

Findings Related to the Southern Regional Lead Hiring Decision, Spring 2017

Commission on Institutional Change

April 2018

When appointed during the 2017 General Assembly, the Commission on Institutional Change was charged with working to identify and propose redress to issues of structural racism within the UUA. Specifically, the charge adopted by the Board of the Unitarian Universalist Association requested the Commission work “in collaboration with a professional organization capable of conducting an external audit of white privilege and the structure of power within Unitarian Universalism, to analyze structural racism and white supremacy within the UUA. The scope of the Commission shall be broad and far-reaching, with the goal of long-term cultural and institutional change that redeems the essential promise and ideals of Unitarian Universalism.”

We begin with the premise in all our work that the values of Unitarian Universalism cannot be realized in a system which 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 which 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.

We also work within a frame that the change required will be fundamental and deep, rather than superficial, and critical to the ability of the Association to bridge the generational divide and to survive. Younger generations expect multicultural competency, are wary of institutions which lack authenticity with their values and expect more participatory models of shared leadership. People still in the workforce are in increasingly diverse settings and face very long work hours so institutional in-fighting or internal power-struggles can cause them to disengage. In an increasingly secular society, religious institutions must show that they have more to offer than a vague sense of community and as people of color make up more of the population, the need to be responsive grows.

The Commission on Institutional Change conducted 15 interviews and had a listening presence on a Board of Trustees conversation with former UUA President Peter Morales to grasp a range of perspectives related to the events around the Southern Regional Lead Hiring decisions in the spring of 2017. The interviews were conducted from September 2017 through January 2018. What they revealed were the myriad ways that a system of sometimes unconscious (and sometimes conscious bias) and white supremacy culture led to events which hurt many people, destabilized the workings and staffing at the UUA, and resulted in a less vital Unitarian Universalism. The events around the Southern Regional Lead Hiring decision, specific to a decision which involves a personnel matter which is about individuals and specifics, are emblematic of the problems around race in the Association.

One Unitarian Universalist “Tapestry of Faith” curriculum defines racism as:

An institutionalized system of economic, political, social, and cultural relations that ensures that one racial group has and maintains power and privilege over all others in all aspects of life. As such, racism is measured by its economic, cultural, sociological, and

political outcomes rather than its intentions (i.e., its effect on both racially and ethnically marginalized groups and racially and ethnically dominant groups).

It is in this sense that we entered into these interviews and information sharing about what had happened as part of the Southern Regional Lead Hiring decision in the spring of 2017.

After conducting interviews and reviewing information related to the situation, we offer the following observations about the economic, cultural, sociological and political impacts of race and racism in our Association. We note with sorrow the death of Moderator Jim Key during these events which added to the emotional nature of the spring. We make these observations holding our role as a faith community, bound by principles which would should direct us in times such as those we faced in the spring of 2017. It should be noted that we concentrated in those events and participants involved in this situation between February 2017 and the end of June 2017.

When the Southern Regional Lead hiring process took place, racial tensions were already at a breaking point in the system, especially for religious professionals of color who endure countless insults and aggressions as part of their work.

Religious professionals of color, in particular, were aware and concerned about these inequities and the events of Spring 2017 occurred in a system where racial tensions were already high. Religious professionals of color travel within those tensions throughout their professional life and encounter many slights on their professionalism and personhood at the hands of people who do not understand cultural difference.

The number of religious professionals of color has been growing, in part because of the support they get from UUA staff of color and because of the continued support for the annual gathering for religious professionals, “Finding Our Way Home” which was protected when other programs were cut by the administration of Rev. Peter Morales. In a world in which diverse settings are increasingly the norm, religious professionals of color provide a very specific form of leadership in addition to the other professional skills which they bring. If properly supported, the hiring of a religious professional of color can be a turning point in a congregation’s commitment to address bias and racism inherent in a white-centered system. Aisha Hauser, a religious educator, observed, “I feel like we are at a precipice. Either we are going to be who we say we are or we will be a country club for white people.”

