

UUA Repair Process Shared Statement

October 15, 2019

On August 19 and 20, six current and former UUA leaders joined together to repair relationships with each other, the UUA, and faith community, including current/former UUA staff (Susan Frederick-Gray, Carey McDonald, Scott Tayler), current/former board members (Christina Rivera, Andy Burnette, Elandria Williams), and those involved in critical roles during the 2017 southern region hiring process (Scott, Christina and Andy). These leaders were supported by two outside facilitators, Richael Faithful and Katie Petitt, and a spiritual witness, Drew MacFayden.

The purpose of this space was that of repair—personal and institutional relationships that were hurt, impacted, and shaped by events over the last two and a half years. This in-person gathering was the outcome of a months-long process that officially began in April 2019 and in which each participant was invited and agreed to be part of the process. The repair process set out to use restorative and transformative justice principles to address various levels of ruptured relationships supported by outside non-UU facilitators who, however, share similar social justice and spiritual values as the Unitarian Universalist faith.

While the initial charge was to engage a repair process that centered on hiring for the Southern Regional Position in spring 2017, it became a much deeper engagement which examined the layers and dimensions of harm experienced by public reactions and debate connected to, and beyond, the position hire as well as UUA institutional responses since that time. It was not the province of this gathering to focus on specific institutional changes that are currently being reviewed elsewhere in Unitarian Universalism. We were instead focused on the human relationships at the heart of these precipitating events left unresolved and untended.

This was the first time this constellation of people were in the same room, which itself, felt monumental, given the pain of the last several years. During this one and a half-day gathering, we grieved in ritual together; shared degrees of trust that at times were tenuous; expressed our needs and care to most fully participate; related experiences of harm; directly addressed questions to one another for clarity; and sought personal and institutional commitments. We also engaged closure rituals that lifted up the wisdom we gathered, clarity we received, and remaining questions we held. Overall, we were able to honor and name the ongoing impact on each participant over the last two and a half years.

Specifically, we witnessed Christina, Andy, and Scott whose lives, now symbols of racial justice politics in and outside of the faith, continue to be defined by not only events from over two years ago, but the events and aftermath that exist within broader unjust legacies we have all inherited, and an inflamed political-cultural moment we occupy.

Susan, Carey, and Elandria provided invaluable institutional memory, cultural context, and outlined current UUA leadership values, approaches, and commitments, as well as organizational, theological and social questions that remain ahead. Two affirmations were particularly healing for some participants. All participants affirmed support for the current UUA administration's leadership on articulating and practicing strong, institutional anti-racism commitments. The participating UUA leaders also personally affirmed the importance of Christina, Scott and Andy's continued leadership in our movement.

All participants hope this process and gathering can represent our best values-in-action as a faith. We tried to honor the inherent worth and dignity of each person in the room by deeply listening to each other's experiences and feelings, even if discordant with our own. We exercised justice, compassion, and equity by acknowledging each other's experience and seeking understanding. We affirmed this in the context of a faith and institution that is turning away from white-centeredness and its harm, and an administration that is turning toward powerful inclusivity. We appreciated that while the process of repair did not ensure restoration, it did, however, represent the kind of brave and tender work that is needed across our association in order for us to move forward faithfully. We most certainly did not demonstrate these values perfectly, but we did succeed at times, and earnestly held the intention to do so—which, as a number of participants expressed, was healing in and of itself.

We hope this effort inspires and affirms other efforts toward togetherness and restorative practices. May our spiritual growth move us toward each other. And may this process serve as a model of possibility and hope.

Thank you for reading and for your communal support.

Respectfully,

Christina Rivera
Scott Tayler
Andy Burnette
Elandria Williams
Carey McDonald
Susan Frederick-Gray