



JUNE 2024

*Widening the Circle of  
Concern 2024 UUA  
Implementation Report*

Submitted by UUA Staff

# A Roadmap for Unitarian Universalism - *Widening the Circle of Concern*

In the spirit of continuous growth and collective transformation, the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) presents the 2024 Widening the Circle of Concern Implementation Report. This document is a testament to our unwavering commitment to inclusivity, equity, and the dismantling of systemic barriers that impede the full realization of our shared principles. Over the past years, we have embarked on a profound journey, guided by the recommendations of the Commission on Institutional Change (COIC), to engage in introspection and reform our practices, ensuring they reflect the diverse tapestry of humanity that constitutes our faith community.

As we navigate the complexities of our times, the need for such introspection has only become more acute. The global landscape is rapidly evolving, and with it the challenges we face as a community committed to justice, love, and a deep respect for the interdependent web of all existence. This 2024 report not only highlights the strides we have made but also lays bare the work that remains. It is a clarion call to action, urging us to deepen our engagement and accelerate our efforts towards creating a faith community where every person is valued.

The UUA Board of Trustees established the Commission on Institutional Change in 2017 to conduct an audit of the workings of power, structural racism, and white supremacy culture within the UUA. Over three years, the Commission engaged thousands of UUs and presented its final report, "Widening the Circle of Concern (WCC)," at the 2020 General Assembly.

The Widening the Circle of Concern report was developed from a mosaic of stories and experiences. Through its introspective process, we have gained invaluable insights into the structural inequities that persist within our association and are reminded that the work of widening the circle is ongoing and ever-evolving.

This implementation report reflects our collective commitment to this sacred task, highlighting specific projects and areas of further discernment. We invite you to engage with this report's content and join us in the ongoing work of building a more just, compassionate, and inclusive world. Together, we continue to widen the circle of concern, embracing the richness of diversity as we journey towards a future where every individual can thrive in the fullness of their being.

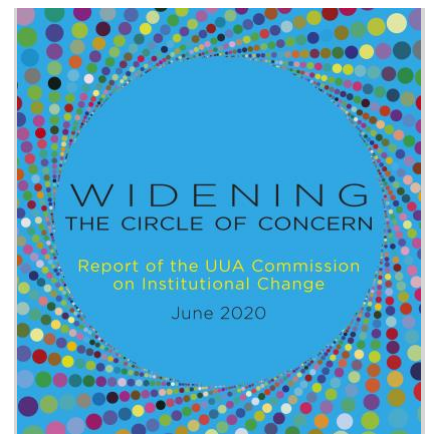
## HOW THE UUA IS IMPLEMENTING THE WCC REPORT

The UUA has taken a multi-year, responsive approach to implementing the recommendations from the Widening the Circle of Concern report. Rather than a single, static implementation plan, we have developed a flexible five-stage framework that allows for reassessing and adapting projects and timelines as needed to maximize impact.

In the first year after the report's release, the UUA focused on engaging all staff in reviewing the report, identifying relevant existing projects, and publishing the 2021 Implementation Plan. The following years involved the UUA analyzing gaps in the initial plan, leading to the Mosaic Anti-Racism Programs & Frameworks working group before issuing the 2022 Implementation Plan.

This is now the fourth annual update, structured with separate sections for each UUA mission area detailing the values, goals, current projects, featured initiatives, and areas needing further development.

The report also includes a titles of all the UUA's projects and initiatives connect back to the 36 specific recommendations in the original Widening the Circle report. This demonstrates our resolve to embed those recommendations fully into every facet of the UUA's mission and operations through this multi-year, adaptable implementation process.



The UUA has taken a multi-year, responsive approach to implementing the recommendations from the Widening the Circle of Concern report. Rather than a **Get the report:** The *Widening the Circle of Concern* report is available for all Unitarian Universalists to read. It is available for purchase as a [book](#), [e-book](#), or for free on [uua.org](http://uua.org) by visiting [uua.org/coic-report](http://uua.org/coic-report).

### Engaging the Report – 2024 Administrative Priorities

#### Investing in Leadership Capacity

The UUA Board approved a \$1.28 million investment over three years to support the new presidency of Rev. Dr. Sofía Betancourt. This funding would come from the FY22 operating surplus and allow for critical investments in leadership capacity during this transition period.