- At the time of the decision to hire for the Southern Regional Lead position, five regional leads, who supervise the fifty members of the UUA’s Congregational Life staff who work throughout the United States, were all white ministers, as was Rev. Scott Tayler, their supervisor. Two of Tayler’s 10 colleagues on the UUA’s Leadership Council were people of color.
- While other people of color are on the UUA payroll, many of them have traditionally been hired in support and other lower level positions which limited their ability to influence the culture of the institution.
- When the controversy began, of 56 people with supervisory responsibilities at the UUA, eight were people of color, or just over 14 percent according to Rob Molla, the UUA’s Director of Human Resources.
- The need to make change in this area was known to all involved including Scott Tayler who stated that he had planned to hire a religious professional of color in a future hire.

- News of Rev. Andy Burnette’s hiring, and his resignation from the UUA Board of Trustees, emerged as UU religious professionals of color were gathered in Baltimore for their annual Finding Our Way Home retreat on March 17, 2017. At this gathering each year, religious professionals of color share their experiences which predictably include mistreatment at the hands of white leadership within congregational and Associational systems.
- The growing number of these stories and the growing discomfort with how this reflects the values of affirmation and interconnection within our faith creates a particular grief within communities of Unitarian Universalists of color, especially religious professionals of color, many of whom hold multiple identities which are marginalized within contemporary Unitarian Universalism.
- Without proper support, anecdotal evidence shows that religious professionals of color are likely to face short tenures within congregations whose members may have never had another significant relationship with a person of color prior to knowing a religious professional of color--and these tensions continue. UUA Chief Operating Officer Carey MacDonald has reported to the UU World that his staff has received 15 reports of religious professionals of color encountering conflicts within their congregational placements since the events of Spring 2017.
- As a result of the aggressions they experience as a part of the Unitarian Universalist culture which include but are not limited to questions about their qualifications, comments that they are hired only as a “token,” regular challenges to their authority, culturally uninformed comments or articulated racial slurs, religious professionals of color are often in need of treatment for traumatic impact of this cumulative experience.

Basic practices of good governance were violated and these led to the level of chaos which resulted from these events.

What is clear is that no one problem in the system led to the events of the spring of 2017. Tensions between President Peter Morales and the UUA Board of Trustees were longstanding and while they had improved by 2017, questions that had been raised about difference in vision and focus remained. Our Association and its congregations operate from practices which have been unaltered for decades in a world which is changing rapidly and the knowledge that many of our practices no longer serve us well led to disregard of the rules and policies on the books. Some outgrowths of this are as follows:

- On February 16, 2017, the Board of Trustees chose to suspend its policy which forbade members of the board to apply for staff positions and this action was one catalyst for the Southern Regional Lead Hiring controversy. Applications were submitted before the vote to allow board members to apply had been taken. Rev. Scott Tayler who made the hiring decision wrote of this: “While not informed about the Board discussion...I expected the discussion to include the principle that Board membership is not an automatic advantage in the selection process. I also expected the Board to would have discussed [the applicant’s] future status in board decisions and discussions if she was unsuccessful. For multiple reasons, I have found the practice of allowing UUA Board members to apply for UUA staff positions problematic.”
- No clear hiring processes were practiced or observed in this particular hiring decision and informal networks were a frequent source of candidates. Even those asked to play a role in the interviews felt they did not have power or authority to influence the decisions.

An important aspect of our tradition--being in covenantal relationship with one another--was not observed by many of the direct participants and observers of the process which led to more damage being done to individuals.

The sense of covenantal relationship and being bound as one religious body to a shared vision of beloved community was lacking. Many of those interviewed spoke of their disillusionment about this last aspect in particular. The lack of a covenantal understanding is seen in the following:

- Resignations compounded issues and did not allow an exploration through a more covenantal process as key actors were no longer available for dialogue.
- Key matters related were discussed extensively by people in leadership on social media, which, because of resignations and legal settlements, led to opinions being formed without full information. Social media distortions promoted adversarial conflict, triangulation and demonization of participants on all sides.
- Legal settlements took precedence over the covenantal agreements upon which our Associational polity rests.

A bifurcated governance system does not allow for clear and strategic transformation.

