Wider Still

A Companion for Applying a Global Lens to "Widening the Circle of Concern: Report of the UUA Commission on Institutional Change"

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Introduction

The UUA Commission on Institutional Change was appointed in 2017 and charged with auditing the UUA's power structures and analyzing systemic racism and white supremacy culture within it. In 2020 the commission issued its important and powerful report, *Widening the Circle of Concern*, which raises critical observations and recommendations for the UUA about how Unitarian Universalism is practiced in the United States. It is shaped in many ways by voices from the margins of American Unitarian Universalism, particularly voices of Black people, Indigenous people, and people of color.

When we read the report, we saw opportunities to incorporate an international lens into many of the themes it highlighted. We are Americans who formed a joint working group for intentional collaboration in our international U/U work. Each of us has professional and personal experience engaging internationally and interculturally both within and outside Unitarian Universalism. Rev. Sara Ascher served our global faith community as the executive director of the International Council of Unitarians and Universalists, Rev. Roger Bertschausen served as the executive director of the UU Partner Church Council, Rev. Alicia R. Forde served as the director of the UUA's International Office, (now the UUA's Office of Global Connections and Emerging Communities), and Rev. Dr. Fred Muir served as both interim director of the UUA's International Office and interim executive director of the UU Partner Church Council.

In these professional positions, we saw the challenges and the opportunities for learning and reflection among American Unitarian Universalists. While deeply committed to their international partnerships, many Americans involved in international U/U activities unintentionally repeat colonial and racist patterns that prevent true mutuality. The essays collected here, which address each of the report's chapter themes in turn, both celebrate the commission's incredibly diligent work and serve as a companion or response to *Widening the Circle of Concern*. They offer the Unitarian Universalist Association, its member congregations, and their congregants insight into how to live more deeply into our UU values of inclusion, equity, antiracism, and anticolonialism within the context of our global faith.

Our hope is that American UUs will continue to understand ourselves as part of an interdependent global web of Unitarians/Universalists committed to embracing mutuality in relationships and will explore and embrace more ways of acting in accordance with that understanding. Doing so requires the UUA and its member congregations to reckon with our past, examine our misuses of power, and be courageous enough to repair our relationships and seek a different future. We invite you to read this companion with courage and an openness to the reflection it invites.

In the following pages we hope to introduce the reader to some of the history, legacy, and current practices of global engagement within Unitarian/Universalism, and specifically of

North American Unitarian Universalism. We provide recommendations for additional learning and reflection.

We especially encourage individuals and congregations engaged in global partnership and work to form reflection groups to engage the discussion and reflection questions in each section.

By engaging with the discussions and recommendations in this document, it is our hope that the reader might examine and reflect on global relationships while holding the recommendations made by the Commission on Institutional Change. Together we will begin to clarify our past so that we might recommit to personal reflection and institutional change.

The images in this document are either open source or used with permission. We offer our gratitude to Shoshanna Green, Allison Hess, Rob Kipp, Morgan McLean, and Jeff Miller for feedback and support on this project, and to the many people who have engaged in this work with us.

A Note on Terminology

Throughout this text we use a series of different but related terms to refer to our global faith:

- **Unitarian Universalist (UU).** Describes communities that self-identify with the term and that combine the historic traditions of both Unitarianism and Universalism. Most UU communities are in North America or draw their membership predominantly from there, but the term describes a theological identity, not a geographical one.
- **Unitarian/Universalist (U/U).** Many of our global faith communities identify not as Unitarian Universalist but as either Unitarian or Universalist. We use this combined term to be intentionally inclusive of the variety of theological representation within our global community.
- **Free Church (FC).** Describes communities that organize around the principle of having no creed, but do not take on a specific theological identifier.
- **Unitarian/Universalist and Free Church (U/U/FC).** Describes all the communities of our global faith, whether they identify as Unitarian, Universalist, Unitarian Universalist, Free Church, or some combination of these terms. We use this longer phrase to speak of our whole global community, not of any specific congregation, national group, or community, and to include all who claim our liberal faith, no matter what theological identifier they choose.

Theology

By Fredric Muir

Introduction

Widening the Circle of Concern notes that individualism and privilege have shaped and characterized Unitarian Universalist theology. The commissioners write, "Since the consolidation of Unitarians and Universalists, an overemphasis on individual exploration and experience as the primary, if not sole center of religious experience developed.… One of the unintended consequences has been the atomized individualism of the search for truth and meaning without accountability to its impact in communities" (p. 10). With a lack of accountability, UU theology has become detached from and de-centered in the communal mainstream; it's understood as an individualized pursuit. One consequence is a general lack of clarity about theological language. Untethered from the theological lexicon, some UUs have developed and shared a misconception that Unitarian Universalism is a place where you can believe anything you want. For some, this is the meaning of "freedom of belief."

While North American UUs may not require orthodox (meaning "right-thinking") or shared theological understandings, they often do have their own versions, even if only at the personal and/or congregational levels. Examining and reflecting on the UUA's Article II in the UUA Bylaws and Rules ("Purposes and Covenant"), it states "Love is the power that holds us together and is at the center of shared values." This could lead one to a religion with theology, dogma, and creed (though this would probably be adamantly rejected by many, even most, UUs). *Love At the Center* (Skinner House Books, 2024) is a good resource to begin an examination of the challenges posed by the power of love.

But theological and ecclesial language will likely be different, even dramatically different, among many U/Us around the globe. If North American UUs are to engage with our siblings in faith, it is critical that we understand theological language.

Many UUs love engaging in theological discussion and debate yet are often limited by individualized understandings. These may be expressed in pamphlets titled "What I Believe" or perhaps "What We Believe." *Widening the Circle of Concern* suggests that we update our theology as a way "to embrace a more inclusive and accurate history" (p. 14), and to do this, it is vital that we start with the basics and build a foundation. Shared working definitions of theological terms are part of this. The following words are often used interchangeably, with little or no reflection on what they actually mean, yet they can form the foundation of conversation with any person of faith. They and their definitions should shape any theological conversation.

- **Religion** is the orientation a person has toward the sacred.
- **The sacred** is that holy or unshakeable something that gives a person's life meaning and purpose. They might call it love, nature, God, or many other names, or a combination of them.
- **Theology** starts as personal reflection on religion.
- **Dogma** is the tenets of an institutional faith, shaped by theology and often held as prescriptive (and sometimes proscriptive).
- **Creed** is "bite-size" statements of dogma shaped into rehearsed and repeatable (often memorized) faith affirmations.

When engaging with others of a liberal faith identity, it is important that North American UUs be aware of and understand theological language and identity, as well as religious rights and privilege, because although our religion may not have or be shaped by dogma or creed, that of our faith partners outside the US might. Assumptions that we often make about ourselves (though maybe we shouldn't) cannot be made about U/Us internationally.

Illustration

In 1990, several UU ministers from North America visited UUs in the Philippines for the first time. During their visit, they were asked to lecture and facilitate worship several times. It became clear that their version of Unitarian Universalism—and its heritage—was different from that of the Filipinos. While the North American UU ministers identified as UU humanists, all of the Filipino UUs had been shaped by Catholic Christianity, which had informed Filipino culture for four hundred years, and they hoped to learn more about UU liberal Christianity. The day before the visiting ministers left, one of the Filipino church's leaders asked them to convey a message to the UUA and the UUMA: Please stop sending UU humanists! The meaning was clear: The Unitarian Universalist Church of the Philippines wants—needs—ministers and theologians who will support its members in translating Unitarian Universalism into their Filipino cultural-religious context (which is only in part a product of the Enlightenment). Similar needs will likely exist in any liberal faith context outside of North America and Western Europe.

Recommendations

- Dive deep into your religious background and bring to light the ideas and expressions that have shaped and informed you.
- *Widening the Circle* recommends "re-engaging with our theological legacy and its use today" (p. 15). Become familiar with Unitarian Universalism's liberal Christian theology

and church history legacies. Familiarize yourself with the challenges of these legacies and how they might continue to be played out.

- Unitarian Universalism currently locates itself at the edge of multiple traditions, including humanism, Judaism, Earth-centered traditions, liberal Christianity, and others; but this has not always been the case. Where do you place yourself among these traditions? Are you familiar with Unitarian Universalism's origins and history? How might your personal faith journey have shaped how you walk with the diversity of theologies and histories in the UU international community?
- Know how politics, culture, and religion have intertwined and affected each other in the histories of those with whom you interact,
- When visiting with international U/Us, engage in theological conversation with deep listening and no debate.

