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SPEAKERS

Rev. KC Slack, Rev. Dr. Sofía Betancourt, Speaker 2, Speaker 1, Speaker 6, Speaker 7, Speaker 4, Speaker 5

Speaker 1 00:07

Hello, and welcome to the Unitarian Church of Arlington. We're happy you're here, whether in person or online. It is my pleasure to introduce Rev. KC Slack. They are currently serving at the Washington Ethical Society, and a local, which is awesome. They are currently serving on the Election Campaign Practices Committee. So welcome. I am going to read an opening to light our candle. I managed to extinguish the candle so my apologies. So we shall virtually light our chalice. This is an invocation by Everett Hoagland. Architect of icebergs, rainbows, jewellers of crystals, sand grains, snowflakes, atoms. Mason, whose tools are glaciers, rain, river, ocean. Chemist who made blood of seawater, bone of minerals in stone, milk of love. Whatever you are, I know this. Spinner, you are everywhere in the ever changing above whirling around us. Yes, in the loose strands in the ruffed weave of the common cloth threaded with our DNA on the hubbed, spoked spinning wheel that is this world, solar system, galaxy universe. Help us to see ourselves in all creation, and all creation in ourselves, ourselves in one another. Remind those of us who like connections made with smiles, metaphors, symbols that are all of us, everything is already connected. Remind us that as the oceans go, so we go. As the air goes, so go we. As other life forms on Earth go, so go we. As our planet goes, so go we. Mysterious news who inspired In The Beginning Was The Word... edit our thoughts so our ethics are our politics and our actions, the afterlives of our words. So again, welcome and turning to you, Rev. Slack.

Rev. KC Slack 02:53

Thank you. So I, as was mentioned, I'm Rev. KC Slack. I serve at the Washington Ethical Society and on the Election Campaign Practices Committee of the Unitarian Universalist Association. And in that capacity, I'm really glad to be here today with Rev. Dr. Sofía Betancourt to do our first presidential forum. So I think we all know Sofia a little bit, but I would like to give you an opportunity to introduce yourself a little bit if you'd like.

Rev. Dr. Sofia Betancourt 03:22

Sure. Thank you. Well, that's very loud. I am the Rev. Dr. Sofía Betancourt. Sofía is really fine for a forum like this. And I am just thrilled that we are finally at this moment where we get to be in conversation with each other. It has been a lot of months of discernment, of communication. I'm smiling at my beloved colleague who's taking pictures of us if you are online and can't see that in the room. I

am an ordained Unitarian Universalist minister. I'm also a scholar of Religious Ethics and African American Studies, and my ministry has spanned a range from congregational parish life to seminary professor to several years on the national staff of our Unitarian Universalist Association, serving as our Director for Racial and Ethnic Concerns. I got to serve on the core faculty of Starr King School for the Ministry for I think five years, which was a real privilege. I served as an academic dean at Drew's Theological School. And right now I get to be a scholar in residence, which is actually as awesome as it sounds, and a Special Advisor for Justice, and Equity at our Unitarian Universalist Service Committee. I have been a UU minister for almost 20 years. It's a long time. I got to be at Starr King with Rev. Slack, which was a privilege. And I'm trying to think, there's a lot of information about me on our campaign website. It's just sofiabetancourt.com. I invite you to go and look and learn a little bit more about me. My beloved spouse, Sam Ames, is in the hall since we are also local in the Washington, D.C. area. Sam is waving in the back. I'm a vocalist. I'm a drummer. I'm a gardener, here in no, we're in Virginia, wut we're almost, we're close to Maryland, where my tomato starts are a little too tall indoors. I'm about two or three weeks ahead of where we should be, but I'm excited to get my hands in soil, to be in conversation with all of you. I'm glad to be here.

Rev. KC Slack 05:28

Lovely. So the way that our forum today is going to work is it'll be split into three sections. We'll begin with some prepared questions from me to Sofía. And then we'll move into a time where folks in the audience, both in-person and online, will be able to ask questions. And then finally, Sofía has some questions that she'd like to ask of the audience. And so the audience will have the opportunity to respond to those questions, again, in-person and online. When folks are asking and answering questions online, that will be through the chat. You'll type your answers, and I will read them out. I will not intentionally edit. Though, we all know sometimes you are reading and the words come out a little bit different than what you read. So that is the arc of our time together today. Each of these segments will take about 30 minutes, so not too long on any one thing. Another thing to know about these forums is that for the prepared questions, each forum has a different theme. The questions from the audience Sofía's questions, those will range, but the prepared questions have a theme. So our theme today is "Social Justice, Community Building, and Unitarian Universalism in the Public Sphere." So to get us started. Sofía, can you describe your approach to leadership around social justice?

Rev. Dr. Sofia Betancourt 06:54

Thank you. My approach to leadership around social justice is actually pretty similar to my approach to leadership in general. I work really hard to be highly collaborative, to be relational. I think that's really important. We talk a lot about collaborative leadership on my team. And I just said that I've been a minister for about 20 years. All of those years, my ministry has been grounded in the work of social justice, and I think it's important to say that that work has been primarily institutional, right? There are many ways that we do justice and equity work in the world. And when we do it well, they are interrelated and connected to each other and forward that work together. But most of my work has been institutional. So I've served in multiple nonprofits. I've served in multiple Unitarian Universalist congregations, always with a justice center, to the shared ministry in those places. I served on the national staff of our UUA as the Director for Racial and Ethnic Concerns for about five years. Goodness! Interfaith coalitions, and also, of course, my teaching, and my current ministry at the UU Service Committee is all about the work of international human rights. So I really am an institutionalist, I

believe very much in our individual callings and ministries in the world. And I think that even though they are always flawed, the purpose of our institutions is to promote and carry forward our values long after we, ourselves, are there to do that work. And so we build those institutions in justice-seeking ways so that that work will carry on beyond us. I think actually one of the most vital things though, about being a leader in a social justice context, really comes to focusing on how we are uniquely able to offer an important and effective voice around different justice issues. I remember when our beloved Co-Moderator, the Rev. Meg Riley, talked to us at a General Assembly many years ago now about what it meant to really focus as UUs on where our voices mattered most. Right? And this can be challenging for us. We have such a human-centered, a worth-centered understanding of who we are in the world. And this makes us likely to want to get involved in every single justice issue. And don't get me wrong, I want us to, right? I want freedom and liberation for everyone. And I know that I have to trust that our beloveds in the political arena, our organizers, our interfaith colleagues, and our coalitions, that our folks are also showing up where they are best suited. Right? So how do we together identify the places where a UU voice particularly matters? That's really key to me. Also, really key to me, is following the wisdom of frontline communities. Right? And we're working on this we're learning how to do this better. And I think a lot of us are used to leading whether it's in our congregations or our families or our work in the world or our jobs, and it can be difficult to take a breath and realize that people most impacted by injustice have a unique wisdom. Right? And that part of our accountability is to show up, is to respond when ever asked. So I know that this work has to be multigenerational, it has to be intersectional. Sometimes we go so far toward the edge of where is our voice most effective, that we forget that most justice issues are interconnected, and that in that intersectionality, they land on bodies, right, in ways that are compounded, in ways that are made made larger, by the way they impact just one individual person, or a species, or a group of people. But I think I most want to say that my understanding is that this is the work of liberation, which is work, which is multiple generations long work. This is the work of liberation, and part of what we can do is show up and model a faith-based approach to justice. And part of what I mean by that we are the inheritors, you've probably heard me say this before, of a Protestant, Christian legacy. So when you hear me say the words of the church, I really mean that kind of meta idea that we've inherited, but really our religious institutions have long been understood as modeling a different way of being in society, right? Of actually showing up and saying, "we can be moved by things other than what late stage capitalism encourages us toward" right? This is about privileging the needs of the most vulnerable among us, privileging liberation, building beloved community, rather than succumbing to the way values are stacked in a capitalist society. So I'm called to the work of justice and I'm called to resource it through the work of beloved community, right? It takes all of us to do the work of justice, and I think as leaders, what we can do is show up, listen, prioritize, and equip one another, to do the work in the world.