A major part of the proposal created a new Vice President for Programs and Ministries position to expand executive capacity. This role takes on oversight of core mission areas previously under the Executive Vice President (EVP), allowing for more balanced

responsibilities. The EVP role had become overtaxed with 11 direct reports and supporting transitions, creating organizational risk. Adding a VP level position dedicated to ministries and programs enables more focused leadership attention in these areas.

The remaining funds would cover an additional administrator for the expanded executive team, potential staff role adjustments, and consulting needs. This investment aims to model shared leadership in line with the Commission on Institutional Change report. It allows the UUA to pursue key priorities, relieve staffing bottlenecks, better support staff during transitions, and engage the major adaptive challenges facing the Association in this critical first phase of the new presidency.

### **Transformative Healing and Trust Building Amongst UUA Staff**

The Transformative Healing and Trust Building (THTB) project was initiated in August 2022. After noticing themes of conflict, tension, and distrust among staff through relational conversations, the UUA brought in outside consultants to co-lead the project alongside the internal workplace equity team. In an initial exploratory Phase 0, the consultants gathered preliminary information and offered trust frameworks to staff.

Phase 1, from February to July 2023, involved a comprehensive staff survey on experiences of trust, harm, and repair that was integrated into the regular HR Needs Assessment. With over 90% of current staff participating, the survey data provided a broad quantitative picture identifying groups having distinct positive, negative, or neutral experiences, though lacking nuanced details behind those experiences.

This past year has focused on Phase 2, the consultants have conducted follow-up interviews to gain a more nuanced understanding of the experiences contributing to conflict, tension, and distrust among UUA and Beacon Press staff. This phase was prompted by the broad data from Phase 1's staff survey, which identified several groups having statistically significant unique experiences related to trust, harm, and repair, but lacked specifics on what those experiences entailed.

The consultants interviewed members of any groups flagged in the survey data as having distinct positive, negative, or neutral experiences in order to explore the nuances behind the numbers. Richly detailed qualitative data was gathered through these conversations to complement the quantitative survey findings.

This allowed the consultants to develop a much fuller picture of the factors shaping staff's sense of trust, harm, and prospects for repair within the UUA/Beacon workplace culture and



systems. The interviews illuminated the lived realities behind the survey data for groups having markedly different experiences from their colleagues.

With a deepened understanding of the interpersonal dynamics, systemic issues, and areas of acute harm or mistrust within the organization, the consultants are now providing recommendations for Phase 3 interventions. These may include mediation, coaching, accountability processes, training, and policy guidance - all aimed at addressing specific concerns that emerged while cultivating an organizational culture of meaningful accountability and transformative healing.



## Equip Congregations and Communities

The UUA equips congregations and communities for vital ministry to create an ever-widening sense of belonging where no one is outside the circle of love. This means congregations that are:

- **Grounded** in their theological commitments to anti-racism and in covenantal relationships for accountability;

- **Embodied**, practicing anti-racist ministry and leadership, in worship and faith development as well as in the workplace, committees and administration; and
- **Inclusive**, welcoming and meaningful for people of all races, genders, and abilities, and through all stages of life, from childhood through older adulthood. This also means supporting communities across our congregations, such as regional and national youth communities, or identity-based groups like DRUUMM and EqUUal Access.

## Spotlight

The Congregational Accountability in Ministry Search policy (also known as 'Special Care' policy), centers on congregational accountability during ministerial transitions. It requires UUA staff to assess a congregation's needs, context, and history after the ending of a ministry partnership. For many years, after conflicted ministry endings, ministers have been required to engage a UUA hold or review process, which sometimes includes professional development or personal work, before engaging their next ministry searches.

The UUA policy of reviewing the congregation's needs, context, and history, offering support, and recommending an appropriate type of search before initiating a ministerial search adds mutual congregational accountability to the search process. By pausing to reflect with congregational leaders at the end of ministries, especially those which ended in conflict, before rushing into ministry searches, the UUA Congregational Life staff team hopes to support congregational leaders in making decisions that will yield sustainable, vital future ministry matches.

Based on this assessment, Congregational Life staff can provide recommendations and support to increase the chances of a successful next ministry match. For congregations exhibiting serious conflict, dysfunction or harmful past ministries, UUA staff may recommend a specific type of transitional ministry (contract, interim, developmental) before supporting a settled search. Staff may also review congregations' search profiles to ensure transparency about challenges and may require certain ministerial qualifications be listed.