Discussion Questions

- What assumptions do people from the US (and perhaps other North Americans) bring to our international relationships?
- What theological assumptions do Unitarian Universalists bring to our international engagements?
- Look at this cartoon and discuss it with others. What assumptions do you bring to your interactions with others that might align with your worldview and cast both you and Unitarian Universalism in a positive light?

"That's strange. I remember it differently, in a way that aligns with my world view and casts me in a positive light."

Sofia Warren, *The New Yorker*, May 25, 2020

Governance

By Sara Ascher

Introduction

"When we talk about governance, we are talking about power," says *Widening the Circle of Concern*. "When we talk about power combined with prejudice and the centering of the dominant group and their ways of being and doing, we are talking about oppression" (p. 22). We cannot talk about power without also talking about cultural norms, patterns of communication, and language itself. And if we are going to talk about power and oppression, then we must explore and understand that not all cultures, nor all communities of U/U people, define, express, or create systems of power in the same way. If North American UU congregations and their members wish to build mutual partnerships and to collaborate with U/U and Free Church communities beyond the borders of the US, then a deep consideration of the concept of power and its cultural implications is critical.

Power is ultimately the ability to impact others, shape outcomes, use (and control others' use of) resources, and influence what is considered to have worth and value. Relationships to power and the ability to use it differ dramatically across cultural contexts. Since faith is an expression of our values, it is essential that North American UUs in relationship, partnership, or collaboration with U/U/FC communities abroad consider how we organize our faith communities and who in them has power—and not merely "power" in the abstract, but specifically who has the power to do what, and on whose behalf, and for what goals.

We need to examine different models and structures of power and what they indicate. What makes someone a leader? What is leadership? Who or what is a leader serving, and to whom or what are they accountable? All of these bring us to the topic of decision-making. How are decisions reached? How do leaders gain trust, and to what ends do they use that trust? If North American UU congregations and their members are to successfully engage in collaborative work beyond their own cultural context, they need to explore these questions and resist ranking one model of power as superior to others.

Illustration

Widening the Circle of Concern repeatedly names two interrelated themes as challenges facing North American UUs: the shallow and recalcitrant nature of individualism and the promise and cooperative aspirations of covenant. Addressing these themes is vital to developing and nurturing international collaborative relationships. Western individualism—which

for my purposes here I define as the inability or unwillingness to see power and governance in a cultural context other than one's own—becomes a barrier to appreciating and relating to others outside of one's own faith heritage, shaped as it is by one's own culture. Covenant—an explicit agreement, perhaps in writing, on how you and others will journey together even when you disagree—names the binding priorities and aspirations of a relationship. The following illustration holds up the challenges of both.

When three U/U groups—one from the US, one from Transylvania, and one from northeast India—began exploring how they would collaborate, representatives of each met online monthly for six months in order to create a covenant. Not only did this provide an opportunity for all the individuals and their groups to become better acquainted, but the meetings became sites for conversation about the things that matter most. Using a covenant design and a facilitated process, the group arrived at consensus about its shared hopes and promises and concluded with this statement: "We understand that promises can be broken and expectations may go unfulfilled. Central to this covenant is the commitment to stay in relationship with each other, honoring our best selves and the process of renewing our shared covenant and the values it embraces."

The next step was for the covenant to be approved by each group's leadership and community, and this is where a deeper and deepening cross-cultural experience began, since these communities, their leaders and members, and their processes were quite different. Elected and unelected gatekeepers; tribal elders, ecclesiastical authorities, and elected boards; clergy with lots of power, no power, and some power; procedures that had been recently and carefully crafted in detail and centuries-old, unquestioned traditions. Each meeting revealed both subtle and bold differences between the three groups, and each had to be patient, open-minded, and willing to learn about the others' ways of proceeding in order for all three communities to finally approve the covenant their representatives had drafted. There were new learnings for a growing, deepening collaboration that incorporated cultural lessons about who has power, why they have it, and how it is used.

Recommendations

- Know the governance structures of both your own congregation and the UUA, and understand each one's strengths, shortfalls, and implications for relationships. Trace the paths of accountability.
- Prepare for any meeting by learning as much as you can about the cultural history and background of your collaborators. When possible, confirm what you have learned with someone who has experience with that history and background (and still be prepared to fall short of your expectations).
- Come to cross-cultural collaboration with a posture of humility and curiosity, with a readiness to learn (and not teach).

Discussion questions

The following images reflect different relationships and models of power. You are invited to reflect on them. Notice your immediate reactions to each. How does each one illustrate power and its implications for collaboration?

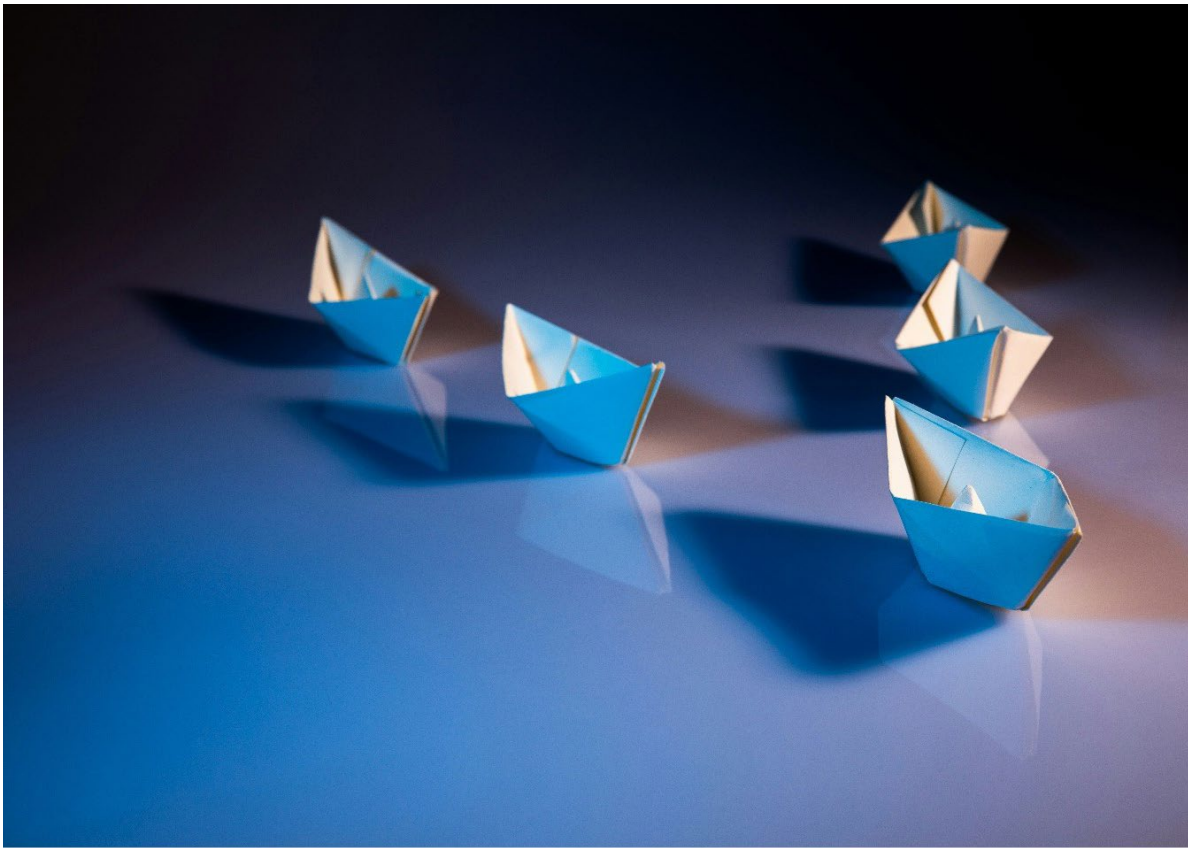
The root systems of trees, where each individual tree appears independent but is actually communicating with the others forming a stand of trees—a collection of connected individuals.

A web, in which the connections between strands are both the weakest points and the most important, and in which a center connects them all.

Pillars, which stand separate but carry their burden collectively, each needed, necessary.

Chess, in which each piece has its role, its position, its own level of power, but all act toward a collective objective.

Boats, which follow and support a single leader that determines the direction for all.



Consider how you, personally, would answer the following questions, and also how your congregation as a whole might answer them, as well as how they relate specifically to power as it is held and exercised in your congregation

- What are your assumptions and beliefs about power?
- Who is powerful and why? What are the characteristics of someone who is powerful, whether they hold formal power or not?
- What are the responsibilities of power?
- How do your answers reflect your cultural context, values, and understanding of how community works?