The governance of the Unitarian Universalist Association allows a Board of Trustees and a President to take separate directions and this makes it difficult to make systemic change. We live in a time when systemic change is essential and cooperation among all leaders is necessary to move towards being an authentically inclusive, mission-focused faith grounded in the values of our religious heritage. The events around the southern regional lead hiring decision illustrate just a few examples of this issue:

- These events took place in an environment in which no shared goal for becoming transformatively multicultural existed.
- The President of the Association Peter Morales was not consulted or interviewed for background information when the events around the hiring decisions were made public through social media, including the severance packages. This continued a pattern of animosity between the Administration and the Board which prevented a lack of clear vision on the steps needed for multicultural transformation, as well as other issues around the use of policy governance within the Association.
- The Board of Trustees was not involved in major financial decisions regarding severance packages which is a concern because of their fiduciary function. This was true even when decisions were made because of fear of legal action, a contingency about which the Board would have been expected to be alerted.

Within the events around the Southern Regional Lead Hiring decision itself, power and economic advantages was centered around the white participants in the process.

The decision to hire in this circumstance was made by one individual, Rev. Scott Tayler, who felt clear on his authority to do so and was up front in claiming this as his role, although he involved others in the process in less clear ways. The system from which this hiring decision was made reflected these characteristics:

- While a desire to gain greater “diversity” existed and was a stated goal for a number of those in positions of power, no analysis of power or privilege within the system was held in common by key leaders and the vision did not include a desire to embrace other ways of thinking and being from a multicultural frame.
- The key decision-makers were white and the systems used were informal and relied on people’s networks which tend to reflect their own culture and background.
- Women and one person of color were involved in the hiring decision in murky roles with little authority. One who participated in some of the interviews said, “I was voluntold to be a part of the team” and yet was also clear that they knew their opinion would not influence the final decision.
- The underrepresentation of religious professionals of color in higher level and better paying jobs reinforced white dominance in the system and modeled only one form of leadership rather than shared leadership.
- The compensation packages offered to employees who resigned reflected existing policies which provided severance packages to the best compensated employees, who were largely white. The largest package, offered after a resignation, was offered because of a threat of legal action.

Assumptions growing out of “colorblind racism,” ignorance of racial bias and white supremacy culture led to conclusions that harmed religious professionals of color.

Racism is when power and privilege are used together to deny opportunity to people of color. Today’s forms are more subtle but just as capable of doing damage as the versions in earlier times. For example, “colorblind racism” is a new form of racism identified by scholar Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, based on the profession of colorblindness as a way of continuing not to challenge the racial order. “White supremacy culture” refers to the unspoken beliefs and cultural practices which reinforce an institution’s white-centered practices. One article defines it thus: “Culture is powerful precisely because it is so present and at the same time so very difficult to name or identify...” Without conscious efforts, predominantly white institutions such as the Unitarian Universalist Association will perpetuate this sort of thinking and it will harm “global majority” members who are trying to be part of the system. Some examples which contributed to the events around the hiring decision include:

- The assumption that the only qualified candidates would need to be completely comfortable with and for those in the white-centered culture or would need to be ministers.
- A lack of awareness and outright denial of the possibility of racial bias in hiring among several of the people responsible for hiring for key positions at the Associational level, even though the existence of this type of bias is widely documented.
- One high-ranking member of the staff spoke in his interview about how he would hand-pick people and then select them, and all of those he mentioned as being good hires were white ministers.
- Another member who had control over hiring spoke about his plan to defer hiring of people of color to a later time, reflecting an awareness of the need and yet a diminished sense of urgency as well as a sense that these were difficult hires because too few qualified candidates of color exist.

- In our interviews, comments about the perceived lack of qualified candidates of color were juxtaposed with examples of personal recruitment of white candidates deemed ready for the job.

White decision-makers lacked an understanding about why the perspectives and skills of religious professionals of color are necessary to fulfill the mission of Unitarian Universalism as part of our living tradition.