Support is offered through coaching, training, conflict engagement processes, etc. both before and after the next ministry begins. Contract negotiation assistance may be provided to establish beneficial terms from the start. The goal is to disrupt dysfunctional patterns and set up congregations and ministers for sustainable, vital partnerships through accountability and customized transitional work.

<b>EQUIP CONGREGATIONS AND COMMUNITIES - AREAS OF IMPLEMENTATION</b>
<b>Lay Leadership Development</b> - Widening the Welcome: Multicultural Welcome Workshop, Spiritual Leadership for Culture Change
<b>Welcoming Congregations</b> - Welcoming Congregations
<b>Helping Small Congregations Chart Their Future</b> - Emerging Congregation Status Project (MidAmerica Region), Small and Mighty Event Series
<b>Young Adult Ministry Programs</b> – The Emerging Adult Ministry (TEAM), Young Adult Revival Network Support, Deeper Joy (youth program)
<b>Hope for Us Conflict Engagement Team</b> - Hope for Us Conflict Engagement Team
<b>Ministerial Transitions</b> - Break Barriers Build Beliefs / Bias in Ministry, Transitions Transformation Project, AR/AO/MC Search Committee Support Groups, Special Care Congregations Program
<b>Anti-Racism Resources and Framework</b> - The Mosaic Hub, Mosaic Lifespan Anti-racism Curriculum Series, Learning & Practice Communities
<b>Publications &amp; Media</b> - Incantations for Rest audiobook
<b>Data Systems for Identity Information on Religious Professionals</b> - Employee Census of Plan Employers to expand access and participation in UU Retirement Plan
<b>Wealth and Reparations</b> - UUA Health Plan: Identity-based Health Impacts, UU Organization Retirement Plan, Congregational Compensation Program Evolution
<b>Resources, Workshops, and Trainings</b> - Intentionally Anti-Racist Our Whole Lives Sexuality Education, Congregations as Employers: Proactive Support, Tapestry of Faith Review, WorshipWeb Library & Collections, Virtual Hymnal, Worship for Transformation online worship class
<b>Innovative Ministry</b> - New Communities Partnerships Fund
<b>Identity Based Community Support</b> – UPLIFT Trans/Nonbinary Monthly Virtual Gathering, EqUual Access Support and Collaboration, DRUUMM Support and Collaboration

*Many categories span more than one mission area.*

## AREAS TO PLAN FOR IN THE COMING YEARS

- Highlight best practices, consider award and recognition programs, that support the ethos of commitment and accountability.



## Support and Train Leaders

The UUA supports and trains leaders, both lay and professional, for ministry that is:

- **Relational** - affirming the wholeness of the people they serve, across cultures and experiences, including engaging in productive conflict;
- **Adaptive** - leading in inclusive and innovative ways, able to navigate challenges our communities face; and
- **Equitable and sustainable** - especially for leaders from the margins, with a pathway for the next generation.

### Spotlight

The New Ministers Seminar (NMS) is a six-month program designed to support ministers in their first and second years of ministry. Ministers attend monthly facilitated sessions led by Rev. Marta I. Valentín and the Center for Courage and Renewal facilitators (CCR), focusing on skills from Parker Palmer's Touchstones work. Beginning in 2024/2025 the adapted



Touchstones version “Being Touchstones” by African American author and CCR Facilitator, Sherry Watt will be used going forward. These sessions provide an intentional habit of setting aside time for renewal within their early ministry careers.

The monthly sessions allow ministers from various ministry types to meet, develop community, and build collegial relationships across different ministerial roles. After the initial six months, ministers have the opportunity to continue meeting monthly in unfacilitated but supported small groups. Many of these groups have continued for years, fostering ongoing renewal based on the shared experiences. The program schedule has been adjusted to include more community ministers, proving successful in making the NMS more inclusive of diverse ministerial roles.