Rev. KC Slack 11:51

I appreciate the layers to that answer. And it leaves me with a follow up question, which is, as UUA president, what does that look like?

Rev. Dr. Sofia Betancourt 12:01

That's a great question. I have all of three months of experience as a UUA president under my belt, so please just I ask for your grace, knowing that I am entering a learning period, right? That's what transition is about. That said, I think there is this unique opportunity to invest, to resource, to promote

the interconnections between how UUs do justice work. So for me, there is this incredible opportunity, where our congregations work with our national staff, right, with our Organizing Strategy Team, with Side With Love. We also work with our State Action Networks, we work with our entrepreneurial ministries, we work with community ministries of all forms, and I think that a UUA president can help remind us of some of those places where we are uniquely able to make a difference, to show up in the world. And sometimes it's the work of communication. Did you know that this incredible work, right, is happening in Texas right now because of their justice network? Do you want to connect with UUs who are already doing the work or learn from them, right, about partners and frontline communities who have something important to share or might have an important ask of us? One of the things that I tend to say is that this is both about resourcing but also about connection, right? So I think there is a prioritization that happens in the role of the president, but it's really front-facing. The work is the work of the staff. But a lot of the work of the president is relational. So it matters to me, for example, that I'm in the D.C. area. My political connections have changed in the last year and a half that I've been here. But it also matters, I think, that organizations sometimes know that they want a UU response, and the person they're most aware of is the UUA President. Right? That does not mean that the president of the UUA is the best person to respond at all. But I think often the role of the president is to connect people to those whose voices most need to be in the public square.

Rev. KC Slack 13:59

Thank you.

Rev. Dr. Sofia Betancourt 14:00

Yeah.

Rev. KC Slack 14:01

So moving into our second question: What opportunities do you see for Unitarian Universalism and Unitarian Universalists to make an impact around justice issues on a national and global scale? I imagine you have much to say.

Rev. Dr. Sofia Betancourt 14:18

[Laughs] I do. And I'm going to try to not- you know, the danger with me is that I am going to hit professor mode, which I try not to do. I try not to do. Thank you. So first and foremost, I really hope we will continue in the places that we have been showing up so well, right? This is the work of, of gender justice, of climate justice, reproductive justice. This is the work of prison abolition and voting rights. I mean, there are places that UUs have really shown up powerfully in recent years, and those relationships are vitally important. Also for me, there's something critical about how we engage our values. There's a term in philosophy, forgive me, called "bad faith," which basically means that you're lying to yourself about something to justify something else. Bad faith. And I think that we have a unique ability to call that out, especially in the political arena right now. So here's what I mean by that. We are the inheritors of a tradition that speaks about the right of conscience, or that speaks about reason, that speaks about the value and worth of human life, all human life. I can feel our Universalists rising in my spirit when I say that. And I think it's really important right now in this country where we are seeing political groups targeting vulnerable communities. Not, I believe, you don't have to agree with me, but not because of their moral values, but because of the impact of harming a community advancing

political goals. Right? We can call this out as a moral evil because of our inherited tradition, because of our understanding of rights and justice. So when our Transgender and non-binary children are being used as political wedges, because more people are likely to come out and vote for conservative issues that have nothing to do with gender rights, we can say not only, of course, our Trans non-binary beloveds are vital to our communities, are sacred, worthy, whole of God. We can say that, but we can also say, "how can you call yourself a representative of the people and spend our children's lives this frivolously?" That is a moral stance. Right? And so as we equip ourselves to talk about our values, this is why I know it is messy and generative and beautiful and forward moving, I am thrilled that we're talking about our shared values right now. Because it equips us differently, to say what must be said, in the political arena. And it equips us individually, right, to stay the course when times are heartbreaking, like they are right now. So bad faith, I think we can talk about it well. I also think, you know, I want to lift again, the relationships I just mentioned, right? So the multiple types of justice communities we have as UUs, and to make sure that we are connected to each other, that we're in dialogue, that we're communicating. Because, right, as as we do that work together, we just promote, we promote justice more effectively. And I want to make sure that I just lift- every time I talk about frontline communities, I think it's easy to forget how many frontline communities are inside of Unitarian Universalism. So of course, I want us to be in coalition with non-UUs. I want us to be listening to those folks who are geographically, and based on a whole range of socio-economic reasons, in the front lines. But I also, you know, I want us to be talking to EQUAl Access, and all our needs around disability and what we already know. I want us to be talking to our young adults, I want us to be talking to TRUUsT, and to DRUUMM and BLUU. And we have this incredible blessing of frontline leaders of all kinds, who have stayed the course with us, because of their love for this faith. So, relational within, relational across justice issues, relational nationally, and being I want to say facile, that's not the word I mean. I want it to be easy for us to use our values language in multiple settings, to say what most needs to be said.

Rev. KC Slack 18:28

Thank you, I am struggling, dangerous microphone. You know, some of us don't use the Madonna mics with any kind of frequency. So moving on from there, and kind of what you were just saying really leads into the next question very easily. What kind of internal work do we have to do to be able to make these statements to be as effective as we'd like to be, but not just effective, as grounded as we'd like to be?

Rev. Dr. Sofia Betancourt 18:55

Yeah. Can I just ask how many of you have been tired in the last three years? [Laughter] Yeah, if you're online and can't see all the hands it was it's almost every hand, I don't want to speak for everyone. It was almost every hand. Some of it is you know, religious community. intentional community, beloved community is also about being able to show up every day, living our lives together, right, more effectively unwell. I don't really mean effectively. I mean, we being resourced in the ways we need, being nourished in the ways we need to be the people we want to be, as we live our everyday lives. So I just said this, but it's worth saying, again, I think it is so valuable that we are doing this work around Article II. How are we expressing who we are in the world? What does that look like? I realize it's easy to say in the middle, where we still have all sorts of time and labor and work to do around what that looks like in the end, but I think we need to be sure of ourselves and what we hold collectively, which is not everything and that's good. Before we go in the world and try to be witnessing to the work that is so vital. But the thing I most want to say here is humility. Humility. We don't actually teach that we're on a

journey to some kind of perfection. I know some of us might believe that. But this is not a core teaching of Unitarian Universalism. I think that we're here to struggle together as humans, right? To figure it out, to really get it wrong, and to stay in relationship and to do better. And so one of the things I don't find very often in social justice spheres, and in the work of equity is, like, the expectation that it's okay when you get it wrong. I say a lot in my classrooms, I never expect people to just I don't know, practice and practice and then be perfect in the world. It's just not possible. To me, the difference isn't do you make mistakes? It's what do you do once you have made a mistake? And I think that for us, as UUs, we have some internal work to do around humility. Not that we aren't humble enough, but I think we're not always as comfortable in the public square saying, here's how we really got this wrong. Here's what we learned. And here's why we're here today anyway, right, to model that we stay in the difficult work, even when it's gone terribly awry. You know, I just use this example about our Transgender youth, but I'm thinking about our leaders. Like, I am so proud as a Unitarian Universalist that we authorize Trans and non-binary religious leaders of all kinds, and wow, have we gotten it wrong, beloveds. We've gotten it wrong. And what would it mean to show up and say, well, we've really gotten this wrong, and here's what we've learned and what we're learning, here's what we're committed to, please maybe hold us accountable to those commitments? Right? So I think there is something about humility that we can really model that is vital. And this is true across a range. It's true across a range of identities. It's true across a range of impacted communities. And it's true across a range of histories, right? When we talk about privilege in the public square in our communities, it is so uncomfortable. If you think about being in relationship with anyone who is trying to learn more about inherited unearned privilege, right? Where we might not say you did this, you, individually, you in this embodiment.