The larger frame of this single hiring decision, was, again, decades of experiences by religious professionals of color who face the casual degradations known as microaggressions on a regular basis as well as more blatant forms of discrimination. Christina Rivera who was the unsuccessful candidate for the position, noted that she was told she was not a good “fit” for the position though it was not clear what a good “fit” would entail. Many religious professionals of color can bring healthy connections to diverse groups in the community and, through their own life experience, offer congregations fresh perspectives. The importance of being a person capable of understanding multiple cultures belied the Association’s stated intention to move towards multiculturalism and inclusion. Other manifestations include:

- A lack of appreciation from the average Unitarian Universalist that religious professionals of color are essential to the survival of the faith in an increasingly global, diverse world and to attract younger members and activists who generally expect cultural competency and value authenticity and confluence of mission with action.
- A lack of understanding of the value of the diverse perspectives and range of skills brought by religious professionals of color who are often perceived as token hires and who are disproportionately also affected by paternalism, sexism, classism, heterosexism and a bias towards the able-bodied.
- A lack of commitment to promoting a Unitarian Universalism which could come closer to meeting the mandates of our pillar first and seventh principles.
- A lack of willingness to reaching out to and retaining the many people of color and younger activists who could find a home in the Unitarian Universalist tradition.

A fear of open conflict and assumption of “good intentions” increased the damage done by institutional racism and other forms of oppression within our Association

Racism, as the definition cited above notes, is not about intention--it is about impact. In our conversations about these events, we noted that direct and accountable communication was often lacking and that a discomfort with open conflict exacerbated tensions around racial difference. We include just a few examples here:

- Information about how the hiring happened was closely held and even employees who were present in interviews were not clear as to what the process or criteria were that were used to hire.
- Female candidates and candidates of color were not given direct feedback about their status in the process--an example of this was that a number who were not finalists in the process believed that they were.
- Those who challenge assumptions or biases were labelled as problematic or trouble-making.
- Breaks in relationship that occurred because of the conflicts continue to this day because key people left and ended all contact rather than continuing to engage across conflict.

- A female candidate of color, Christina Rivera, faced and continues to face a series of threats to her personhood and professionalism, the latest being an anonymous note accusing her of being focused only on issues of race as a professional. This is a common experience for people of color who raise issues around racism and oppression. Her children have also been targeted as fair game for comment.
- The white man awarded the position, Rev. Andy Burnette, was also mocked and objectified, including having his picture featured with the label “white supremacist” which resulted in unnecessary ostracism (such as not being invited by the Board to their end of the year dinner) as well as serious stress and health consequences for his family members.
- Resignations precluded the opportunity for further dialogue and full information disclosure. Instead the events were tried in the court of conjecture and social media.
- The perceived need to keep these secret compounded the traumatic response of religious professionals of color, who have experienced and witnessed their peers deal with a perceived need to “keep the congregation from getting upset” as a way to deny them and congregations an open conversation about performance. This has been used as a tactic when a small group is removing a religious professional of color from their position.
- The dynamics of white supremacy culture also limit opportunities for collegiality for religious professionals of color.

Clear and consistent systems of accountability were missing and accountability to the mission and purpose of Unitarian Universalism was not seen as preeminent by many.

The level of informality and lack of documentation in these events was concerning. Examples are included in the bullets below. In addition, various players saw themselves as accountable to their own integrity or to their colleagues rather than to the larger mission, or even the standard processes, of the Association. The impact of years of stress between the Board and the President of the Association as well as between religious professionals of color and the existing systems were evident. Some examples:

- Hiring processes were inconsistent and undocumented. Informal systems tend to bias those who have power in existing power networks which privilege those who have been in power.
- A common frame for understanding how power and privilege work was not present in the system. While “diversity” was recognized as a goal, no clear processes were established to advance power-sharing or to place professionals of color in leadership positions.
- Key members of the staff discussed the advantages of informal systems of recruitment which allowed them to directly attract white people they perceived brought particular talents.
- Severance agreements were made without key Board members involvement, including the UUA’s financial advisor who raised concerns about learning of this information at a Board meeting.
- Religious professionals of color were more likely to see their accountability as to the larger mission of Unitarian Universalism which made these deviations from what seemed like open process to be more spiritually damaging.
- People of color in Unitarian Universalism have no clear recourse or path to obtain reparations when events cause them to bear the burden of a system.

- White participants in these incidents also have no place to turn to for greater understanding of biases or systemic oppressions about which they may never have had cause to learn.

Widespread disregard of existing systems and policies shows a lack of trust in existing systems which have not been intentionally redesigned to reflect the complexities of an emerging multicultural Unitarian Universalism.