Congregations and Communities; Hospitality and Inclusion

By Roger Bertschausen

Introduction

We have learned many lessons from congregational partners in the Philippines and in Transylvania. In both places, we encountered U/U faith communities that were thoroughly and persistently centered on the community rather than the individual. In such faith communities, everything—governance, social justice activities, relations between people, outreach, and all other activity—aims toward the communal good. Having "we" rather than "I" as the focal point engenders a very different kind of congregation. American UUs could learn a great deal about centering communal, rather than individual, good by engaging more with spiritual kinfolk overseas.

We also learned lessons about hospitality and inclusion. The chapter on hospitality and inclusion in *Widening the Circle of Concern* begins with the observation that UUA congregations generally continue to mirror the harms to and microaggressions toward Black, Indigenous, and other people of color that take place in the larger society. The text makes a strong case for (among other things) creating materials and establishing new practices for multicultural hospitality. Developing skill and understanding among congregational leaders as well as front-line welcomers such as ushers will help. We won't get more skilled at multicultural hospitality without learning and developing intentional practices.

I have frequently encountered a sense in American Unitarian Universalist congregations that our theology and message are optimally suited to people who are white, highly educated, and middle or upper class. I have also frequently heard talk about the limited appeal of our faith to those outside this demographic. We typically then concentrate any marketing we might do on people who fit that demographic—e.g., sponsoring a local National Public Radio station.

Imagine the surprise of many of us when a congregation I served joined a congregation-to-congregation partnership with a vibrant church of primarily subsistence farmers in the Philippines. Unitarian Universalism was unique in each congregation, and we could recognize one another as kinfolk in faith. The congregation I served learned that perhaps we had sold short the appeal of our faith short where we lived. Maybe our faith could resonate with a wider variety of people in our town than we imagined. We learned an important lesson about our context and grew wider by getting to know our spiritual kinfolk in the Philippines.

The fact that everyone in American congregations has a role in welcoming can present a challenge. Trained and sensitive front-line welcomers as well as lay leaders and staff are of course important, but harmful comments and microaggressions by others in the congregation can undo their good work. For example, in one UUA congregation, a white member came up to a Black family who were visiting for the first time and said, "Oh, we love to have chocolate people here." The white member didn't intend to cause harm, but that was the impact of the remark. The family didn't come back.

This lifts up the crucial importance of programs that help white congregants understand their privilege and learn intercultural skills. Congregations need to have a critical mass of people who have done this work.

This point is also crucial in UUA congregations' engagement with overseas Unitarians/Universalists. Understanding privilege and learning intercultural skills are key to making sure that UUA engagement with overseas U/Us doesn't replicate harm and microaggressions across the world. It is also incumbent on UUs in North America to learn about colonization and imperialism, including UU complicity in imperialist enterprises the United States undertook in the Philippines and Hawaii, for example.

Widening the Circle of Concern notes that "the circle of faith community grows wider from the margins, not the center" (p. 63), and that "when individualism is not in balance with communal good, individualism can become toxic to religious community.… Our congregations must center themselves in the communal and covenantal and not primarily the comfort and familiarity of the social club" (p. 46). Might the UUA's internal exploration of power structures, systemic racism, and white supremacy culture be further deepened and sharpened by also engaging with voices on the margins of our global faith—particularly U/U communities of color across the world?

Illustration

Here are two stories of American UUs visiting overseas partners:

1. A group in an American UU congregation plan a trip to visit overseas partners. They want to spend a few days with their partners but want most of the trip to focus on visiting important Unitarian historical sites as well as sites of natural beauty and cultural interest. They largely plan their own itinerary. They don't want to burden their hosts, so they ask to stay in a hotel or guesthouse during the few days they will spend with their partners. They don't do any cultural preparation for the trip.

   They soak up the sites and experiences. When they visit their partners' house of worship and attend service there, they focus on finding similarities to worship services in

their own congregation. The differences strike them primarily as signs of a more primitive version of our American UU faith. With more development and education, they assume, their partners' faith will look more like our faith. They affirm that underneath the differences, their partners' beliefs are essentially like ours.

They go home and share their experiences in a service. Many in attendance experience the service as a travelogue.

2. A group in an American UU congregation plan a trip to visit overseas partners. Their main goal is to spend time with their partners. They work with their partners to plan the trip, inviting them to lead the process of creating the itinerary. If their partners offer them home hospitality—which is likely—they will gladly accept.

   They prepare for the trip by having several orientation and education sessions. In these sessions, they talk about the history of Unitarian/Universalism in their partners' country and learn about their partners' cultural history. They frame their visit as a pilgrimage—a chance to leave their everyday lives, venture into liminal space, and return changed by the experience. Their preparation is designed to guide them to be curious about and engaged with their partners' stories, culture, and beliefs.

   They soak up the experiences. They enter their partners' houses of worship and experience services in them with curiosity and wonder. They ask questions afterward to try to get a deeper sense of the ideas and beliefs underlying the service and its rituals. They allow their partners' incarnation of our global U/U faith to interact with their own spiritual journeys and beliefs. They spend lots of time talking with partners in both formal and informal settings. They also have time with their group to process what they are seeing, hearing, and learning.

   They go home and share their experiences in a service. The focus of the service is how their pilgrimage affected their own spiritual journeys, beliefs, and understandings of Unitarian/Universalism. Many in attendance experience this service as an invitation to deeper spiritual reflection.

These two stories are composite portraits. They illustrate opposite ends of the spectrum of visits; most visits to overseas U/U partners are somewhere between these poles. For many decades, however, a significant percentage of such visits have been closer to the first.

Recommendations

- American UUs should examine their privilege and develop intercultural skills before visiting overseas partners or inviting their partners to visit them. Without this preparation, visits to and from partners are more likely to cause harm.

- American UUs should learn about our global U/U faith and the UUA's relationship (past and present) with overseas U/Us before visiting overseas partners. American UUs should also learn about their partners' history and current context before visiting.
- American UUs should view visits to overseas partners as spiritual endeavors rather than as tourism. It is helpful to think of travel as a spiritual pilgrimage.
- Partnerships should focus primarily on deep spiritual connections between congregations. Deep friendships are a byproduct, not the primary goal.

Discussion Questions

- What about the first story feels problematic? Discuss why and how.
- What helps the American UUs in the second story hear and engage with their partners' voices, experiences, and beliefs? Discuss why and how.
- What role could engagement with overseas Unitarians/Universalists play in American Unitarian Universalists' antiracism, anti-oppression, and multicultural work? What are some ways we could promote and facilitate this engagement?

Living Our Values in the World

By Roger Bertschausen

Introduction

"Living Our Values in the World," the sixth chapter of *Widening the Circle of Concern,* begins with this observation: "The work of becoming more equitable, inclusive, and diverse within our congregations is justice work" (p. 68). The work of becoming more equitable, inclusive, and diverse across the Unitarian/Universalist and Free Church world is also justice work. In fact, engaging with our global faith while acknowledging and understanding the dominant place of American UUs and the UUA within it can help us do justice work at home, within both our congregations and the communities in which we live.

Widening the Circle of Concern goes on to assert, "If we fail to address our own injustices, we are not only hypocritical, but we are probably working out of an outdated, paternalistic model of 'helping others' rather than acting out of the recognition that our lives are interdependent with those of our neighbors" (p. 68).

The rekindling of the partner church movement between congregations in North America and in Transylvania and Hungary in the early 1990s was largely rooted in a desire to help our Unitarian kinfolk as their lands emerged out of Communism and authoritarian rule. In one way this makes sense: The Unitarian church, like almost every institution in Romania (where Transylvania is located) and Hungary, suffered greatly under authoritarian rule. The help we offered, in the form of both relationships and money, was greatly needed—and greatly appreciated. Some in North America, and even some of our spiritual kinfolk in Transylvania and Hungary, declared that we "saved" Transylvanian and Hungarian Unitarianism. That is not true. Unitarianism in that part of the world had a strong four-hundred-year foundation and was saved by the only people who could save it: Transylvanian and Hungarian Unitarians. Unfortunately, this conceptual framework of "us" saving "them" created a paternalistic model of partnership that centered our charity.

Many partnerships have struggled to move beyond this paternalistic model toward truly mutual partnership, in which we and our partners act out of the recognition that our lives are interdependent. We help our partners, they help us. This is the nature of truly mutual partnership.

Illustration

Here are two stories of partnerships between Transylvanian and US U/U congregations.