Rev. KC Slack 22:12

Mmhmm

Rev. Dr. Sofia Betancourt 22:12

No. We're saying wow, Unitarian Universalists used to promote eugenics. We did. The kernels of that are still in the word progressive that we still use. So I just saw on Facebook, a statement that's been touring, that the person who designed the SATs finally admitted in the 1930s, that they were designed as a eugenics project, right? That he was concerned that there were too many BIPOC folk entering the American educational- so this is really gross. So racism. I want to pause and just let people mute if they need to, right? But what he was afraid that having too many BIPOC students would lower the overall intellect of the American population. So the SATs were designed to promote white students. They were also designed to promote students in certain economic classes, which is not in this thing I've seen bouncing around. But wouldn't it be powerful if we knew that and we knew our own history with eugenics, including the fact that Clarence Skinner, one of our ministers who promoted this idea that you could, forgive me, like breed the human population to be better than it was? Terrible. That on his deathbed, he really regretted having promoted those teachings. What if we showed up in the public square around access to education, and said, as a people who have this in our history, we are particularly called to call out eugenics where we still see it in the world, right? All the research tells us that standardized testing is still absolutely nothing more than a filter to keep certain people out. Right? We could say this, not just about eugenics, we've done some of this work around the Doctrine of Discovery. As an environmental ethicist, I always want us to do this around the Americanist environmental canon, right? We are the proud inheritors of Emerson, and Thoreau, and there are some

beautiful teachings there, some beautiful teachings from our transcendentalists. And we are uniquely suited to be the people who say, we cannot do climate justice work, as if the Earth needs saving, with no human justice issues involved. Right? The pristine wilderness that some of our beloved thinkers wrote about is not the world we live in. We are here for an intersection analysis of environmental justice. Right? So where is our history? How do we learn to own mistakes and to talk about them with agency, with courage, with intentionality? How are we willing to be held accountable? So humility is actually kind of my overarching theme on this, and I think we've done a lot of this work. When I think about the last 25 years of Unitarian Universalism, I've seen a remarkable change. Right? So we are equipping ourselves, we are resourcing ourselves, and there is always, always, always work to do.

Rev. KC Slack 25:01

Thank you. So our last question in this section, and you've touched on this already, but can you expand on where you see opportunities for us to build coalition, and how you see the role of the president (and your specific presidency) as working to build coalition?

Rev. Dr. Sofia Betancourt 25:19

Thank you. Such an important question and particularly right now. I mean, I think that UUs are actually beautifully in coalition, and just imagine your own congregations, your own work situations, your own families, I think re-strengthening connections, right? As we move out of the quarantine phase of this pandemic, a lot of our relationships need tending, they need care. So it's time to be reaching out, right, into our interfaith partnerships, it's time to be reaching out to our political allies. And I've already begun some of that work, and I know that a lot of that good work is already happening. But I think being mindful of post-pandemic, and I don't believe in that, let me say that differently, in post-quarantine phase of pandemic, right? Reemergence. Combating the distance that we've really had from one another, even though we've done such powerful work, but we've been doing communal care. Beautiful, communal care work. We have been taking care of each other. We've been taking care of people in our neighborhoods and regions and areas. And so what does it mean to come back into the very urgent ideological struggles that we're experiencing right now? And so I know that it's important for a president to often be a front-facing representation of our values, and I really believe in that. I am excited, you know, some of the things are about identity and relationship. The Disciples of Christ have a black woman president right now. The United Church of Christ is about to elect and call a Jamaican woman, their first president, certainly their first black woman president, into serving as their president and general minister. So there's a part of me that's really excited to caucus with black women leaders, I'm not going to lie. But part of it also being in D.C., I've gotten to work with the Washington National Cathedral. That was a real privilege, doing more political connection work. So for me, interfaith connections, political connections, but also, you know, prioritizing that time in the work of the national staff, prioritizing that access, those relationships, feel very vital to me. This is about empowering multiple voices. It's about empowering multiple voices. And I know that this theme of reemergence means that we need to be sometimes physically, sometimes electronically, digitally. We need to be present, again, in more spaces than we've been able to be. And I've been very encouraged already. You know, just being a sole candidate, to be the next president of the UUA means people are already approaching me about relationship. And so that has been really, that is a source of hope for me. And real possibility. And you haven't asked this, but you know, I live in the D.C. area, and I plan to stay here. So you will see me bouncing back and forth between Boston and this area, but it puts us in a

different place. We haven't had a Washington office for a while. Our presence has been different. And so I think that raising those possibilities again, and just re-energizing relationships feel vital. Yeah.

Rev. KC Slack 28:18

Thank you.

Rev. Dr. Sofia Betancourt 28:19

Thank you.

Rev. KC Slack 28:21

So, we're gonna move into our Questions from the Audience period. If you are in the room, and you would like to ask a question, we have two microphones and folks to assist you there. And if you are on Zoom, Amy is currently bringing to me your words. [Laughing] Thank you so much, Amy. And I will, I will read these questions as they appear, but if there's someone at the microphone, I will prioritize that. Okay. So the first question is from Carrie - I'm gonna mispronounce this and I apologize - Lucien from WSUU in Seattle, Washington, who says, "Your delegates guide for GA make suggestions congregations might adopt to make serving as a delegate more accessible and equitable. Though this may be outside the president's job description, would you personally also support the UUA lengthening the window after each GA business session for delegates to listen and vote, and also allow delegates from the same congregation to make proxy votes if a fellow delegate needs to miss a business session?"

Rev. Dr. Sofia Betancourt 28:40

Thank you, Amy. So great question. Thank you. Certainly, I think these are important questions. I do want to remind us that the way that the business of General Assembly works is under the purview of the UUA Board of Trustees, not the president of the UUA. That said, that said I think we are still learning together how to do multi-platform General Assembly, how to do virtual business sessions. I am thrilled as someone who has been in general assemblies for a very long time, the level of participation change that we've seen, as we get better at using our online tools and resources to get a higher participation of delegates, you know, you could even say, "Why did you put out a delegate guide if this is not the work of the presidency?" But this is really about a desire to hear more UU voices. That place of our democratic process of really wanting representation from our congregations, is vital. So the specifics about holding votes open longer, I don't think is in my purview. But I will say that we've seen real improvement, right, from the yellow cards we were used to for a long time where votes were immediate and on the floor. And too often our delegates were really chosen based on their ability to travel, rather than their perspectives or the investment of the congregation in their representation. I have seen particularly the votes that feel more consequential, often having an entire day for voting to occur. And we'll see some of that at General Assembly this year. So I certainly am in support of greater access. And I am not looking to instruct the Board of Trustees on how to manage the business of the General Assembly.

Rev. KC Slack 31:14

Thank you.

Rev. Dr. Sofia Betancourt 31:14

It's a great question though, thanks.

Rev. KC Slack 31:16

And I'll turn it over now to the person at the microphone. If you would just introduce yourself: name, pronouns, where you're from.

Speaker 2 31:22

Right. My name is Diane Ulius. My pronouns are she and her, and I am a member of this congregation, UUCA, for about the last 20 years. My question has to do with lay leadership and ways to make the most of lay leadership and and what integrate it with ordained leadership and staff. I understand that someone has recently been hired with a title of something like coordinator of lay leadership paths or something. And I wonder if you've had a chance to develop any thoughts about the work of, for example, commissioned lay ministers in the Central East Region, or other kinds of lay leaders who take on roles in their churches and in the UUA in general?

