



MEMORANDUM

To: UUA Board of Trustees
From: Carey McDonald, Executive Vice President

Re: Sources of democratic accountability for AR/AO/MC work
Date: April 23, 2021

Introduction

The UUA's commitment to anti-racism, anti-oppression and multiculturalism (AR/AO/MC) is rooted in its commitment to justice and equity, as expressed through our democratic system. Our AR/AO/MC work to create a beloved faith community where all can thrive has been called for through the UUA's democratic process for decades and includes many statements of policies and positions. It is also observed in the ongoing ways that energy and commitment show up through engagement in UUA programs and events which are broadly accessible. Democracy also must enfranchise the voices of those most affected by decisions, so we understand ourselves to have special democratic accountability to Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) Unitarian Universalists, as well as other groups representing impacted communities

This memo outlines these sources of democratic accountability for the AR/AO/MC work and approach of the UUA and its leaders, with a focus on anti-racism.

Formal Policy - Statements by the General Assembly

Formal policy positions are adopted democratically, congregational delegates must vote to approve them at a General Assembly. In the past 25 years, a wide variety of statements approved by the GA have explicitly named racism and oppression as a concern operating within our faith community and called on the UUA and UU congregations, communities, and organizations to address racism within UUism.

The following statements are focused entirely on addressing racism within Unitarian Universalism:

Widening the Circle: Establishing Ongoing Intersectional Accountability Commission and Sunsetting the JTWTC, Responsive Resolution, 2020

Deepen Our Commitment to an Anti-Oppressive, Multicultural Unitarian Universalist Association, Responsive Resolution, 2013

Toward an Anti-Racist Unitarian Universalist Association, Business Resolution, 1997

Excerpts from the following statements address also racism within Unitarian Universalism:

Amen to Uprising: A Commitment and Call to Action, Action of Immediate Witness, 2020

"WHEREAS, many of our faith communities have been complicit in creating the society and systems we currently live within... THEREFORE, we commit to making our congregations and communities authentically multicultural, multiracial, anti-oppressive spaces that dismantle anti-Blackness; resisting a culture of perfectionism, and repairing our mistakes; and, given that building the Beloved

Community is an ongoing and ever evolving process, we commit to staying in this work for the long haul.”

Our Democracy Uncorrupted, Statement of Conscience, 2019

“At the Association level, Unitarian Universalists also fall short of democratic ideals... Excluding people of color from the creation of processes has distanced them from engagement. Informal systems rely on organizational cultures that not everyone has knowledge of or is able to access. Congregations vary in governance and decision-making processes. Our organizational styles vary from leader-oriented with defined hierarchies to more collaborative leadership with changing roles. At both the Associational and congregational levels, realizing true democracy requires expanding to include more diverse voices.”

Suggested actions included “Conduct a congregational democracy audit that includes any practices that continue to sustain white privilege and income inequality. Take action to address findings”; and “Conduct periodic [UUA] association-wide democracy audits that include any practices that continue to sustain any structures of oppression and disenfranchisement including white supremacy, ableism, sexism, and classism. Take action to address the findings.

Phoenix General Assembly 2012, Business Resolution, 2010

“THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Assembly hereby...calls on the UUA Board to continue providing the resources needed to build the capacity of Unitarian Universalists to stand in opposition to systemic racism in our congregations, local communities, and in our own lives.”

Economic Injustice, Poverty, and Racism: We Can Make a Difference!, Statement of Conscience, 2000

We must look both inward and outward as we organize ourselves for action within our congregations and beyond. Looking inward, the 1997 General Assembly of the Unitarian Universalist Association urged Unitarian Universalists to examine carefully our own conscious and unconscious racism and to work toward our transformation to an anti-racist, multi-cultural institution. The Unitarian Universalist community has only begun its soul-searching toward the goal of becoming more inclusive and affirming. We acknowledge the lack of racial and economic diversity within most of our congregations.

Finally, it is worthy to note that there have *not* been any statements in the same time frame adopted which contradict these positions or otherwise deny the existence of racism within Unitarian Universalism or the complicity of our institutions and structures in it.

Relational Indicators – Engagement and Responsiveness

Beyond formal policy positions, the UUA understands our commitment to democracy to include responsiveness through our relationships with our constituents and leaders. In the past four years, UUA staff have reported significant support and interest from congregational leaders in the work of dismantling white supremacy, patriarchy and other forms of oppression. Events focused on anti-racism have been some of the most popular. Here are a few recent examples:

- *New Day Rising Conference National*– In February 2021, over 1200 UUs registered for the virtual New Day Rising National conference to share and learn about anti-racism work in their congregations, one of the largest UUA events that has taken place outside of GA in recent years.
- *Virtual GA 2020*– Virtual GA saw historic highs in registration for GA, and featured strong engagement with the centerpiece of the Commission on Institutional Change’s final report; many participants commented on the COIC report in the post-event survey (e.g. “*The business was very important to our faith this year, the report by the Commission on Institutional Change especially.*”

- [COIC Survey Results](#) – Per UU World magazine: “The survey, created by the Commission on Institutional Change and distributed through the General Assembly mobile phone app [in 2019], asked UUs to rate on a scale of 1 to 10 how important they believe ARAOMC work is to the future of the faith. Nearly 91 percent ranked it as an 8, 9, or 10 in importance, with 59.8 percent ranking it as a 10.”
- *White Supremacy Teach-In* – In the spring of 2017, over 700 congregations participated in the White Supremacy Teach-In, a non-UUA event organized by three religious educators.

Mutual Accountability – Commitment from UU Organizations

The UUA’s commitment to AR/AO/MC has been regularly affirmed as essential in our conversations with UU organizations. In particular, we have heard those organizations representing and/or led by BIPOC, trans/non-binary, disabled and other UUs holding historically marginalized identities calling us to this work as a faith community. Here are two examples:

- In 2016, Diverse and Revolutionary UU Multicultural Ministries (DRUUMM), the UU BIPOC organization, issued a [Call for Renewal](#): “Today, DRUUMM calls upon Unitarian Universalism, as represented by our democratic institutions and congregations, to recommit to building an anti-racist beloved community and to the vision and intentions of our Journey Towards Wholeness Work. We call on UU institutions to lead in this transformational work, renewing commitments to anti-oppression and transparently aligning resources with these priorities.”
- In 2019, a group of UU groups co-signed with the UUA an [invitation to the Conversations for Liberation project](#), which called UUs to “recommit ourselves to the aspiration of a fully inclusive and anti-oppressive community.” It was signed by signed by Allies for Racial Equity, the Association for UU Administrators, the Association for UU Music Ministries, DRUUMM, the Liberal Religious Educators Association, Transgender Religious Professional UUs Together, and the UU Ministers Association, with additional support from EquUal Access.