The first partnership began in the early 1990s when the current partnership movement was rekindled. Within only a few years, the first group of American UUs traveled to Transylvania and met their new partners in person. In spite of language differences, both visitors and hosts felt that love flowed between them. The Americans were amazed by the deep hospitality and generosity of their hosts—even though it was evident that just about everyone in the partner village was struggling to make ends meet. Some of the customs of the Transylvanian church struck some Americans as quaint, others as outdated and badly in need of updating. The visiting Americans were taken with the simple beauty of the partner church building; and they were struck by how dilapidated it was. They enthusiastically shared ideas for its restoration and promised to send money.

The American delegation returned to their congregation and shared stories and pictures of these somewhat exotic Unitarian kinfolk behind the recently raised Iron Curtain. They raised quite a bit of money for the restoration of the partner church building, and they committed to sending some money each year to help with ongoing costs, such as the minister's salary and car expenses. The American partners defined how most of the money they sent should be used; they'd seen the problems with the church building and lack of operating funds and felt like they knew what was needed.

Several more delegations visited their Transylvanian partners over the next years. Once, they paid for the partner church minister and spouse to visit the US. After the first decade, however, the visits to Transylvania diminished. Most of the people who went had been there before. The trips became more and more about seeing old friends and less about the congregation-to-congregation connection. The congregations, and the beliefs and actions of each embodiment of our U/U faith, were discussed less and less often.

The trips stopped toward the end of the second decade of partnership. The American congregation kept sending around $1,000 a year to help with the minister's salary and gasoline, and every five years or so, they'd do some bigger collection. Eventually, sending money was really the only connection. Most of the time, no note accompanied the money, and no note was sent back saying it had been received. The group in the American church that was passionate about the partnership dwindled as the early stalwarts died, moved away, or moved on to other congregational projects.

In 2017, buffeted by growing crises in the US, the American congregation told the UU Partner Church Council that they were done with the partnership. After twenty-five years "our partners don't seem to need us anymore," they explained.

Another partnership between a Transylvanian Unitarian congregation and an American UU congregation only began in 2007. Seventeen years after the fall of Communism and with new resources available, such as European Union grants, the situation of the Transylvanian partner church didn't feel as dire as it might have in the early 1990s. From the beginning, the primary focus of the partnership was getting to know each other. Members of the partner congregations learned about each other's lives, families, jobs. They discussed and explored the differences and similarities in what they believed and how they practiced their U/U faith. The American partner sent several delegations, which included youth and young adults. They worked with their Transylvanian partner to help multigenerational delegations come to America. They supported each other's projects from afar as they were able, and after a while delegation members also worked side by side with their hosts on projects chosen by the hosts specifically for each visit. Sometimes these projects were internal to the church; other times they were focused on the wider community beyond the church walls.

The American partner congregation was troubled in 2017 when the Synod of the Hungarian Unitarian Church democratically adopted a traditional definition of marriage as being between a man and a woman. The American congregation had worked passionately for marriage equality in the United States; the cause had electrified them more than anything else had ever done. They couldn't believe their partners might have a different viewpoint. Some called for an end to the partnership. After much discussion, the Americans decided to engage their partners in conversation about the Synod's action before making a decision about ending the partnership.

This engagement was possible because they had already established a model for meaningful conversation. One of the centerpieces of each visit was a free-ranging conversation between partners about what was on their hearts and minds. Though these conversations had not previously gotten into areas of deep disagreement, a delegation from the American partner congregation brought up the Synod decision during a visit to their Transylvanian partners in 2018. They described their congregation's journey to becoming marriage equality activists and how deeply they believed in inclusion. And then they listened. They heard about the background of the Synod decision. They heard about a range of beliefs in their partner congregation. It was a hard conversation—a conversation for which a dozen years of partnership had prepared them.

Both congregations remained committed to their partnership, and many of the Americans felt that the conversation, and the work they had done in preparing themselves for it, brought them into a deeper relationship with their partners.

Recommendations

- American Unitarian Universalists should acknowledge and understand the outsize role of American UUs and the UUA in our global U/U faith. We are the largest and wealthiest nation in our global faith, as well as the nation with arguably the most significant cultural, political, and economic impact on the world during the last 130 years. We should understand the nature of the impact we have on our global U/U faith.
- American superiority and exceptionalism (the roots of which lie in white supremacy culture) are manifested when we believe we know better than overseas U/Us what they need and so instruct them how to use money we send. We should unpack these attitudes and approach overseas U/Us with a spirit of humility.
- American UUs should understand and affirm that we have at least as much to gain from interactions with overseas U/Us as they have to gain from us. Only a thoroughly mutual partnership is truly authentic.
- When we interact with overseas U/Us, we should focus on our different manifestations of U/U faith and pay attention to differences in our beliefs and practices, as well as similarities.

Discussion Questions

- Explore the role of paternalism in sabotaging mutuality and ultimately ending the partnership described in the first story. What might have helped that partnership unfold differently? What principles from *Widening the Circle of Concern* might have helped?
- What happens when our values lead us to choose and act differently from our overseas partner? How do we navigate difference within the context of mutual relationship?
- Can you imagine a congregation-to-congregation relationship in which there is significant economic disparity but in which the wealthier congregation does not give the poorer one money? What would their relationship look like without such gifts?

Religious Professionals

By Fredric Muir

Introduction

The UUA, the UUMA, and individual North American UUs have often sought and welcomed opportunities to join in fellowship with Unitarian, Unitarian Universalist, and Free Church co-religionists internationally. Often such gatherings center around workshops or on-site consulting with hopes for growing leadership skills. Yet in spite of the hopes and aspirations that have accompanied these projects, their results have sometimes failed to develop leadership as they were intended to. Although these projects have been undertaken with high hopes and aspirations, they have often failed—or, at least, seemed to fail—and left participants disappointed and disheartened—both the Western UUs and their international partners.

Widening the Circle of Concern quotes an earlier observation by the Commission on Institutional Change that could explain these outcomes:

> We begin with the premise in all our work that the values of Unitarian Universalism cannot be realized in a system that is centered around one cultural expression. In fact, the centering of white culture and values has stymied the development of a full range of cultural expressions. In the Unitarian Universalist tradition, two "pillar" Principles invite us to covenant to affirm and promote the inherent worth and dignity of all people and to acknowledge the interdependent web of existence of which we are all a part. Systems, policies, practices, and expressions of Unitarian Universalism that bias one racial or cultural group above others make a mockery of these two core values, and so we are called into efforts to name and change them as acts of witness to a fuller and more authentic expression of this faith. (p. 77)

Here is an example that illustrates the commission's observation in an international, cross-cultural context. The faith leaders we encounter abroad are often not trained religious professionals of the kind that North American UUs are accustomed to, and their skill set may not be shaped in accordance with Western understandings. Among our international U/U and Free Church siblings, it is common for ministers and leaders of congregations to have a primary occupation in another field as well, often agriculture or education. In contrast, many in the North America expect their ministers and church professionals to have made a full-time commitment to congregational work, and are put off when this is not the case. In some international settings, our ideas of professionalization are culture-bound, unrealistic, and unfair. These ideas will limit our opportunities for constructive relationships with many co-religionists.

Illustration

For decades, the largest international liberal faith relationship that most UUs were aware of was with the Hungarian Unitarian Church (in Transylvania). It's likely that every congregation's "Introduction to Unitarian Universalism" class mentions the centuries-old heritage of the Hungarian Unitarian Church. Similarly, at least once a year many congregations speak about Unitarianism in the Czech Republic when they observe their Flower Communion service and recall the heroic imagination of Norbert Čapek, who was murdered by Nazis. Both of these liberal faith contexts are, of course, rooted in Western European traditions.

On the other hand, the Unitarian Universalist Church of the Philippines—founded in 1954 (as the Universalist Church of the Philippines) by Toribio Quimada, who was murdered by soldiers at the behest of corrupt political landowners in 1988—is a mix of cultures and traditions. The UUCP reflects its cultural context: Church services are shaped by liturgical influences from Roman Catholic culture, faith healing and nature-centered practices are valued, church events are for all (families with infants and children are never discouraged). Its members struggle to earn a sustaining wage; most Filipino UUs are rural, poor, and undereducated. And, of course, they are not white. In short, members of the UUCP do not fit the images that many Western UUs have of their faith community. It's not uncommon to hear someone remark, of our Filipino co-religionists, "They aren't really UU."

Beliefs and ideas like this create barriers for marginalized folx seeking recognition. In particular, *Widening the Circle of Concern* urges us "to reduce the barriers to entry for those who seek to serve as religious professionals. This is true for all people, but these barriers are especially damaging for Black people, Indigenous people, people of color, and other marginalized people, who tend to have fewer financial resources due to historic and continuing patterns of discrimination" (p. 82).