Rev. Dr. Sofia Betancourt 32:17

Good question, Diane. Thank you so much. Does either do any of the staff members in the room remember this exact title? I know this is a new position around lay leadership support. Not off the top of your head? Yeah, me neither. I'm sorry. Even though we were just in conversation about this, I have to say I'm actually I'm really excited about the work the UUA is doing on this right now. So we're seeing lay leader labs, the production of a whole number of new resources, particularly, I think, acknowledging that there are congregations who are used to having more paid staff, professional staff, and find themselves surprised to be running their congregations themselves. And so I know that we should be investing in commissioned leaders and investing in lay leadership regardless. But I've also seen this real attempt to quickly, right, provide more resources for our communities and congregations, which I think is exactly the right direction. I believe in everyone's ministry. I know that sounds kind of like a pat answer. But it used to be unpopular. [Laughs] It used to be unpopular back in the day to say, you know, everyone who works in a congregation is a professional religious leader, period. Do I think there are differences for ordination and training? Sure. I also think that lay leaders who are commissioned have a different kind of accountability relationship, right, than some of our other lay leaders do. And so all the places where we resource and acknowledge people who have made commitments, right, to be in this kind of leadership role in the congregation, I think, is really powerful. So my absolute intention is to continue the good work that I'm already seeing. And I know that some of it is also really trying to retool, again, post this quarantine phase of the pandemic to talk about what to our congregations most need. It looks different than it did three years ago. It just does. And, and I want to say also that that leadership development, you know, which is something that I've been in at the national level for a long time. So I served on the UUA's Nominating Committee for a whole bunch of years, and then they put me on the Appointments Committee to help those two committees work well, also, for a whole bunch of years. I just stepped down in November from thinking, obvious reasons. But one of the things we've seen over the last 12 to 15 years, that I was a part of identifying national leaders for committees and things like that, is that some of the pathways we used to have into leadership don't exist anymore. Right? The shift to regionalization meant that folks had less ability to get training around leadership in district level work. So we have this kind of gap, like how do we go from congregational life, to regional service to national

service? I think about this, particularly with our youth and young adults. We've just had some fewer opportunities for that kind of leadership development, and I'm seeing them start to rebuild. So I really want to shout out the current staff of the UUA and our current president, because I think they've been investing beautifully in this work. But I want to say, you know, particularly as an Afro-Latinx individual, you know, I think about the Black church. When you come out of a community, where religious life is the only place historically that ever invests in your voice or even the idea that you could lead, I am convinced to my bones, right, that part of our work is actually training each other to lead, to lift our voices, and to make difficult decisions. So, again, for me, this is collaborative, it's relational. And I think we have to continue investing in it. I think we don't fully know yet what all is going to be needed to keep our communities thriving, and to also broaden what those communities can even be or look like. So this is ongoing work. But I think it's really exciting. You know, some of our commissioned lay leaders, some of our loudest voices come out of Starr King School for the Ministry, you know, come out of places where people have been trying to think about leadership differently for a long time. And I think there's some real wisdom in the community that is that is growing.

Rev. KC Slack 36:14

I see someone coming to the mic. I'm going to ask one more question from online, and then we'll go to you. So the next question is from Rev. Dr. Cynthia Landrum, who is the minister of First Parish Church of Stow and Acton, Stowe, Massachusetts. The question is: Many people think our youth program has not been as strong nationally since the disbanding of YRUU, and the in the pandemic quarantine online-only time, regional and national youth programming has struggled. What is your vision for strengthening youth empowerment and youth programming?

Rev. Dr. Sofia Betancourt 36:44

Thank you, Rev. Landrum. That's a great question. I agree. And this is another one of these places where I'm not trying to dodge your question, where I think we don't fully know yet. So I have seen not just our national programs, but our congregational programs really struggling. Our religious education programs are struggling our support for youth and young adults. You know, I don't like the word struggling, but I think we haven't figured out yet what folks need now. And that a lot of the wisdom we had about this doesn't apply in the same way now. So for me again, this is you know, I had the privilege of being in Boston with our senior staff for a day in December, and I was hearing some really exciting new plans about emerging adult support, about support for youth and faith formation. And so I think there's some really good things coming out of the national staff that I would encourage us to keep an eye out for. And I want to say, you know, my colleague, the Rev. Sierra-Marie Gerfao says that we have to take small risks with great courage right now. This is the try new things because we actually don't know what it looks like right now to support families well, to support youth well, to support young adults well. But also, I know that we have some immense resources coming around even hearing the stories that we've maybe forgotten. Right? So I know there is a documentary being filmed right now about YRUU. I'm looking at my spouse giggling in the back because they were just interviewed for that. But you know, the rich stories, the histories, hearing how the program's we've already had, you know? Can we also go back also to AYS? Like how did this form you? What was vital about it? What's missing? And can we not assume that youth and young adults in 2023 need what youth and young adults needed 10 and 20 and 30 years ago, either? This is that humility thing again. So I think we need

to continue listening. I'm really hopeful about the new resources that are coming out. And I think we're going to surprise ourselves as we learn more about what's needed and community going forward.

Rev. KC Slack 38:49

Yeah. We have another question at the microphone. Name pronouns, where you're from, and then ask the question.

38:57

I'm Dino Drury, from Cedar Lane. I've gone to a dozen or more GAs. And I have a related question, because I was concerned we weren't saying anything about youth, which is a huge failing. Another issue is declining membership. So what do you anticipate doing to do a better job of outreach and publicity and growth within the denomination, such as holding on to more of our youth, getting getting our word out, so that people who share our theology find their way to our congregations? And, it's sort of related question, is how do we handle this ecumenical thing where on some issues that are important to a lot of people such as migrants, we may find ourselves working with people who are very opposed to our UU values, such as on on women's right to choose? How do we successfully and credibly navigate that dilemma? Thank you.

Rev. Dr. Sofia Betancourt 40:34

Thanks, there are a couple of questions in there. So I'm going to try to tease them out a little bit. I do want to tell you all that there is a forum whose main theme, right, is around youth, young adults in religious education. So that is coming. We would be very remiss to not be to not be discussing that subject. You know, I've seen us as UUs do a whole bunch of different kinds of outreach over the years. And what I've loved about those efforts is that they've often crossed congregations and communities, they've been collaborative, they've tried to identify kind of who we think our demographic is. And that's where we start to get into a little bit of trouble, I want to say, so for me, outreach is actually about mission. Right? It is, I think, yes. It's important, of course. That story: I was a UU for 10 years, I didn't know it. I mean, we've all heard this, I think a lot of us have felt this, this is true to who we are. I don't want to let that go. Can we be less shy about Unitarian Universalism? Truly. And I think we've seen some really beautiful work done by our recent presidents about showing up in the public square, about really communicating our values. But I think also that there is this question of, who are we serving? What assumptions do we make about who Unitarian Universalism is for? And what impact is that having on our communities and congregations? And so this is the mission question for me, you know, do you understand yourself in the community that you're in? What are the needs of that community? How is your congregation or entrepreneurial ministry or, you know, emerging community, whatever it is involved and engaged with the actual people who are around you? I think that's vital. And I think it's vital for Unitarian Universalism as well. And this gets to the really, I think you're asking a coalition question. Please forgive me if that is a mis-assumption. So to take your example, if we're talking about people who are impacted, right, by reproductive justice, people who have the ability to carry a child, people have the ability to plan around reproduction in those ways, and are being targeted right now. Just are. This is not just women, right, in this country. We have learned, I think successfully over time, that being in partnership with groups who may not agree with us on all of our values, but who can show up in particular ways around the justice issue is much more effective than trying to organize on our own. One of the examples that I use in my classes on environmental ethics is we credit evangelical

Christians with saving the Endangered Species Act. Right? And I think there are ways that UUs might build some of those coalitions around environmental justice, particularly around legalities, and we might not around reproductive justice, and that's okay. Right? What does it mean to partner well, I think really matters. But this again, comes back to me, comes back to for me, too, are we well resourced to discuss our values in the world? You know, are we listening to our religious educators who create phenomenal curricula, to help us express our lived experiences to talk about our stories and our histories to really show up for the work of justice? Are we sharing with one another some of those risks that we've taken that have borne fruit that have turned out well? I think there is a lot so early in the presidency to me is about listening. Right? It's a if you think back to it, like our emergent congregation, kind of things where we would celebrate really good work that happened in a in a congregation or community and hopefully share resources, and learn from them. For me, that's a piece of the early work. But really, how do we, again, do what our beloved mentor Ibrahim Baba used to call for holy boldness from UUs? Or he was like, "stop apologizing for who you are in the world. Show up with this radical excitement about what your values call for." And I think we need to do more of that. You know, whether that looks like the kind of billboards we used to put on highways? I'm not sure that it does. I think that we need to respond to how people who are likely to partner with us communicate today. Right? And that some of that still requires research from us. And some of it is continuing to do the work that we started to invest in over these last three years. And we still don't quite know enough about what the impact is, of those choices.