<b>SUPPORT AND TRAIN LEADERS - AREAS OF IMPLEMENTATION</b>
<b>Direct Support and Start-ups for BIPOC, Trans/NB and Disabled UU Religious Professionals</b> - Finding Our Way Home, Taproot: National BIPOC UU Space, First Year Ministers Seminar, Religious Education Credentialing Program Assessment for Barriers, TRUUsT Retreat
<b>Lay Leadership Development</b> - Lay Leadership in the UUA: Development and Network, Central East Region Drop In Calls for BIPOC UUs, Liberating Practices Learning Community
<b>Community Ministry Support</b> - UU Military Ministry, Community Ministers Retreat
<b>National and Regional Youth Programs</b> - Young Unitarian Universalist Project (YUUP), GA Youth and YA@GA
<b>A Wider Path to Ministry (MFC)</b> - The Ministerial Fellowship Committee (MFC): A Wider Path
<b>Scholarship Programs</b> - Scholarship for BIPOC Seminararians & PhD Scholars, The Office of Lifespan Faith Engagement (LFE) Youth and Young Adult Scholarship Committee, Funding Campaign for Ministries
<b>Resources, Workshops and Trainings</b> - Claiming Our Spiritual Leadership (UU Leadership Institute course), Practices of Spiritual Leadership, Music Leadership Certification Program Course Development, Training Using Principles of Sociocracy (Dynamic Governance) for Congregational Leaders, PF Flyers (Preliminary Fellowshiped), Tending Covenant: Training for Right Relationship Teams
<b>Innovative Ministry</b> - UU Funding Program
<b>Data Systems for Identity Information on Religious Professionals</b> - Integrated Data System Across Programs for Religious Professionals and Leaders, Identity and Consent Data System

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## AREAS TO PLAN FOR IN THE COMING YEARS

- Further reducing barriers and creating alternative pathways to ministry
- Deeper investment in shared ministry and collaborative leadership



## Advance UU Values

The UUA advances UU values in the world in service of justice and liberation, where UUs are:

- **Rooted** in the spiritual and political grounding for our justice work, growing the skills needed for organizing and partnership;
- **Taking Action** – mobilizing in solidarity with and leadership by those impacted by injustice; and
- **Prophetic** – Amplifying the prophetic message and voices of our faith.

## Spotlight

In 2022 Skinner House Books formed its Equity and Accountability Panel, an advisory and review group that aims to ensure Skinner House titles contribute to dismantling white supremacy culture and center the needs and perspectives of historically marginalized communities. The panel has been a part of a two-tiered process in which the Editorial Board reviewed proposals along several criteria, including an equity and accountability assessment to advise UUA Staff on their publishing decisions. The Equity and Accountability Panel then worked with authors after their proposals were accepted to incorporating values of justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion into their manuscripts. This includes:

- Centering underrepresented perspectives, experiences, and voices;
- Examining authors' identities, privileges, and marginalization in relation to the topic; and,
- Identifying areas where authors need support or education on oppression topics.

The panel also reviews manuscripts to ensure they:

- Challenge dominant cultural contexts and avoid reinforcing them uncritically;
- Are useful and revelatory outside the dominant cultural context; and,
- Clarify assumptions about the intended audience and use of "we."

The panel has aided in cultivating accountable relationships between authors, Skinner House staff, and reviewers to apply a counter-oppressive lens throughout the book development process, rather than just late revisions. To further deepen these relationships with authors and ensure that the resulting books manifest Skinner House values of equity and accountability, the Equity and Accountability Panel will be merging with the Editorial Board. In this way the same people who review proposals and make publishing decisions will also journey with the authors as the panel has throughout the editorial process.

ADVANCE UU VALUES IN THE WORLD - AREAS OF IMPLEMENTATION
<b>Publications &amp; Media</b> - UU World New Editorial Process, JUUst Breathe Podcast
<b>International Engagement</b> - Unitarian Universalist Curricula on U/U Imperial Legacies, Study Guide with an International Lens: Widening the Circle of Concern, UU@UN Intergenerational Spring Seminar
<b>Climate Justice</b> - Green Sanctuary Program
<b>Side With Love and Organizing Strategy</b> - Side With Love Action Center, UU the Vote 2024, 30 Days of Love 2024, UPLIFT Action for LGBTQIA+ Gender & Reproductive Justice

## ADVANCE UU VALUES IN THE WORLD - AREAS OF IMPLEMENTATION (continued)

### Skinner House Books Equity and Accountability Panel - Skinner House Books Equity and Accountability Panel

*Many categories span more than one mission area.*

#### GAPS – AREAS TO PLAN FOR IN THE COMING YEARS

- Establish a strong internal communications strategy for the UUA to connect directly with congregational leaders.