Recommendations

In order for North American UUs to be in right relationship with our international co-religionists, it is imperative that we move away from the assumptions we bring, including by understanding cultural contexts of local communities and by reimagining "professionalism."

North American UUs who work with U/U and Free Church religious professionals globally should select candidates in collaboration with members of the communities they will serve, prioritizing those who are local to those communities. Doing so might mitigate many Western/North American assumptions. Alternatively, in the absence of suitable local candidates, prospective ministers and lay leaders could be supported or subsidized to immerse themselves for several months in the communities they are meant to serve, in order to become familiar with the people and their cultures.

Discussion Questions

One element at the core of effective, meaningful, mutual international relationships is cultural competence. One understanding of cultural competence comes from BCT Partners, a minority-owned group which works to help solve complex social issues and increase equity:

> Cultural Competence is the ability to understand and effectively interact with people from cultures different from our own. It also means being able to negotiate cross-cultural differences to accomplish practical goals. Multicultural competency requires the following:
>
> - A basic understanding of your own culture and ethnicity
> - A willingness to learn about the cultural practices and worldview of others
> - A positive attitude toward cultural differences
> - A willingness to accept and respect these differences
>
> Cultural competence has four major components: awareness, attitude, knowledge, and skills. (http://bctpartners.com/post/what-is-cultural-competence-and-why-is-it-important).

Consider the two cartoons below, looking at them through the lens of cultural competence.

"It's cultural, gentlemen—these other countries can't possibly understand that nothing is ever our fault."

David Sipress, *The New Yorker*, March 5, 2020

"Actually, Lou, I think it was more than just my being in the right place at the right time. I think it was my being the right race, the right religion, the right sex, the right socioeconomic group, having the right accent, the right clothes, going to the right schools . . ."

Warren Miller, *The New Yorker*, January 13, 1992

Then reflect on these questions:

- In what ways are you culture-bound? Is Unitarian Universalism culture-bound?
- How has cultural competence stretched you, and how has it stretched Unitarian Universalism?
- What steps might someone need to take to become culturally competent?
- How might cultural incompetence be a barrier in relationships between North American UU leaders and U/U/FC leaders elsewhere?

Educating for Liberation

By Fredric Muir

Introduction

The eighth chapter of *Widening the Circle of Concern* calls for "educating for liberation." Such education must include the acknowledgment and study of Unitarian Universalist imperialism—the disproportionately large number of our faith ancestors who were in positions of intellectual and political leadership and authority when colonial settlers forcibly removed North American Indigenous peoples from their lands, and who supported the conquering and colonizing of people in present-day Puerto Rico, Cuba, Hawaii, the Philippines, and Guam.

Many of today's U/U and Free Church co-religionists reside in nations or regions where neocolonial and/or authoritarian oppressions were aided, abetted, or ignored by the US. In some places local U/U/FC leaders, as well as authorities in the US, took no notice of or failed to respond to the inequities and oppressions that people experienced. Awareness, sensitivity, and care are needed as we engage our co-religionists; we must acknowledge the roles that US and U/U leaders have played. Initially, it might be enough to simply listen to our partners describe the ways their culture was shaped by outsiders and how this shaped their congregations; but we must be sure to listen, rather than trying to "fix" past or current harms.

Anyone entering the UU ministry, and any North American UU layperson engaging in international relationships, must learn and accept our imperial past and the effects of white privilege, conquest, and colonization. *Widening the Circle of Concern* cautions, "The antidote isn't to avoid antiracism work." Actually, it's just the opposite: "The antidote is to train people to see that oppression happens at the personal and interpersonal levels and at the systemic and cultural levels.… To undo this, people can engage their free and responsible search for truth and meaning in the work of self-discovery and learning about the systemic effects of oppression" (p. 91). If U/U and Free Church Westerners hope to deepen and broaden ourselves and our faith, preparation and humility are indispensable.

Illustration

"Education for liberation" can begin with a fuller understanding of the ways colonial education and education at the end of a gun shaped the cultures and beliefs of many of our international co-religionists. Engaging with them and building relationships with them means liberating ourselves by listening to—truly hearing—the stories and lessons they choose to share with us about the shaping of their lives, faiths, and nations.

Few American native English speakers have had the experience of learning history from a text not written in their native language. In introductory material to her novel *The Revolution According to Raymundo Mata*, which won the Philippine National Book Award in 2010, the Filipina novelist Gina Apostol describes how her nation and people experience a liberating text through a translation by a colonial power. Understanding this experience will inform our education for liberation not only in the Philippines but in any former or current colonial or authoritarian context.

> The national hero Jose Rizal's first work, called *Noli Me Tangere* (*Touch Me Not*), inspired the mass movement that launched revolution against Spain. That novel was written in Spanish. At this point in history, Filipinos do not read that language. Because we were occupied by America by 1898 and officially ruled by it until 1946, we learn to read in English (at least I have) and speak at least 50 different other languages. I grew up with four languages: Waray, Tagalog, English, and Cebuano; at this point, I consider the first three of those native tongues.… Thus, Filipinos must read in translation the novel that begot us.… The Rizal Law of 1956 required the reading of Rizal in schools—but it did not require reading him in the original. In a further spin, many of us study his novels in another colonizer's tongue, English (as for me, I first read the *Noli* in Tagalog: one more colonizer, so the joke goes, for those not from Manila).
>
> The essence of a country like the Philippines is that it seems to exist in translation—a series of textual mediations must be unraveled in order to reveal who or what it is. More precisely: it exists *in the suspension* of its myriad translations—it is alive in the void of its ghost-speeches. In this way, for me, Filipinos embody a definition of the human: a translated being. It seems to me we are all always only on the cusp of being understood, or understanding ourselves. ("Author's Note on the American Edition," pp. 2–3, *The Revolution According to Raymundo Mata*, Soho Press, 2021)

Recommendations

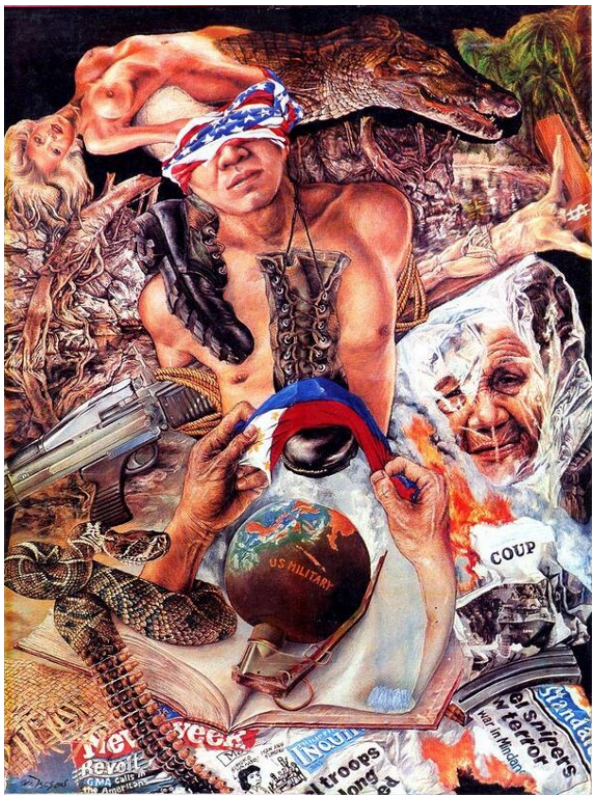
- Any UU visiting or partnering with our international co-religionists must make as deep and serious an effort as possible to learn about the cultural context, political history, U/U and Free Church ecclesiology, and theology of those with whom they will be working. Such knowledge is part of the "comprehensive path to understanding the work of equity, inclusion, and diversity" that *Widening the Circle of Concern* calls on us to develop and maintain.

- Be aware of power imbalances, especially as they pertain to economic stresses. The West's history of "toxic charity" and "colonization by wealth" is still a shaping factor.
- Practice good listening skills; know how to remain silent.

Discussion Questions

Examine the two paintings below. The one on the left is a study for a mural that was commissioned for and displayed in the Philippines Exhibit at the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair (which was also known as the Louisiana Purchase Exposition, because it celebrated the hundredth anniversary of that settler colonial event). The artist was a Filipino expatriate living in Paris: Félix Resurrección Hidalgo. The mural itself no longer exists, but its title was *Per Pacem et Libertatem* (For Peace and Liberty), and it measured twenty feet in height and fifteen feet in width, which is to say that it was overwhelmingly large and powerful. The Philippine Exposition Board paid Hidalgo twenty-five thousand francs for it. In today's currency that would total about one hundred thirty-eight thousand dollars, which the Lopez Museum sharply called "the price of elegantly presented propaganda."