Rev. KC Slack 44:57

Thank you.

Rev. Dr. Sofia Betancourt 44:58

Yeah.

Rev. KC Slack 44:58

In the interest of time I'm going to condense a few questions into one question.

Rev. Dr. Sofia Betancourt 45:03

Sure.

Rev. KC Slack 45:04

Because I think I think it's important for you to get an opportunity to answer this question, which I will summarize as: Can you speak to the value of democracy and the reality of being a single candidate?

Rev. Dr. Sofia Betancourt 45:17

Yeah. Thank you. So the value of democracy, my goodness, I mean, I am an ethicist so it's like, to my bones, it is just an absolute. Right? We are guided by the democratic process. This has always been central to our faith. I know that that language of democracy has reentered Article II, which I think is right, I think it's right for us to name boldly how important this is. I have had some questions recently, because it is so central to who we are, as we've been questioning whether UUs still believe in democracy. I mean, to me, it is a it is a stunning question because it's so central to who we are and how we have been. And I think it's fair to ask this question about what it means for me to be a single

candidate. Right? Our bylaws call for there to be, nominated by our search committee, at least two nominees. Right? I cannot speak to what their process was, I was not in the room. I do know that the other potential nominee took this issue very seriously. We were in conversation with one another. Right? And that when we honor, we have to honor the agency of our beloveds in this process. So what I want to say is, I think there are good ways to identify leadership that aren't necessarily about the numbers of people that a process results in. Right? I do think that a Unitarian Universalist Association president is different than a congregational minister. But we do know processes, right? That result in going from a pool of candidates, to really asking one person to be in relationship with a community around whether or not that shared ministry makes sense. And I feel like even though we didn't expect to be here, that's where we are as Unitarian Universalists right now around the presidency. But I do think that we had a democratic process. We had a group of UUs who gave two years, I believe, of their countless, countless hours of meetings, who worked in good faith with our applicants, with our candidates, and held to our process as it was given to them. You know, the result is not what we expected. And I think we have to honor them holding to their integrity of what we asked of them, right, which is a certain level of confidentiality, and a certain level of good faith, of holding to our process. But I have to choose to trust to believe that this group utilized the process they were given. Do I think it's important to talk about that process and whether it's working well for us? Absolutely, yes. You know, I would encourage you, I think publicly on my Facebook walls, if you search for my name on Facebook, you will see the article about how the United Church of Christ identified their sole candidate to be their next general minister and president. It's a different process than ours. And it's certainly not the process we used. But I just want to say that we have close kindred traditions, right, who have done this also and done it well. And I think that there are things we can learn from those processes. But to me, Unitarian Universalism is so predicated so founded on democratic principles that it is shocking to me when we question whether that is still a value of ours. I do think it's fair to say, have we lived this value well? How are we going to live it better in the future? But to me, the wedge of abandoning democracy just makes no sense at all.

Rev. KC Slack 48:48

Thank you.

Rev. Dr. Sofia Betancourt 48:48

Yeah.

Rev. KC Slack 48:50

Next question comes from Thomas Pistol of the Durham UU Fellowship, Durham, New Hampshire. Our religion has at times been described as a faith with a strong social justice component. Others describe it as a social justice movement with a faith component on it. How would you describe Unitarian Universalism?

Rev. Dr. Sofia Betancourt 49:08

I would describe Unitarian Universalism as a justice seeking faith that saves lives. That saves lives. But this is one of my favorite questions because in religious studies, there has been this long debate, right? Does theology come first or does ethics come first? As an ethicist, you might guess my respect? No, I'm kidding. Actually. What I love about questions you can tell me Unitarian Universalist, I don't buy that

debate. Theology and ethics are intertwined. Values and justice are intertwined. So there's this big debate right? Does theology inform your ethics meaning, what you believe drives the system of morality on which you base your choices. Does ethics drive theology meaning your system of morality points out when your theology has failed you and there's work to do? And the answer to that is yes to me, right? So as a womanist scholar, we talk about theo-ethics. And we say, what you value, what you believe, informs how you show up in the world, informs the work of justice, informs the decisions you make. And the decisions you make, and the need for justice in your community, should inform what you believe. Right? We are living tradition. So when our ability to invest in justice somehow misses the mark, it's time for us to talk about what we believe. And when we're really struggling, right, it's time for us to talk about whether we found the best expression through our work. So the good news is that I think all of our communities and congregations do this a little bit differently, right? You will get different expressions and different balance points across the way. But I think that we are a justice informed faith. And that there is a difference. And that there's a difference right, in the idea that these two things are in competition with each other. I don't think they are I think we are a people who live our values in the world, who use our reason and our conscience to define those values, and allow that lived experience to shift and change and grow what we believe. And I do hear this and I think usually, this is actually a question about what does my community feel like? Am I feeling like I as a person, in my struggles, am supported by our leaders, I'm supported by the community I've invested in? Is there room for my spiritual growth when I'm tired and weary because of the justice work I've been doing? Is there room for my family to be nurtured? Right? Am I being asked to be more than I was when I arrived here 20 years ago? Right? How am I still growing? Who am I asked to be? This is a religious life and it involves all of that. It is a spectrum. It's a spectrum, from justice and belief. I think that is one of the most powerful things about our faith is that actually, we're expected to change what we believe as we go, and we're expected to be impacted by the people we are in community with, as we learned from what they know, and what they bring.

Rev. KC Slack 52:15

Thank you.

Rev. Dr. Sofia Betancourt 52:15

Yeah.

Rev. KC Slack 52:15

So one of them is from Rev. DC Fortune, who is the minister at the UU Congregation of Susquehanna Valley. And they say: How do we hold accountable and remain in relationship with those in our faith who label our commitment to deep internal and external social justice work as the conspiracy of a woke cabal of young queer BIPOC folk? Another one of those questions is from Edna Trim of the UU Church of Reston, Virginia. How do we deal with the unwillingness of some congregations to make changes and accept the 8th principle? And the final one is from Samuel Prince of the UU Church of Akron, Ohio. It says: Thank you for your words on justice and liberation. As justice is closely aligned with accountability, is there any specific advice you can share now and as our president to equip us that can assist us to move into an effective course of action? There are a number of questions around the topic of accountability.

Rev. Dr. Sofia Betancourt 52:20

Mmhmm.

Rev. KC Slack 52:21

And I'm going to share pieces of three of them in the hopes of arriving at one instead of three questions.

Rev. Dr. Sofia Betancourt 52:29

Beautiful. I'm gonna take notes. Oooh, these are light questions.

Rev. KC Slack 53:26

Yes.

Rev. Dr. Sofia Betancourt 53:26

Okay. I do. You'll be shocked to hear that I do have thoughts on this. And I actually want to start by acknowledging grief. I want to start by acknowledging grief. I think that a lot of the places where we most attack each other over these questions come out of a place of feeling like we don't recognize our faith community anymore. And I don't want to minimize how much that hurts. I just want to acknowledge I don't think we talk about it enough. There's deep grief. There's deep grief. I also think that where we are right now, as the Unitarian Universalist Association is a logical outgrowth of our values. It really is. As someone who has been in the middle of UU congregate congregations, that too, but conversations about the work of justice, the last 25 years I've seen us shift. Paula Cole Jones promised us, bless you, promised us a tipping point. And I remember calling her sometimes and being like Paula. We are far from that tipping point. And she has never wavered in this belief. If you don't know the work of Paula Cole Jones, I'd invite you to join her in her whatever her next endeavor is or training. So I want to say that even with that grief, even with that place of really fearing that we might not recognize our communities anymore, but there's going to be profound loss. We have erred on the side of waiting for everyone to be in agreement for too long, by which I mean this idea that that a few people in a congregation can stop an entire process around justice has caused us real harm. But it comes from love. Right? It comes from profound love. We do not want to leave our beloveds behind. And I think that we sometimes think that Universalism means that everyone has to agree before something happens. And that's actually not the inherited teachings of our faith. Universalism teaches us that everyone has value, that grace isn't earned, meaning it is yours, and that there is always a way back into community. That last piece is where we struggle. It is not, we all have to be of one mind to change who we are, or we all have to be of one mind. You know, I mean, as a not young anymore, but BIPOC queer person who tries to be woke, you know, clearly, I'm going to have a bias here. But actually, what's most important in that place of grief is that this community is always here for you. And we're not going to wait. My silence here is again, acknowledging grief. We're not going to wait until the work of justice that we're called for is comfortable for everyone in our communities. Because what we forget, what we don't notice is the number of people we have lost for decades, from not doing this work as fully as we might have. So to me, there is grief in every direction. And there is accountability. Right? This is a question about accountability. So, you know, I'm sorry, I want to take us back to 1648. I have said that I wish I could have time to fully rewrite the Cambridge platform and theological language that worked for us today. Because it's like the last time I'm going to try, you know, it's gonna be that minute, Sofia, can you

