UU.org/re/teachers.webinars). So again, thanks for joining us. Thanks to our presenters. We're very grateful. And see you all soon.

KENNY WILEY: Thanks, everyone, for showing up.

TAKIYAH NUR AMIN: Thank you. Thanks, everyone.