Per Pacem et Libertatem by
Félix Resurrección Hidalgo, ca. 1903
https://epa.culturalcenter.gov.ph/3/82/2264/



Amerikanser poster by Filipino artist and activist
Asterio Valino Tecson.

> The figure of the Philippines is represented by a woman, dressed in a dark sheet, purposefully positioned below the figure of the United States, shown in this painting as Columbia, sword sheathed, flag of the United States billowing behind her. The goddess, the female counterpart of Columbus. One arm of the Philippines holds a *bolo*, the other holds out an olive branch that, apart from being a symbol of hope, is coincidentally the tree of the goddess Athene, from whom Columbia's femininity was patterned. A catalogue describing the figure of the Philippines goes on to say that she is, "…*a lonely, sorrow-stricken woman in black beseechingly holding out the olive branch to Columbia*." A desperation for peace and reconciliation with mother America. ("Remnants: Per Pacem et Libertatem," blog post by the Lopez Museum, https://lopezmuseum.wordpress.com/2019/10/22/remnants-per-pacem-et-libertatem/)

After the closure of the Exposition, this portrayal of US hegemony made its way to Manila, where it hung in the back of the Assembly Hall, the legislative seat of the Philippines colony. Every Filipino legislator would view it as they left the building. It was destroyed in 1945, when the Americans decided it was more expedient to bomb Manila than to face the Japanese in hand-to-hand combat.

The painting on the right, *Amerikanser*, is by Filipino artist Asterio Valino Tecson. Much of his work is concerned with themes of justice and protest; his 1990 exhibit "End the Bases of Insecurity! Stop the Rape of Mother Earth!" portrayed the struggles of Indigenous peoples against militarization and their fight for their ancestral lands. *Amerikanser*, one of his best-known pieces, was created in 1989, at the height of the struggle against US military bases in the Philippines. In a dense collage of imagery, it illustrates the horrific legacies of American colonization and militarization.

Look at the images carefully.

- What is the history you see? Or, in Gina Apostol's language, what are the translated messages of these images?
- Are you familiar with the history and the context captured in these images, and how they have shaped life and religion for our UUCP partners?
- Are you familiar with other international U/U/FC contexts and how these have also been shaped by US or Western imperialism or other authoritarian regimes?
- Has ignorance of these legacies interrupted partnerships?

Innovations and Risk-Taking

By Fredric Muir

Introduction

Widening the Circle of Concern shares the disheartening news that Unitarian Universalism is "losing congregations and [has] many teetering on the edge of collapse. While we typically refer to 1,000 congregations, in truth we now have 819 congregations that would meet the standard to become a congregation today" (pp. 1–2). The world is changing dramatically all around us. The report notes, "The pace of change is now at an unprecedented level accelerated by shifts in global economics and demographics as the world adjusts to a world economy and as the US prominence in that economy drops, signaling an 'end of empire'" (p. 101).

The powerful, challenging forces shaping our era have created a "kairos moment" for us, a moment in which to imagine, dream, and envision. This is the right and opportune moment to boldly and enthusiastically reinvent ourselves and learn to engage our domestic and international partners and partners-to-be in creative and imaginative conversation, leadership, planning, and action. Now is the time for risk-taking, for living into our commitment to cross-cultural and international engagement, for opening the coffers of support in ways never before seen. Now is the time to:

- visualize broader, more inclusive and equitable partnerships and international networks that are free of constraining hierarchies so as to be more nimble, flexible, and adaptable;
- think what it might feel like and what it would mean to welcome to the partnership table those adults and youth who have been unable or reluctant to share the meaning of their faith;
- conceive of ongoing opportunities to share our faith identity in theologically diverse groups that incorporate international partners;
- picture leadership and mentoring programs in cross-cultural contexts where the English language and Western values are no longer required of participants;
- dream about regular opportunities for worship and spiritual formation circles composed of and led by international partners;
- envision a cooperative and covenanted global justice voice that honors and addresses the priorities of partners; and

- imagine a new endeavor that is fully funded and has a broad, sustainable, and eager network of volunteers.

But there will be resistance. We have seen it before. For example, in 1936 the American Unitarian Association's Commission on Appraisal wrote, "The plain fact is…that most Unitarians are lamentably indifferent to this whole subject [of international partnering]. The international aspect of our denominational program is most inadequately financed. Even the moral support which it receives is scattered and half-hearted. It is as though the ordinary Unitarian church were so completely absorbed in the conduct of its own affairs that it had no time and energy to devote to larger considerations. This is a most unfortunate condition, which requires vigorous effort to correct it" (*Unitarians Face a New Age*, p. 19).

Illustration

I was once invited to participate on a three-person panel at a UUA General Assembly. I was there because of my relationships with U/Us in the Philippines. Following my remarks (which contributed to shaping my 2001 book *Maglipay Universalist: A History of the Unitarian Universalist Church of the Philippines*), I shared my hope for greater UU engagement not only in the Philippines but in the Pacific Rim. As I talked about the commitment I had seen from evangelical Protestant missionaries, I asked the audience what it might take for UUs to muster the same kind of commitment and passion as the Christian missionaries I had seen—though not, like them, in the course of proselytizing—and whether in doing this we might deepen our international connections. It was at this point that the UUA facilitator—who had invited me—kicked me (under the table, of course!). I thought it must have been an accident, so I continued, only to be kicked again. This time I got the message and quickly brought my presentation to an end. I wondered if the concerns the AUA's commissioners had expressed in 1936 still persisted. Were North American UUs still unwilling to face a new age and become more proactive by taking a risk and sharing their faith internationally?

Recommendations

- Visit the website of the UUA's Office of Global Connections and Emerging Communities (https://www.uua.org/global) and explore the programs and partnerships described there. Were you aware of them already? If so, to what extent; or if not, why not? What would you add in order to deepen UU international engagement? What would deepen such engagement in your own congregation?

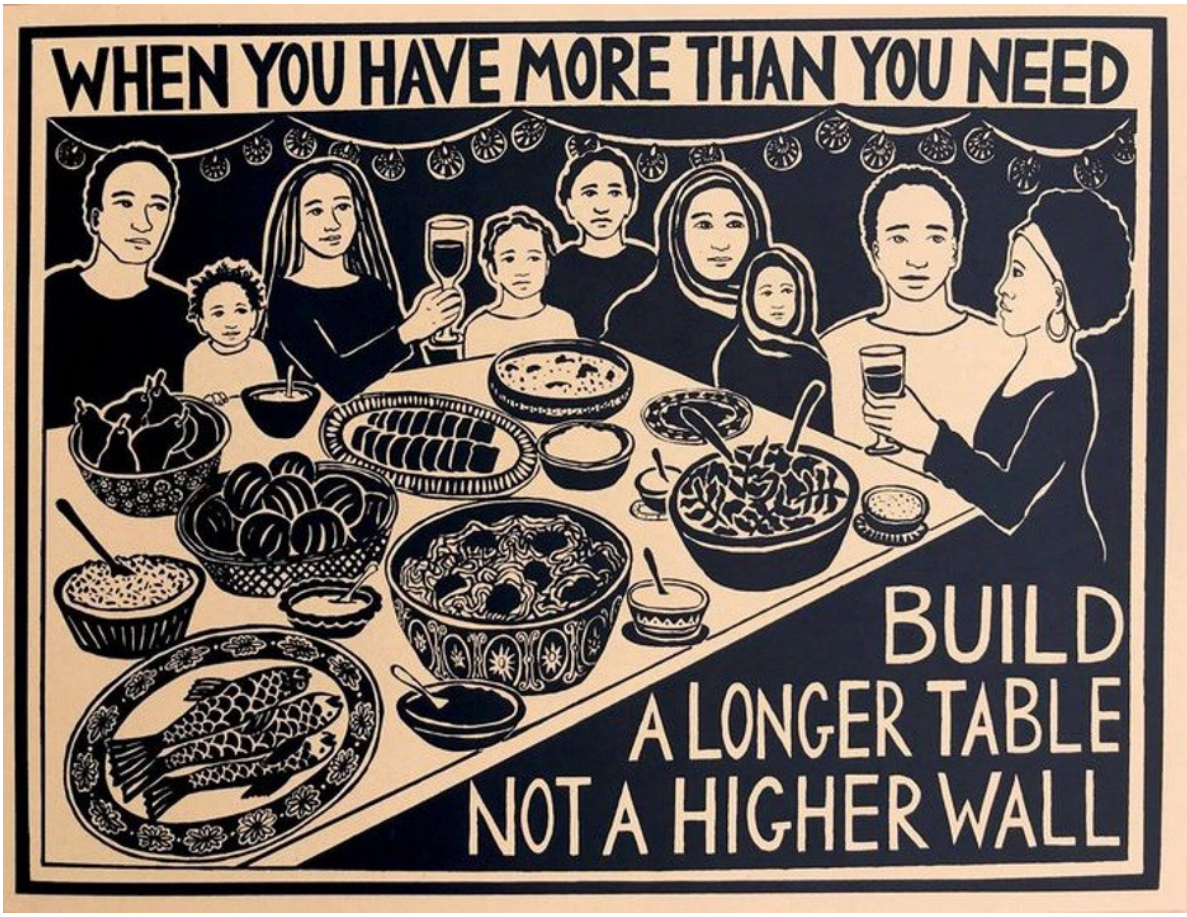
- With other UUs, sign up for the free five-part U/U Colonial Legacy course "Are We an Imperial Faith?," created by the International Unitarian/Universalist Joint Working Group and offered through the UU Leadership Institute at https://www.uua.org/global/

faith/post-imperial/colonial-legacy-webinar. Watch the webinars and work through the course together.