take 10 minutes? No, no, no. {Laughter} No, I have a colleague, a beloved colleague, who's on my mind, who was like delegate, delegate, get someone else to do it. But I want to remind us, right? 1648. We said to one another, it is our responsibility not just to invest in our leaders, not just to invest in what we believe, not just to invest in our communities, but my community is going to know what your community is doing. And when you falter, we're going to come help. We're going to come help. More of this, more of this. We can help hold each other in our grief. We can help with caucuses, we can help with theological resources, we can help with collaborative programming and training and learning, we can help with staying the course in difficult frightening times. But yes, accountability. Yes, accountability. So if our leaders are not living up to the professional code of ethics they agreed to, then we hold them accountable for that work, and it's painful. We don't like losing each other. But this is for the safety and well being of our communities. When our communities don't live up to the covenant we hold currently, collectively between our congregations, hopefully, we show up to be in conversation about that. When we are with one another, out of right relationship, hopefully, our community members sit with us while we try to find a better way. And hopefully the most vulnerable among us have the resources they need, right, for communal care, for resilience to stay the course in beloved community with us because that's what it takes. So I am I am pro-accountability. I am pro don't get me wrong. If our professional ethics aren't working, let's review them again. But we've done that really recently. Right? If our bylaws aren't working, bless the UUA Board of Trustees, bless the Article II Study Commission. Right? Let's talk about it. Let's ask those questions. Let's figure out who we want to be. But we have to be accountable in how we are in community with one another because, beloveds, otherwise it is the same groups that are paying the price again, and again, and again, and some of our failures have been not noticing how many have left us. and not being able to fully express what we've lost as a result. So I believe fervently in Unitarian Universalism. I believe in our theology. I believe in who we are, and can be and part of that is holding everyone accountable so we can be our best selves and actually build, right, the beloved community that we've been talking about for so long. And if you hear emotion in my voice, it is grief over beloveds we've lost in on every side of this question. There is always a path home. That is the promise of Universalism. Doesn't mean we're always going to decide what you want, doesn't mean that one person will always have the best answer. But finding a way to rebuild community to restore relationship, that is who we've committed.

Rev. KC Slack 1:00:11

Yeah, there are more questions in the chat than I could hope to get to in the remaining 10 minutes of this segment. But there are a couple of questions about specific justice issues.

Rev. Dr. Sofia Betancourt 1:00:27

Mmhmm.

Rev. KC Slack 1:00:27

And I will give them to you and you will do what you want with them. One of them is how much you see ways for UUs to address climate change and climate justice at the federal policy level? And the other of them is, do you see the UUA taking a stronger stand against the current apartheid condition imposed on Palestinians? These are from Nadine Spearman, the UU Congregation of Somerset Hills in New Jersey, and Karen Steele of All Souls New York City.

Rev. Dr. Sofia Betancourt 1:00:32

Sure. Thank you. Oh, so I know we have good I know, we have UUs doing good work on both of these topics. So again, this is about, for me, relationship coalition building, listening to one another. I really want to talk about coalition and climate change. You know, we talked about this earlier, we did. But what does it mean to build coalition to make sure that we are supporting policy efforts that are truly the work of climate justice, rather than environmentalism? So if we are talking about the fossil fuel industry, that is wonderful. And I also need us to be talking about predatory dumping of toxic waste, right? Like, how do we make sure that we that we dovetail, that we weave together not just what happens with climate devastation, but also the communities that we consider disposable, and, and use, right, as literal dumping grounds, not just in the United States, although that is vital, but also around the world? Right? And so I know, you know, I had an opportunity to talk with some of our beloveds who are doing good work with Citizens Climate Lobby. I mean, there is there are good coalition's of UUs, working at the federal policy level, and I think it is vital, it's urgent, right, for us to also be partnering the way I know our Organizing Strategy Team is with groups that are doing the work that looks at the intersectional approaches: How is race impacting these questions? How is the economy? You know, how are how is economic injustice impacting these questions? How's gender impacting these and just a range. It is impossible to talk about our earth without talking about a whole range of justice issues, and federal policy that seeks to separate those things, often to move, you know, an agenda in complicated ways. I think it's important for us to be really mindful of that. And we can work in all of those places, but how are we encouraging multiple voices at the table? How are we encouraging multiple issues at the table? And how are we retooling to make sure that that work continues? Apartheid conditions and Palestine? I'm going to say that this is one of the places I know we have UUs working particularly on this issue. And I'm going to say I don't believe we have a strong history of working on these issues. And so this question of how are we hearing one another? Where does this come up in our priorities is something I'm very sensitive to, and challengingly, that question of where is our voice most effective? I would like to hear more about what particular aspect of this challenging justice issue UUs would be most useful in engaging and who are we in relationship with who could help us understand that, not as a projected assumption, but as a call? Right? This is again, how do we follow the leadership of frontline communities and what is actually being asked of us? And I would say this about almost any justice issue, but particularly one where we haven't been as present lately.

Rev. KC Slack 1:03:58

Thank you.

Rev. Dr. Sofia Betancourt 1:03:59

Yeah.

Rev. KC Slack 1:04:00

I think I'm going to leave the questions from the audience there. And we're going to move into our questions from Sofia time.

Rev. Dr. Sofia Betancourt 1:04:07

Thank you.

Rev. KC Slack 1:04:08

So in much the same way as the questions from the audience worked, if you are in the audience here, and you would like to answer one of Sofia's questions, you come up to the microphone, you introduce yourself, you answer the question. If you're online, you send a direct message to Amy, which winds up here on this screen that I am looking at, and I will voice what you have said. I will do even less editorializing in giving your responses than I did in asking your questions.

Rev. Dr. Sofia Betancourt 1:04:37

Thank you. Um, I also just want to say thank you to the Election Campaign Practices Committee. I know we don't usually do this. But one of the things, instead of having three people like last time for the same hour and a half, right, there's one and I think it leaves us a little bit more time and one of the things that I've really been longing for in these recent months is the opportunity to hear from more UUs. I've benefited so greatly from the groups that I get to talk with in some one-on-one conversation. So I'm really grateful in advance for this time and however we do this across across the other forums. You've heard me say this again and again, very much on my mind is, what does it mean for us to be emerging, again, as a community? Right? I'm watching our hard working Board of Trustees talking about how best to have us gather for our annual meeting, how we do that work together well, in relationship? Well, we are really leaning into these questions of how we want to be in community. So a question I have, because I don't hear it as often, is what were some of the most effective offerings that you or your community received from the UUA? I mean, literally, from the national staff, during this time of pandemic? That's a piece of it. And a piece of it is also what are you beginning to learn? Or what are you fully aware that you still need? What is still needful? So this is really about, we are reemerging. We are gathering in in different ways, in shifted ways. What has been most effective that the national staff has offered, especially in these last three years, and what is still needful? What do your congregations need? What do you what would you like me to have in my mind, as I'm in this wide range of conversations around what is most needed in the Association in the coming six years?