## Governance

To manage our faithful institutions, we strive for a system of governance that is grounded in our commitment to democratic process, reflective of our faithful covenant, and effective at guiding the UUA in its mission and impact. Our institutions must fully embody an anti-racist, anti-oppressive and multicultural approach to leadership to achieve these goals. Just as the UUA trains and supports congregational leaders, leadership at the Association level should also be:

- **Relational** – affirming the wholeness of the people they serve, across cultures and experiences, including engaging in productive conflict; accountable to directly impacted communities within and beyond the UUA
- **Adaptive** – leading in inclusive and innovative ways, able to navigate challenges our communities face; and
- **Equitable and Sustainable** – especially for leaders from the margins, with a pathway for the next generation.

<b>GOVERNANCE – AREAS OF IMPLEMENTATION</b>
<b>Resources for Deepening Covenant</b> - Annual Program Fund Engagement
<b>Regional Connections and Integration</b> - Regional Assemblies Planning, Financially Integrate the MidAmerica Region into the UUA
<b>Reimagining General Assembly</b> - Reimagining General Assembly
<b>Streamline and Rethink UUA Governance Structures</b> - Renewing UUA Bylaws
<b>UUA Culture Change</b> - UUA Hiring Practices, UUA Culture Change/Thriving Workplace - IDEAS
<b>Wealth and Reparations</b> - Decolonizing Philanthropy, Unitarian Universalist Common Endowment Fund
<b>Systems of Accountability</b> - Accountability Launch Team

*Many categories span more than one mission area.*

## **AREAS TO PLAN FOR IN THE COMING YEARS**

- Build shared commitments to anti-racism and full inclusion with UU related organizations and UU partner groups.
- Further develop practices and frameworks for reparations within the UUA.
- Expand understanding about congregational polity.





## Theology

Theological reflection is a foundational and critical aspect of Unitarian Universalism, rooted in our covenantal, living tradition. Through theological reflection, we explore our individual and collective experiences and the wisdom of diverse sources to deepen our understanding of the universe and our place in it. This process is not only liberatory, but also essential to our aspiration of creating a beloved community that moves towards justice, compassion, inclusion, and equity.

We recognize that Unitarian Universalism has failed in the past to live up to these values, resulting in harm to marginalized communities. Theological reflection provides the foundation for cultural change and transformation in Unitarian Universalism, leading us towards a more just and equitable society.

The UUA supports theology and theological development through various means, including publishing, leadership development, credentialing, investment in theological education and collaboration with UU seminaries, convening theological conversations, and stewarding the UUA bylaws that formulate the core principles, values, and sources of UU faith. It is through

covenant that we do this work together, calling ourselves to respond to what our faith demands of us in the moment, and advancing the causes of justice, compassion, equity, and liberation within and beyond our Association.

## Spotlight

Meeting the Rest of Ourselves: A Small Group Ministry Series is a seven-session program developed by the New England Region of the UUA. It focuses on exploring Spiritual Leadership and its five practices: Covenanting, Tending Our Tradition, Doing Our Inner Work, Centering in Gifts, and Faithful Risking.

Unlike previous programs targeted at congregational leaders, this series aims to provide a wider range of participants, including youth, with an opportunity to experience the Spiritual Leadership model. Each session includes questions for sharing, as well as activities designed to give participants a direct experience of the Spiritual Leadership practices, grounding them in Unitarian Universalist theology.

The five Spiritual Leadership practices offer ways to develop congregational practices that move away from white supremacy culture, promoting values of justice, pluralism, equity, generosity, interdependence, and transformation. The series centers on profound questions about imagining a just world, claiming personal power for positive change, and accepting powerlessness when appropriate, fostering deep reflection and sharing. The program includes a Facilitator Guide and Participant Handbook to support congregations in offering this Small Group Ministry series effectively.

### THEOLOGY – AREAS OF IMPLEMENTATION

<b>Resources for Deepening Covenant</b> - Spiritual Leadership Small Group Ministry
<b>Article II Study Commission</b> - Article II Study Commission Final Recommendation

*Many categories span more than one mission area.*

### GAPS - AREAS TO PLAN FOR IN THE COMING YEARS

- Clearly articulate a UU theological core that grounds UU commitments to anti-racism, anti-oppression, multiculturalism and full inclusion.