- Become familiar with the UUA's Bylaws and Rules, Article II, Section C-2.1, "Purposes and Covenant" where it names among our primary purposes "to heal historic injustices," "to support and encourage the creation of new Unitarian Universalist communities," and 'to advance our Unitarian Universalist values in in the world." Explore how the sentiments behind these purposes might be expressed by UUs in our global connections.

Discussion Questions

Look at the two images below. The first is a 1901 *Puck* cartoon by Joseph Keppler, Jr. titled "It's Up to Them," depicting Uncle Sam offering Filipinos the choice between an armed soldier and a schoolteacher. Many Americans of the time would have agreed that Filipinos could freely choose between guns and "domestication." The second image is from artist Jen Bloomer and is sold as a holiday greeting card by the Syracuse Cultural Workers. (https://syracuseculturalworkers.com/products/holiday-card-when-you-have-more)



- What do these images say to you?
- Do you see the challenges of privilege in both?
- Are there ways Unitarian Universalism has built a wall around itself?
- Will we—can you—build a longer table? How?
- Are you ready for mutuality with our co-religionists, and do you think UUs in general are? If yes, how so? If not, why not? If we're not ready but we want to be, what will it take to get there?

Restoration and Reparations

By Alicia Forde

"We must move away from an idea of personal and individual 'success' and toward ecological economics, collective advancement, collective achievement, and collective wealth."

—Diallo Kenyatta, *The Bro. Diallo Show*

Introduction

As a Black immigrant to the United States from Trinidad and Tobago—a country of twin islands, formerly colonized by a host of European powers, the last of which were the British—I am interested in the idea and practice of reparations. My social location as someone who spans two cultures, both impacted by the realities and legacies of the enslavement of Black Africans, moves me to think about the role of religion in perpetuating institutional violence and what is required to address that violence and live more fully into the values that form and animate our faith.

What follows is not an examination of the instances in which the UUA needs to consider reparations in the global arena. Those instances exist, and one appropriate response to them would be to create the infrastructure that makes it possible for the fullness of our histories to be told and shared widely.

Widening the Circle of Concern states,

> Any discussion on reparations must begin with an acknowledgment of the ongoing genocide, oppression, and exploitation of Black people, Indigenous people, and people of color so pervasive in the worldwide Euro-dominant, racist, capitalist system; in the nations and cultures where those Western cultures and ideologies originate; as well as in the nations and cultures that have been influenced and molded by invasion, colonialism, and socio-economic oppression. Ultimately, a true cessation of this aggression is required to ensure freedom, justice, and equity for all. While we work toward a total liberation for all, we must acknowledge the hurts that can be healed, the faults that can be fixed, and the repair possible among communities suffering from the material outcomes of hundreds of years of oppression. (p. 112)

Indeed, any discussion of reparations must necessarily include the harms perpetuated by Unitarians and Unitarian Universalists in countries other than the United States. A faith tradition that operates within an imperialist system cannot, itself, be free from imperialism with-

out explicitly reflecting on and dismantling that worldview. Living into a new way of being demands that we honestly review the past and its impact on our present. Only then can we truly create a worthy present and future.

Embedded in our history as a faith tradition are foundations of nation-building in both the United States and the Philippines. This nation-building served to concretize ideas of supremacy that disadvantaged and marginalized BIPOC communities.

Additionally, our advancement of reason as a cornerstone of the faith—which understands one particular type of knowledge as superior—and our position as the largest broker of power (i.e. resources) within our faith community have meant that we have had an outsized influence on the shape of Unitarian/Universalism globally. Our "religious imperialism" sometimes means that we knowingly or unknowingly encourage (American) UUs to claim primacy in interpreting the faith from their own limited cultural and political context.

Our values call us toward community; and community asks us to recognize that we are, in fact, a global faith with varied expressions of how we understand and live our faith. It behooves us to live into our covenant by drawing on our global U/U relationships and commitments, on a foundation of deep mutuality. This means that US Unitarian Universalism needs to reckon with the legacies of those who influenced the crafting of this America.

To paraphrase *Widening the Circle of Concern*: Our limited reflection on our historical legacies means that we have not attained the wholeness that comes from a true accounting of the ways that our faith has been complicit in shaping the systems that are foundational in the oppression of Black people, Indigenous people, and other people of color, as well as poor people, both here and around the world.

The lack of identifiable and covenantal ways to air, process, and address damaging behavior has meant that UUs often engage in international programs from a place of unexamined privilege and superiority. They interrogate neither their social location nor their understanding of their faith as being more advanced than that of their partners.

> The commission's work affirms that reparations within Unitarian Universalism are imperative to both fulfilling the values of the second Principle (covenanting to affirm and promote justice, equity, and compassion in human relations) and achieving the goal of a "beloved community."
>
> Further, our sixth Principle calls on us to work toward "a world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all," thus requiring we work for "justice for all." (p. 117)

This work must be done within the context of a world community. This we cannot do without acknowledging our past injustices while also drawing on the wisdom and faithfulness of our U/U siblings in the global arena.

We echo the Commission on Institutional Change in calling "for the adoption of the following principles for reparations":

- Resources need to be redirected toward investments needed to accomplish reparations as well as transform and shift our culture and practice toward more inclusion, diversity, and equity.
- Risks should be borne by our systems and institutions and not just by individuals.
- Promising practices should be identified, curated, and made available as models.
- A more uniform, flexible, and culturally competent regional structure is essential to support this institutional change at the congregational level. (p. 117)

Illustration

It is tempting here to limit our imaginations to the impact of Unitarianism and Unitarian Universalism in the global north on U/U faith communities in the global south. The danger of this limitation is that it narrows our focus and demands a one-to-one correlation of action to harm: We in the global north did X, and this resulted in Y harm for communities in the global south. In thinking about reparations, we should shift away from this mindset and place ourselves in a larger historical frame.

If we did so, we might ask: Why is it that our resources flow unidirectionally, and only to some communities and not others? What do we understand mutuality to mean and what would it take for us, as a global faith, to invest in the development of trust—a trust that understands the complexity of life in a postcolonial reality?

Money is a tricky subject. It remains accessible to those who know how to navigate our complex systems and web of relationships. It's also true that it tends to flow from the global north to the global south (almost never the other way around) in the form of charitable giving. What would it mean to hear the stories of the ongoing impact of colonization and imperialism on our siblings in faith in the global south? What would happen if we unearthed the links between our national politics and the lived realities of our siblings—with the intent not to fix, but rather to think together, as a community, about how we live this faith?

Recommendations

- Resources should be directed toward creating the infrastructure needed for research and storytelling that encompasses the fullness of our complicated histories. We need to understand, in relationship with our affected U/Us siblings, what is needed for reparations. This requires establishing mutual relationships in which American UUs practice listening and humility.
- Risks and responsibility should be borne by our US systems and institutions and not just by individuals or U/U international communities with financial resources.
- Promising practices among international U/U communities should be identified, curated, and made available as models.
- A flexible, collaborative, and culturally competent international U/U organization is essential to support institutional changes in the global U/U arena. Such an organization should be inclusive of U/Us from historically marginalized global U/U communities, and power in them should be shared equitably among stakeholders.

