

25 September 2017

TO: UUA Board

FROM: Rev. Leslie Takahashi

RE: Report on the Work of the Commission on Institutional Change

The Commission has had six meetings to date, including a two day in-person meeting in Chicago in August. As you do not have time on your agenda to discuss this work in depth, I look forward to being with you for part of your October meeting to discuss this in further detail.

Purpose and Goals: The Commission on Institutional Change held its first in-person meeting on August 21 and 22. After two days of deliberation and consideration of the charge presented it by the Board of Trustees of the Unitarian Universalist Association, the Commission completed a statement of its work, its guiding principles and its approach to its work. Over the two years the Commission will report back to the Board and General Assembly its learning, recommendations, and guidance for ongoing work. The Commission will:

- Ground its work in theological reflection and seek the articulation of a liberating Unitarian Universalism which is anti-oppressive, multicultural and accountable to the richness of our diverse heritage.
- Oversee an audit of racism within the Unitarian Universalist Association practices and policies to set priorities and make recommendations for anti-oppressive strategies (including hiring and personnel practices and governance structures) and that will advance our progress towards building the Beloved Community and hold the Association accountable.
- Collect stories of those who have been the target of harm or aggression because of racism within existing UUA culture and to identify the aspects of that culture which must be dismantled to transform us into a faith for our times.
- Examine and document critical events and practices at all levels of the Association, congregations and related ministries which spotlight areas for redress and restorative justice and illuminate the expectations placed on religious professionals of color in the transformation of our faith.
- Identify promising practices for recruitment, retention and formation of religious leadership which spans the spectrum of race, class and age and which reflects an ecclesiology of an inclusive faith.

Principles to Guide Our Work: We also spent time discerning guiding principles with which to address our work to end systemic racial oppression in our Association, informed by the experience we bring to our work as Commissioners. These will be evolving, however we begin with these premises:

- Unitarian Universalists and the practice of Unitarian Universalism need to call us to live into the fullness of the theology we inherit and proclaim.
- Transformation is needed at all levels of our Association of Congregations to abandon dysfunctional cultural expressions of our theology and polity.
- The covenants which bind us together both within our own faith and to our partners in the world are frayed and broken by the domination of white supremacy culture among us.
- To keep Unitarian Universalism alive, we must privilege the voices which have been silenced or drowned out and dismantle elitist and exclusionary white privilege which inhibits connection and creativity.
- In this effort, we should be guided by the bright spots of creativity and learning where multicultural and multigenerational new expressions of our faith are found.

Statement of How We Will Work: We have agreed on the following approach to our work. Former tri-president Rev. Sofia Bentancourt in charging the Commission instructed us as Commission member to work in a way which will be sustainable and so the Commission issued these statements about HOW they will work.

- We are a volunteer commission with primary duties outside this work.
- We intend to do and model this work in a way that is sustainable for us.
- We will be issuing regular communications and we ask you to pay attention.
- We will be seeking stories and accounts to inform our work, please monitor our web page and our website and other social media.
- In communicating with us, we ask that you use our group email which is [commission@uua.org](mailto:commission@uua.org).

Affirmation of Our Independence: For the Commission to do its work, it is important that we be able to look at all aspects of that which contributes to the persistence of systemic racism in our Association. This may include policies and practices of the Board and for this reason it is important that we be independent of the Board. We would ask the Board to affirm through a motion our independence and our ability to act without management by the Board or its members and would ask and for a resolution to affirm the independence. We do not feel that we can do our work without this important clarity on accountability.

Budget: We have been greatly slowed in our work and especially our communications by the fact that no allocation of funds has been made. When asked to serve, we were told that we would have access to independent staffing. This is essential to do our work and our inability to do this to date has greatly slowed and hampered us. The adoption of a budget is key to this. Thank you to Tim Brennan and Sarah Lammert for their work to help cost out this budget. (Please see attached.)

Southern Regional Lead Hire: We have begun our examination of this issue with private interviews which may lead to a more public process in the future. Our goal is to conclude the examination of the issues in this process before the end of 2017.

Communications Strategy: We have struggled to have our communication infrastructure established. We plan to have a website where people can submit comment and testimony which may need to be housed outside the UUA.org site for technical reasons. We wish to make this a highly interactive process and want to be sure that people who do not have the means to travel may still participate.

Timeline: We will provide you with a more detailed timeline by your October meeting.