Speaker 4 1:06:43

The Rev. Charlotte Layman, I serve Bull Run Unitarian Universalist in Manassas, Virginia. Pronouns, actually prefer my name. Just off the top of my head, my feeling is, is that what I appreciated most as a spiritual leader of a congregation was all of the information and effort by the UUA to keep us up to date on best practices, but also the work of the Office of Church Staff Finances, in all of the ways that they serve our congregations, assisting the volunteers, but supporting also staff and clergy. I think without that, you know, to turn to, I would have had a lot less in terms of resources to to help to guide the congregation during that time. Thank you.

Rev. Dr. Sofia Betancourt 1:07:48

Anything still needed? I'm just reminding about the second half of that question, which was what do you still need? What would be useful in the congregation?

Speaker 4 1:08:03

All of that still. I think sometimes we don't- we're not making use of it in the same way. The urgency is less. But I think it's all still needed. And and I do have to say I really appreciate all the work of the Office

of Church Staff Finances on on re-examining salary structure, and so on and so forth. I don't know that the congregation appreciates it as much as I do. But we'll see. Thank you.

Rev. Dr. Sofia Betancourt 1:08:40

Thank you so much. Thank you so much.

Rev. KC Slack 1:08:44

We have a couple of responses on on the Zoom. First, Audrey McMullin says, "For our small congregation, Worship Web has been a wonderful resource. And also the MMC offers quote unquote free sermons by various ministers." Lisa Napier says, "It was very helpful to have weekly and later monthly lay leadership Zoom calls among the CER UUA. More opportunities to congregate with other leaders is what is still needed." Mary Teslow of the UUA Fellowship of Franklin, North Carolina says, "We are a small rural fellowship that has been lay lead for 50 years. Worship Web has been a blessing as well as UUA-developed services, particularly to connect us with the larger denomination." "Support for multiplatform," says Brian Lewis. Rev. DC Fortune says, "What is most needed and what I would like to see is more attention and systemic support for congregations that are small, particularly those who are in rural or geographically isolated settings, i.e. in the wilds beyond I 495." [Laughter] Rachel Rott of the Palomar UU Fellowship in Vista, California says, "We have appreciated the connective offerings from the UUA staff around how we understand and hold our ministry in the time of pandemic, especially in the early days of that time. But I feel like we have needed and still need is skillful UUA support around conflict resolution, creating behavioral covenant, and navigating conflict in right relationship in our congregations.

Rev. Dr. Sofia Betancourt 1:10:40

I commend the hope for your team to you. Your some great new work coming out. Thank you. These are great, thank you so much. I just want to pause. I know some of us take a minute to gather our thoughts. We all think differently.

Rev. KC Slack 1:11:01

Bruce Epstein from the UUA Fellowship of Poughkeepsie, New York, says, "As a small isolated congregation, here's one more vote for both Worship Web, and the extraordinary support we have received from the Central East Regional staff.

Rev. Dr. Sofia Betancourt 1:11:22

Wonderful, thank you.

Speaker 5 1:11:24

Hi, my name is Barbara Bozell, and I'm a member of this congregation here in Arlington. One of the things that I found most impactful, which was enabled by the multiplatform capacity that we that we were able to stand up was a series of sermons of, of across the DMV, which allowed us to have an idea of how much larger the faith is, and how many partners or how many partners we have in building and sustaining our faith community. I'm not really sure if I can imagine a way you could be more helpful in that, except to make that something that's really encouraged, because it was great to hear the voice of other ministers, and to see the faces of other UUs.

Rev. Dr. Sofia Betancourt 1:12:21

Thank you. I think this was the work of the Potomac partnership, right? I'm looking at my colleague over here. Yes. So I think that the UUA can encourage regional partnering and I think that our regional staff are often doing exactly that. This is one of the things I think, was the one of the greatest outcomes of how we tried to care for one another through the pandemic. Really some beautiful collaboration and sharing across congregations. Thank you for that.

Rev. KC Slack 1:12:47

We have a comment in the chat from anastasia biros, who is a co-chair of the Racial Justice Accountability Ministry of the Southwest Unitarian Universalists in North Royalton, Ohio. "About what is still needed, at least in their area is, how do we really want to show up in the greater community? What presence should we want to have? They are a smaller, around 70 member congregation in Northeast Ohio."

Rev. Dr. Sofia Betancourt 1:13:14

Thank you.

Rev. KC Slack 1:13:15

And from Frankie Hill at the Unitarian Universalist Church in Eugene, Oregon says, "Appreciated the offering offerings around the increased accessibility of GA to participants, organizers, and delegates, and the beloved conversations program. Needed support from the UUA level for congregations steering themselves towards COVID-irresponsible practices such as mask-optional services or in-person only events, which are creating an unjust tiered system that privileges those with less to lose should they contract COVID, and dooms those most at risk to marginalized participation."

Rev. Dr. Sofia Betancourt 1:13:56

Thank you. This question about how we reemerge is so incredibly complicated. I have I my entire family is high risk, so I have deep compassion for this question. And how do we resource each other around continued continued best practices is very serious. I really want to applaud and lift the UUA's continued policy, right, so I'm grateful that you are all masked, it allows me to be unmasked even in my high risk household. And, you know, that policy hasn't changed. And I know congregations are figuring out what works best for them at a local level, but this is a huge justice issue. We talked about this here last Sunday. You know, one of the realities from our UUSC partner is that a lot of our partners don't even have access to vaccines, and there are still people in the United States who can't get vaccinated either. And so you have to hold on to how this is a justice issue and to make sure we are taking all of those factors into account as we make what can feel like impossible decisions in congregational life. Yeah. Thank you Thank you.

Rev. KC Slack 1:15:01

Yeah.

Rev. Dr. Sofia Betancourt 1:15:03

Are we winding up? Oh.

Speaker 6 1:15:06

I'm Rev. Nancy McDonald Ladd, she/her. I serve at River Road UU Congregation. When I think of the height of pandemic days, I think of the ways in which our current president, Susan Frederick-Gray, served as a pastor, to the entire collective body

Rev. Dr. Sofia Betancourt 1:15:23

Yes.

Speaker 6 1:15:23

of Unitarian Universalists. And I think with deep gratitude, that what I'm aware of now and what I think about in terms of what our congregations need, and what the movement needs, is a variety of different roles that we asked the UUA president to play - both that pastor to the collective body of the people, as you have alluded to, before, a resource and leader for the staff team, and a fundraiser and a manager, and the thing that I yearn for perhaps the most, and that I will be honest, makes me just almost giddy at the prospect of your service, we need a, we need a elevated theological discourse. We need talking about theology to not be at the margins of our life together, but at the center of our life together. So when you talked about, very clearly, the links between how we speak of Universalism and the Cambridge Platform, if we can take theology and make it not just something that the minister does on Sunday morning, but that through your role as our president, helps equip all of us to think theologically and thus differently about what our theology demands of our actions.

Rev. Dr. Sofia Betancourt 1:16:42

Thank you so much. Is there anything burning online, or should we shift?

Rev. KC Slack 1:16:47

Nope. Not right now.

Rev. Dr. Sofia Betancourt 1:16:49

Great. Um, you know, I know we're going to have a forum that really focuses on on youth and young adults and religious education. But, you know, I thought I might ask, particularly if parents, are there any parents in the room or parents online? Especially if you have youth are young adults who are currently active, or or were active, it's probably a better way to say that in congregation or community youth and young adult programs? I'd love to hear some of what has changed in terms of what your family understands that it needs right now. This all the things you'd love us to be thinking about. I know that our national staff has been engaging folks in this question, but I would love to hear for myself, what is needed? What would you have us bear in mind? I think I am very aware that as much as there are beautiful, rascally, fierce, UU children in my life, I am not a parent. And so I really would love to hear from some of you. What would you like me to have in mind? What is needed right now? And let me shout out our religious educators who have been working so incredibly hard and doing phenomenal work. And also, I want to acknowledge that this is one of the places where we need some risk-taking where we haven't quite figured out how we're moving forward right now. I will stop talking.