Upon beginning the interviews, we noted that many participants in the system did not chose to honor policies on paper as far as hiring practices. In a UU World article, Acting Chief Operating Officer Sarah Lammert said she learned about the severance packages on the first day she stepped into her interim position when Limpert resigned. While the UUA’s severance policy, “as written, is fair,” she said, “I don’t think it’s good to go outside the procedures in the way that happened here. I can’t defend any of it.” Other examples include:

- Informal method of consulting colleagues in hiring left people confused about their roles and feeling undervalued.
- There was “systems beating” in the system—people felt the system was so broken that they did not need to honor it. This occurs when systems are seen as fundamentally biased.
- The UUA Board which chose to disregard its own rules which prohibit sitting board members for applying for open positions at the Association.
- White participants often saw themselves as more capable operating solo than any system which could be put in place and so disregarded them. Some religious professionals of color saw them as so broken that they did not need to respect them.
- Severance packages which generally are not put into place when people resign voluntarily were negotiated.
- An emphasis on legality and a fear of lawsuits dominated rather than the need to honor the covenantal values of our faith.
- The appointment of a non-traditional tri-presidency of Revs. Sofia Betancourt and William Sinkford and Dr. Leon Spencer provided some relief however their term in office was centered around the spiritual, emotional and practical fallout from spring’s events.

Informal systems perpetuated white-centeredness in hiring

Hiring systems used within the Association and reported through the interviews were informal and did not use a consistent set of hiring practices. Procedures which were in place were not followed. Emphasis was placed on personal recruitment and practices. Confusion about the nature of the process, widespread disillusionment about the existing hiring processes led to disregard of written policies and ad hoc policies which did not create a process in which those outside the mainstream could participate.

- In the Southern Regional Lead hiring decision, hiring practices were informal, with people of color and women being brought on to be “thought partners” but without the input of an actual search committee. Some of those who were asked to participate in interviews felt as if the decisions had been made previously.
- The hiring decision in question was made by Rev. Scott Tayler. While others were involved in the interview process, they were not given a voice in the final hiring decision.

- While progress was made to increase both the percent and number of employees of color, a marked lack of people of color in higher level and leadership roles limited the impact of the change and re-enforced a culture of tokenism.

Religious professionals of color--and women--were not given direct or honest feedback

Racism and sexism can operate in subtle ways which were seen in this set of events. White managers reported the desire to provide opportunities for people of color within the system and yet they perpetuated bias by their inability to give direct feedback to people of color who were candidates for positions. As Rev. William Sinkford, who served as one of the Tri-Presidents observed, the issues around race were amplified by other issues around paternalism. “The culture of supremacy is not just about race, it is also about patriarchy,” he observed. Interim moderator Denise Rimes said the Board did not “ensure that all issues were placed out in the open.”

- Power-hoarding and the way that people in power controlled information lead to at least two candidates believing they had been told they were finalists when they were not,
- Models of leadership which could have incorporated new approaches were not considered or embraced such as the idea of a co-lead in the Southern Region.
- Those participating as candidates in the process were not given clear feedback as to how they were faring in the process. An example of this is that all the people we spoke to who were candidates in the search process believed they were finalists.
- Two candidates who were not white men were both under the impression that they were finalists when they were not.

Lack of multicultural competency at the regional staff level has a disproportionate impact on religious professionals of color.

The Southern Regional Lead Hiring decision brought longstanding concerns of religious professionals of color to the forefront--and in the year that has passed since these events, a number of religious professionals have shared that they were not able to get critical support from regional staff which resulted in early termination of positions. The staff of the Unitarian Universalist Association lack a common frame for understanding systemic racism, sexism, heterosexualism, ableism and other oppressions and regional staff without this understanding cannot effectively aide a religious professional of color who might be in need of support against a congregation also wrestling with embracing a different kind of leadership.

- The UU Ministers Association culture around collegiality and the “good officer” system which is supposed to support ministers in times of conflict with congregations or with colleagues is also not multiculturally competent. The inability to understand the dynamics around the service of religious professionals of color makes most of those professionals unwilling to seek assistance from either system and makes them more vulnerable to negotiated settlement.
- Regional staff hold key functions such as start-up weekends or negotiated settlements which determine what happens to religious professionals of color.
- Continued loss of religious professionals of color this year shows the urgent need to address the inadequacies in the regional staff system.
- Competency in dealing with issues around race was clearly not seen as a competency critical to being a lead field staff.