Discussion Questions

- Reflect on your personal experiences with our siblings in faith located outside of the US. What assumptions did you hold?
- What stories can you tell about your congregational partnership with a global U/U group or a local community group? How has your congregation engaged these partners? Whose language and cultural ways of engaging dominated? How has your congregation navigated cultural differences and engaged with differing social or political views? How have you done so yourself?
- If the congregation has shared financial resources, who made decisions about the partnership projects and how money would be spent on them? What information were those decision-makers expected to provide to others: gift acknowledgments, status updates, other kinds of reports? To whom were they expected to provide it?
- What patterns or practices within your congregation might need reexamination and repair?

Accountability and Resources

Conclusion

The ability of some individuals, congregations, and organizations to embrace and move forward with the lessons and recommendations of *Widening the Circle of Concern* might be constrained by an unknown, unacknowledged, or underappreciated history. While this response refers to some of the history, legacy, and current practices of Unitarian/Universalism, and specifically of North American Unitarian Universalism, we recognize that there is an immense amount more to learn, particularly about practices of colonialism and imperialism both at home and abroad. Individuals and congregations engaged in partnership and international work are encouraged to form reflection groups to engage the discussion and reflection questions that have been presented here.

Wrestling with these truths is essential to our living tradition. But Unitarian Universalists have been, and remain, reluctant to do so. *Widening the Circle of Concern* quotes a 1989 report from the Black Concerns Working Group declaring that "the white majority refusal to acknowledge and accept the firsthand knowledge that people of color, indigenous and other marginalized groups face within our frames is maddening to those who experience it over and over among us" (p. 135).

This companion to *Widening the Circle of Concern* turns our attention to the ways we have been in relationship with international co-religionists and specifically draws our attention to how we might examine and reflect on those relationships while holding the recommendations made by the Commission on Institutional Change. It is important for American UUs to consider how our global siblings in faith have been harmed by our patterns of engagement, and the ways in which our engagement reinscribes colonial violences on U/U communities.

By working through the discussions and recommendations in this document, it is our hope that it may help clarify our confusing history of successes, failures, and frustrations in international engagement. When we are able to see what has been then we can begin to repair and redeem the relationships, institutions, and systems that remain.

In Resource 1 of this document, you will find the GO REPAIR process. Its name is a mnemonic for its eight steps, which can be adapted by individuals and institutions to fit their particular contexts, people, and goals. After reflecting on patterns of relationship, an individual or congregation may wish engage this process for deeper reflection and renewed commitment to action with a global partner, local outreach effort, or other community partner.

In Resource 2 of this document, you will find recommendations for additional learning including some of the sources of material for this companion.

We leave you with a final question here: How can an organization—an individual, a congregation, the UUA—speak the truth about its past and, with this truth, move forward?

Resource 1: GO REPAIR

The Hebrew phrase *tikkun olam* means "repairing the world"; it connotes social action and the pursuit of social justice. In that spirit, we invite you to engage with the GO REPAIR process. Its name is a mnemonic for its eight steps, which can be adapted by individuals and institutions to fit their particular contexts, people, and goals. For example, perhaps your congregation has a global partnership that has been challenged by North American expectations or actions. Using this process your congregation can understand the context of the challenges and later engage the partner to repair the realtionship.

> The GO REPAIR process, or device, was developed and is copyrighted by Fred Muir. While you are urged to adapt and adopt it, he asks that credit for it be given him. A version of it is included in his "Seduced By the Sound of Science: Unitarians and Universalists in the Eugenics Era," *Journal of UU Studies* 45 (2022).

Gather a team that is representative of your organization both as it is and as it aspires to be. This may require reaching out into the larger community. The team might begin by writing a mission statement that is agreed to by the organization's leaders and/or stakeholders. A good mission statement helps a team be clear and transparent; it also becomes a reference point, a touchstone, when the team feels it's necessary to reimagine or revise their mission. If you are unfamiliar with mission statements and how to compose one, here is a place to start: https://www.uua.org/leadership/library/mission-statement-tips.

Organize the team so that all members understand its purpose, what is expected of them, and what they are likely to be asked to do. The team's work may be challenging both for the organization as a whole and for team members personally, so it may be helpful to establish a team covenant: promises the members make to each other about how they will walk together to live into the mission. Team members may discover that they count on each other for moral, ethical, and spiritual support in ways that they never expected. The promises made in a covenant can honor these experiences. https://www.uua.org/re/tapestry/adults/harvest2nd/workshop1/creating-covenant

> Organizing the team could include defining assignments and inviting members to volunteer for them, so that it is clear what specifically is to be done, by whom, how, and when. Also, remember that while it's important to keep your stakeholders informed, your task may involve unearthing secrets that must be thoughtfully and carefully handled. Avoid giving stakeholders the impression that you are continuing a perceived or real legacy of silence. Your team covenant might include promising to speak with one voice and designating who speaks for the team, how, and when.

After you've met several times and are beginning to get a sense of how you will proceed, determine if you will have expenses, and request funding if so. Not only is this necessary on a practical level, funding is also one of the ways that the organization demonstrates its commitment to your work. Finally, share the team's mission statement and covenant with the organization's leaders and stakeholders. This is a critical way to earn trust and sustain integrity.

Research the context and actors of the topic or event you are addressing. What was going on—in your community, state, region, and nation, and even globally—that might have shaped it? Who were the people involved? What were their backgrounds and motivations? Look for books and articles on the subject, interviews with people involved, videos and podcasts; cast as wide a net as possible. This research can feel never-ending; you may find yourself going down endless rabbit holes. Team check-ins with periodic assessments are valuable to keep the team on mission.

Explore beyond the traditional research sites. You or the whole team might go on a field trip to relevant locations, participate in a workshop or webinar, or interview people who have been involved with what you are researching. Think broadly and deeply. Remember that interviewers must create a setting free of fear, anxiety, blame, and guilt, and those who share their stories must feel confident that the interviewer and the team will present their words accurately. Here are some suggestions for doing interviews: https://siarchives.si.edu/history/how-do-oral-history.

Personalize the topic; that is, make it personal. This is a story to be told with a cast of players: individuals, families, institutions. Who were they, where were they from, where did they go? Where was the power coming from and going? Was it shared? Dig deep to look at how concepts and identities were created and how relationships were shaped. Are the factors that shaped your members, leaders, and organization then still doing so today?

Actions should result from your work. There are many possibilities: reporting to your stakeholders, publishing a news article or opinion piece, sharing your work (as a published text, a multimedia presentation, or any other format that is suitable) with the UUA's Global Connections & Emerging Communities Office, developing guidelines for future international relationships, making contact with others affected by the issue or topic you are concerned with, and so on. A word of caution: Any action needs to be carefully considered, with reference to its context, before being undertaken. What will be done, by whom, and when? Consider the action's possible outcomes and whom they might affect. Speaking truth to power is important, and so is care for people in power who were and remain well-intentioned, but whose efforts have missed their mark.

Incarnate your learnings with a deepening spiritual experience or exercise. Creating an artwork, singing or chanting, designing and enacting a ceremony or ritual—any of these can be a vehicle giving expression to your work, revelations, and feelings. This is an opportunity for the team to partner with others (such as a community group, another congregation or a local school) and explore how what you have learned can suggest a way forward.

Renew your purpose and aspiration after you report back to your organization. Look ahead to the difference your work can make, and plan how you will continue to strive for necessary change.

Resource 2: Additional Learning

- UUA Office of Global Connections and Emerging Communities: https://www.uua.org/global
- Resource List: Becoming a Post-Imperial People of Faith, UUA Global Connections: https://bit.ly/PostImperialResources
- "Transylvania Travel Guide," Roger Bertschausen, 2019 UU Partner Church Council http://bit.ly/3AfVJnt
- Fredric Muir, *Maglipay Universalist: A History of the Unitarian Universalist Church of the Philippines* (2001; available on Kindle)
- Mark Morrison-Reed, "A Ménage à Trois: The UUA, GAUFCC and IARF and the Birth of the ICUU" https://bit.ly/3CcKj4k
- Paula Cole Jones, "Reconciliation as a Spiritual Discipline," editorial, *UU World* (March 1, 2004), https://www.uuworld.org/articles/reconciliation-spiritual-discipline
- Paula Cole Jones, "The Practice of Reconciliation," *UU World* (March 1, 2004), https://www.uuworld.org/articles/practice-reconciliation
- Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (1993)
- Robert S. Heaney, *Post-Colonial Theology: Finding God and Each Other amidst the Hate* (2019)
- "Leading into the Future, Continuing the Exploration," an interactive report from the Leading into the Future Convening, October 26–29, Prague, Czech Republic, https://bit.ly/3C937S1
- Leadership and Design Team and U/U Global Network https://www.uuglobalnetwork.org