Rev. KC Slack 1:18:11

While people percolate on that, I'll share a couple last answers from the previous conversation. So, Audrey McMullen say, "Our congregation is geographically diverse, so coming together in action, even in worship, is difficult. I would like us to feel more connected to the what the UUA is doing on our behalf. But more to be spiritually encouraged and strengthened. Your remarks today, we're so inspired. I wish our whole group could hear them." Great.

Rev. Dr. Sofia Betancourt 1:18:37

Thank you.

Rev. KC Slack 1:18:38

And Rachel and Bruce Epstein say, "What would be a huge help to us would be increased public exposure to the very existence of Unitarian Universalism as a faith as such awareness is very low in the geographical area where we are struggling to survive."

Rev. Dr. Sofia Betancourt 1:18:55

Thank you. I should also say, wow, if you are a young adult or an emerging adult yourself, I don't mean to imply that only parents would have a perspective [Laughter] on what your needs are. You might be parents yourself. I apologize. I would love to hear from you too. And I want to promise there's no right answer here. I think, I think the silence is actually indicative of where we're wrestling as a community.

Rev. KC Slack 1:19:35

Kim Diana Connolly from UU Amherst, New York, says, "We need to recognize the difference in the lives of our youth and young adults. Their online life is not aligned with a Sunday service focus."

Rev. Dr. Sofia Betancourt 1:19:46

Thank you. Yeah, can we shout out Tanner Linden who just translated that powerful Medium article for us? Thank you, Tanner. He's on the staff of the Church of the Larger Fellowship.

Rev. KC Slack 1:20:11

Rachel Rott says, "My team has felt disconnected from congregational life for years. It has been our UU youth camps that have been the place that they connect with our faith and our values, and they are creating our faith in those spaces. I hope we can find ways to bring that spirit into our congregations."

Rev. Dr. Sofia Betancourt 1:20:30

Beautiful.

Rev. KC Slack 1:20:33

Suzanne Souther, who is a DRE in Florida says, "We need a curriculum for a one-room schoolhouse, with 45 minutes for youth curriculum, and one hour for young adults."

Rev. Dr. Sofia Betancourt 1:20:55

Thank you.

Speaker 7 1:21:07

Hi, my name is Craig Ben, and I'm from the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Fairfax, just a little further west from here. And as you know, as the D.C. suburb congregation, our lifeblood is families, right? Because people come here, they live, they work, and it's been very important. And I was- my children are grown now, so I'm not gonna speak too much about the current reality, although I tried to hang out with the kids to keep that kind of energy in my life. We need to find ways to keep them connected because I've seen pandemic was hard. Some families could Zoom in, and the kids like that, some didn't. But you kind of lost those routines, the youth groups, the things that we're going. We need to, we need to focus on that. And I would also say as we move forward, you said something Sofia, about a few people holding the whole congregation hostage. As we move forward, we've got this is the future of the faith is these young people and these children, not people that look like me. So we need to all learn to embrace that, and listen to them and find opportunities for them to be engaged in the congregation, even if that means things change and it's a little more uncomfortable for those of us. Even if it's a little noisier in the background, even if the music is different, and kind of build in opportunities to engage the children and the youth and the young adults. So.

Rev. Dr. Sofia Betancourt 1:22:21

Thank you. Yeah, our youth and young adults remind us that they are the church of the present, which I think is really important. And yes, this is that same question. Who do we assume Unitarian Universalism is for and what are we willing, right, to have expand and change in our own lives to make that reflective of how how we gather in community? Thank you. Thank you.

Rev. KC Slack 1:22:43

Rachel and Bruce Epstein share, "Our daughter was raised UU and is currently unchurched because, as she puts it, she is turned off by the boomer-centric congregations in the area where she lives." Chanel Gomez says, wait, no, that's wrong. Nancy Sadler of QUUF in Port Townsend, Washington says, "One thing that would help us is to have cyberspace as a Zoom be valued as sacred space. Given that we have, why have our ability to communicate with one another via chat be disabled?" It's a question about how we have run this, and that's mostly for my ability to read anything that's happening. June Southward says, "We need to make a way to make it relevant to young people's lives. We need to reach the quote unquote nones." Nancy Sendler says, "One thing that would help us is to have-" Okay, just that's the same. Sorry. Sometimes I see the same message twice and then I read it twice.

Rev. Dr. Sofia Betancourt 1:23:45

You are great. Thank you.

Rev. KC Slack 1:23:47

And then as another comment from Judith, Sue, and Suzanne, that says, We need to let them know why Unitarian Universalism is good for their lives."

Rev. Dr. Sofia Betancourt 1:23:58

Thank you for all of that. Wow, I want to hear theologies of cyberspace. Wouldn't that be fantastic? But these kinds of questions, can we lean into what we believe about the world as it is about as we remember it being in, you know, can we challenge ourselves to be impacted by how those truths land and have those conversations differently? I want to hear, right, I want to hear why UUism matters to our

youth and young adults and emerging adults who are here and what we're missing when we don't meet those needs well. Thank you for all of these statements. This is really helpful and I, again, I want to just acknowledge here that I think there is a longing again in a whole range of directions, right, to figure out how we can be together well, and to and to really invest in what Unitarian Universalist Unitarian Universalism means across groups and identities and lived experiences and everything else. And I don't want to be the same UU I will I was before and I want my Unitarian Universalism to be changed by the people around me so I am so grateful to all of you for these pieces. I don't know if that clock is right. So I'm-

Rev. KC Slack 1:25:10

The clock is right. And so I there's one last comment in the chat and then we will wrap up and go to reception time. So Rev. Denise Gouch is the minister at the Greater Nashville UU Congregation in Tennessee. The parent of two young adults says, "My partner and I want most for our children is that they not lose hope. Do not become cynical in the face of all of what is."

Rev. Dr. Sofia Betancourt 1:25:37

Oh, can I say something about that?

Rev. KC Slack 1:25:39

Yes, you can.

Rev. Dr. Sofia Betancourt 1:25:41

You know, I think it's beautiful that we center hope, culturally. I have to say culturally, 'cause I can hear my UUA historians in my in my mind. That that we center hope culturally as something that we offer one another in religious life and in in, in our celebrations, and in our worship. I talk a lot about hope as a discipline. And I think it really matters in times like this, you know, to think about the ways that that hope- This is hard to say, right? I'm an environmental ethicist. You might imagine that the number one thing my students say to me at the end of any class is how are we supposed to hold on to hope with all the- Rev. Slack's nodding, I think you have asked me this very question in the classroom? Yes. How are we supposed to hold on to hope right with all of this. And my response is always hope is a discipline. And what I mean by that is that I don't think there is some good mood that we are looking for, you know, we minimize hope. And I get it. It comes from a place of longing. But what does it mean, instead, to live as if the way that we move through the world still matters? And that to me, does not mean that all will be well, that we will save the planet, right? It matters to me that we don't lose our humanity along the way. So we show up as if we are bound by a hope. Right? Our movement says there is another way. Our movement believes in the inherent goodness of humanity, even given everything we know about human history, because it helps us to show up as who we most want to be in the world. So I also, I also pray that your teens hold on to their own hope. And I hope they will share some of that with us so our understanding of what it means to live every day, choosing possibility, so we continue to live our values out in the world can be expanded and expansive, and nurture us especially in these times. And I want to say lastly that this is a time to re-resource ourselves. Right? We drew down some beautiful stockpiled goodness and love and connection and resource over these three years. And as we come back into community and new questioning, ongoing ways, I hope that we're going to be reinvesting, right, the best of who we are so that as we face - I talked about this - as we

face the unknown together, we're revitalizing what will carry us through in these coming years. I love you all. Thank you for participating in this conversation. I am so grateful. [Applause] Thank you.

Rev. KC Slack 1:28:28

Thank you all so much and as we conceptually extinguish our never-actually-lit chalice, [Laughter] I invite you to just hold in your mind something from today that was meaningful for you. Thank you. For those who are present, there will be reception time, I believe across the hall. And for those online, thank you so much for being here, for participating, for bearing with me as I sometimes read your messages twice or not at all. Thank you so much for your participation. Your participation is an important part of our faith together. Thank you.