- What is the right “fit” for a position depends on whether you see the job as moving towards stated goals for inclusion or whether you see it as supporting the existing white-centered culture of congregations.

Without a clear and accountable process of resolving these issues, events and individuals were tried in the court of social media which resulted in confusion, targeting and vilification of individuals and did not promote a greater sense of what had gone wrong.

Just within this one incident, extensive harm was done to many relationships and people because of racial bias, unclear expectations, lack of common vision and a method for addressing wrongs done. What must not be forgotten is that this was just one among many which occur every year and which people of color are aware of within our Association. The lack of safety for truth-telling has meant that religious professionals of color are carrying an unsustainable amount of tension. Ironically, the positive development of a growing number of religious professionals has led to those same religious professionals of color collecting more and more stories about damage done to those same professionals, especially because they are too often placed in congregational systems ill-equipped to handle a different leadership style in a healthy way. These dynamics also hurt white participants. Some examples:

- Christina Rivera paid a high price for speaking out against a system she believed could not see her skills.
- “Victimhood doesn’t look good on you” was one statement posted on Rev. Andy Burnette’s Facebook page and his family, including his children, suffered from his becoming perceived as the symbol of white supremacy culture. His relationships with other members of the UUA Board with whom he served were deeply damaged.
- The lack of participation by key members such as President Peter Morales and the one who made the hiring decision, Rev. Scott Tayler, helped fuel rumors and divisions and, when combined with social media accounts, led to their almost complete isolation from Unitarian Universalist community.
- The resignation of the UUMA Executive Director Don Southworth and the death of Moderator Jim Key in a time of great turmoil in the nation as well, added to a sense of damage and decline for the UUA.
- Without clear leadership and process, social media became a source of judgment and condemnation.
- Terms of the settlements were not clearly explained or accounted for and key people were not consulted such as the financial advisor for the Association.

Truth must come before reconciliation and transformation and truth-telling is still dangerous for religious professionals of color.

The Board charged the Commission with examining the relevance of “truth and reconciliation” processes to key events in the Associations’ recent past. While we spent some time researching these processes as they have been used in a number of nations and municipalities to resolve issues related to damages from racial conflict, we find that the circumstances of the UUA may require a different kind of response. Some observations:

- While the Commission was charged includes: “Establish a ‘truth and reconciliation’ process to create a climate of honesty, accountability, and disclosure essential to our

learning and multicultural growth as an institution,” most religious professionals of color do not feel safe to tell their truths because of what they have experienced from congregational leaders, colleagues and many of the systems set up to support them.

- The lack of true anti-oppressive, anti-racism orientation on the part of regional staff and “good officers” through the Ministers’ Association has been particularly damaging to religious professionals of color which is, in part, why the events around this hiring decision became such a lightning rod for criticism. As part of the conversations we have elicited, it has become clear that the Association’s credentialing system for religious professionals and its systems for developing lay leaders do not take into account the dynamics of oppression and its systemic effects.
- No process exists for redress when damage due to institutional racism is done whether that damage is done to people of color or white participants. Trial in the court of social media is not a healthy alternative to a real process.
- No consistent resources are available for religious professionals of color (or others) who experience traumatic stress as a result of the lack of clarity of mission around racial inclusion and the gap between our aspirations and our actuality.
- No data is available on the number of religious professionals employed at the congregational level or the types of positions, other than in the ministry and these statistics are also not easily obtained. That an Association which claims to wish to become more diverse does not track data which most corporations now track is puzzling.
- Since we began our work, more religious professionals have lost their positions or are in conflict with congregations and the existing systems remain inept and inadequate at offering them help. The loss of any religious professionals of color among us is costly.
- The time for “reconciliation” may be passed. What may be needed is what author Melvin Bray calls a “truth and transformation” process which looks at not reconciling us to equity under an outmoded system but reimagining a new system of equity, inclusion and innovation.

A Final Note

This report and the accompanying video recording are not flawless. Perfection is neither an aspiration nor an achievement as it comes from a cultural model we reject. We conducted this work in good faith and within the boundaries of limited time and assistance in the hopes that these general insights may be helpful.

