

# Commission on Appraisal

Class Action: The Struggle with Class in Unitarian Universalism

COURTESY REPORT PRESENTED AT THE APRIL 20-21, 2017 BOARD OF TRUSTEES' MEETING

## Reflection: The Problem We All Have

### CoA Statement

### Testimonials from the Report

#### Report Abstract

This report examines the impact of class and classism on the ministries of Unitarian Universalism, the Unitarian Universalist Association, its congregations, its members and friends.

Class and its attendant classism represent an intersection of multiple cultural forces and systems of power that thwart Unitarian Universalism's vital work of building Beloved Community, stifling its impact and stunting its growth as a moral voice for good. These cultural forces separate us from one another, dividing us into groups both external and self-selected that make it difficult for us to work together effectively and to acknowledge each other's worth and dignity. The systems of power that make up class result in dominating hierarchies, inequality, and inequitable agency, oppression, and limited access to material resources.

Our vision is to co-create a faith that unifies, points to the transcendent, to that which is greater, is transformational, honors our tradition, is future-thinking, and that builds the world we dream about in the spirit of life, love, and the holy. It will require a tearing away of the barriers caused by class society to fulfill this, our free and mutual covenant.

Our work in the world--the Universalist mission of building heaven on earth--depends upon our collective ability to cross boundaries and build relationships, to make power and oppression visible, to embody our Principles, and to make our practices sustainable. Developing an understanding of how class and classism affect us, our congregations, our Association, and our faith is absolutely vital to the success of *giving life the shape of justice*.

The report provides a working definition of class, how class intersects with other oppressions, and discusses the systems that make it up. It then looks to our history, theologies, and practices through this lens. Thirdly it examines our structures, organization, and ecclesiology, and lastly it provides recommendations on how we can address class and live more fully into our faith and its vision.

### Testimonials from Report

#### Introduction to the Report's Recommendations

The Commission on Appraisal started this study by acknowledging that class is an extremely complex matter. Our work has proven to us that is indeed the case. We have spent months tugging at its knot. We have continually confronted deep, serious disagreements with each other regarding the fundamentals of this topic: the very definition of class and the question of whether class is a part of the human condition or a product of oppressive systems, particularly capitalism. Our arguments have been passionate yet reasoned and respectful. We end our project still in basic disagreement on some fundamental points. What we agree upon, however, is profoundly more important and more efficacious: Dominance, oppression, marginalization will not reign; the inclusion of all—around the table, in the sanctuary, in the work for justice—is our covenant with each other as UUs. There is work to be done. Doing that work is our covenant, our promise, our blessed struggle.

## **Sampling of the Report's Recommendations**

### **Board of Trustees**

- Facilitate revision of the Ends of the Association to more clearly articulate transformations related to class and classism
- Endorse continued funding for UU Class Conversations and for the creation and distribution of other such introductory materials and opportunities.
- Take the UU Class Conversations workshop.
- Use the UU Class Conversations curriculum as a process for becoming a "Welcome Table" congregation.

### **Association Staff**

- Initiate a sustained project to create class-inclusive materials for congregational fund-raising and conversations about money.
- Create a collection of worship materials related to class on Worship Web. This recommendation is already in progress and we thank, Rev. Erika Hewitt for her quick early work on this project.
- Begin a process that will enable the sharing of email addresses and names of all people known to our Association with the campaigns for UUA President and Moderator. The current practice amounts to a class-blind act that favors the status quo and discriminates against those who lack the means to attend regional gatherings or General Assembly. Our democratic principles favor having informed voters. Candidates for top UUA offices are among our best spokespersons for our faith. We ought to facilitate communications from the candidates during elections. We appreciate the steps that have been taken to encourage and make voting easier and recommend that this further step be taken.
- Create a program like Breakthrough Congregations to recognize congregations that are doing significant work in creating liberating forms of community and worship.
- Make the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity and its accompanying materials available to UU congregations in ways that will support work toward congregational engagement with cultural differences of many kinds.
- Develop new models of stewardship and fundraising that recognize the diversity of classes within our congregations and the realities of our changed economy.

### **Congregations**

The commission has several recommendations for congregations and the most significant of those is to pay ministers and staff just, livable wages that enable vocationally appropriate living standards. We heard many heart-breaking stories from ministers who 'class pass' to fit in with their congregation.

### **Testimonials from Report**

### **Closing**