

Aisha Hauser:

Thank you all. My name is Aisha Hauser. My pronouns are she and her. I am a middle-aged brown woman and I'm wearing glasses. I have wild curly salt and pepper hair, and I'm wearing a keffiyeh, a symbol of Palestinian liberation. I am super honored to be in this book. I got an email from Manish saying, "Please be in this book." So I sent in a blurb, a proposal, and it was accepted and it was truly just a beautiful experience. And Manish, I am the only non-ordained person in "Centering." So I was part of the "Centering" experience, which was also deeply meaningful. And hello to Judith Frediani because I want to just say Judith, Jessica, and I worked together on the same team at the UUA, which was deeply meaningful.

So my chapter is called "Collaborative Leadership for Collective Liberation," and I will be reading excerpts. "The stories we have been told about leadership and hierarchy have been reinforced over and over in different ways. In congregational systems, often it is one person, the ordained minister, who is held up as the ultimate authority and the one who decides whether or not to include others in decision-making. Sometimes it is a small group of people who hold informal and formal institutional power because of how long they have existed within the system. This concentration of power and authority is limiting at best and at worst oppressive. One antidote to this dynamic is collaborative leadership as a way to dismantle systems of oppression."

Missed opportunities at collaboration. "In a congregation I once served, there was an art gallery that began in the late '60s. According to the story, told about this gallery, it supported local and independent artists, and the money it raised would go to support the congregation. While the gallery did support some local artists, the choice of who to feature was not transparent, and the funds raised did not go directly to the congregation. The gallery committee voted among themselves, what to do for the congregation rather than simply donating to the operating budget. The gallery's committee was a group of mostly women who wielded significant power and influence over the foyer space where all the art was displayed year round.

The gallery had been controversial since it began, as it was never very welcoming to families or small children. For example, some exhibits would have breakable items within reach of small children, which made parents nervous and created the atmosphere of an elite art gallery rather than an inclusive congregation. Now, while the gallery was collaborative with each other, they did not collaborate with the wider congregation. Over time, this became a significant challenge. The lack of collaboration between the gallery and the board, and even the minister resulted in the gallery becoming separate from the congregation's UU mission.

The gallery made decisions that centered around the desires of its members and not the needs of the congregation. When things aren't collaborative, in time, the reasons why something began get lost and things get reduced to hard and fast rules. The nuance is lost. The art gallery limited its own potential by remaining isolated and fearful of collaboration. Collaboration expands the memory of an institution because its stories, methods, and mission are being held by more than one person and more than one group. In turn, this helps expand the collective imagination. If we embrace a wider set of perspectives that reflect who we are as Unitarian Universalists, we will discover more dynamic and creative solutions.

Collaborative leadership is one way to learn to connect to ourselves and others. It can help us learn to work through issues no matter how difficult, and find creative ways to affirm each other so that the community is taken care of in ways that center Unitarian Universalism. Community care often calls for clear and transparent boundaries. I have found that working collaboratively takes more time and effort so that everyone learns what those boundaries are and where the lines of accountability lie. In many ways, we as a society have been conditioned by capitalism and the patriarchy to respond to only one person, usually a white, straight, cisgender male, rather than to work as teams. But just because we aren't accustomed to collaboration doesn't mean it's impossible or unworthy of the effort." So I thank you all and I hope that you enjoy the chapter and the book. This has been a joy. Thank you.