For further information on our work, please go to

<https://www.uua.org/uuagovernance/committees/commission-institutional-change>

To be added to the list to get alerts to our work, contact mfogliano@uua.org.

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RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

The events around the Southern Regional Lead hiring decision encapsulated larger tensions faced by religious professionals of color in the Unitarian Universalist Association. Religious professionals of color are uniquely qualified to help our Association move into a more authentic expression of itself and support of these professionals must be a priority if we are to be who we aspire to be. What happened in the spring of 2017 was that a conversation that had been carried on for decades by religious professionals of color met the public discourse of the Association, largely in a social media frame in which we do not have well-defined standards of behavior. Mainstream Unitarian Universalism was not aware of the amount of pain and trauma being held by the communities of color in the Association which erupted around these events.

The concerns and grievances raised were not new: a marginalized set of professionals had been speaking about them only within their own braver and safer spaces yet the events of 2017 propelled a number of these leaders into saying publically what had been said in people of color spaces for many years. As we stated before, this incident is a “wholon” which contains the issues which result from practices which center whiteness and is only one incident. In our continued work, we will continue to explore the themes we raise here. We make these specific recommendations out of a sense of urgency that the longer we wait, the more the service of religious professionals of color becomes untenable and the more religious professionals of color find themselves unable to offer their gifts. Specifically, we call for:

1. A clear vision for multicultural transformation translated to action at the congregational level is needed. The current governance system in the UUA needs to be examined because wasting energy in in-fighting between the Board and the Presidency is a waste of resources at a time when we are struggling to keep interest in institutionalized religion alive, especially among younger generations who do not tolerate inauthenticity. The President of the Unitarian Universalist Association and the Board of Trustees should set a clear vision for a Unitarian Universalism which embraces the fullness of an transformative multiculturalism as a fulfillment of our principles and heritage. We need the common understanding of power and privilege as well as a sense of urgency around transforming the Association.
2. The President and the Board should make policies and set practices which allow for best hiring practices to promote a diverse workforce. They should also acknowledge the critical role that religious professionals of color play in moving Unitarian Universalism to reflect the multiracial dynamics which are rapidly spreading across our nation. These professionals hold a vision of what a transformed and multicultural Unitarian Universalism could be and are often the only conduit our predominantly white congregations have to understanding a way of being which is more authentic. All policies and processes adopted should be observed by all involved and exceptions should be granted only under extreme circumstances. Clear goals for hiring and inclusion should be set which reflect not only the current situation but sets out a clear plan for going forward.
3. Anti-oppressive best practices should be the standard of practice for all leaders of the Association, paid and unpaid, especially those who are helping congregations navigate new ways of leadership such as regional staff and interim ministers. All such leaders should also understand the role of healthy conflict. These gate-keepers are essential to ensuring the conditions in which religious professionals of color and other professionals from marginalized groups can succeed in the UUA’s white-centered culture.

4. President Susan Frederick-Gray and her administration have already put in place new hiring procedures. All the hiring policies and procedures, including the new ones, should be assessed through an anti-oppressive lens. The expanded and improved policies put in place by should be examined as a key part of the racial audit.
5. Congregational life staff who are the direct link to the congregations are critical, especially in times of transition and should be culturally competent, skilled in conflict resolution and aware of the impacts of trauma. All interim ministers and other volunteers and paid staff working with transitions should have anti-oppressive training and be skilled in navigating the dynamics around race. Congregations who are already attempting to transform should be supported and offered resources as should any congregation employing a religious professional of color.
6. Clear processes should be established so that people who have concerns and injuries can know how they can be addressed and the widespread culture of secrecy broken. Congregations who have been abusive to professionals should be named publicly and a record of their action maintained as information for future candidates. Processes should include forums for reconciliation conducted by people with an ability to understand a diversity of experiences. A grievance procedure for religious professionals of color must be established. Ways to privilege covenant over legalities should be explored.
7. Until such time as all regional staff can have anti-oppressive competency, a special team which is trauma-informed, should be brought in when religious professionals of color are in conflict with congregations.
8. Funds should be set aside to support the development of religious professionals of color and to provide for their education, development and healing from injury by congregations as their presence is so critical and the cost of serving so high for them.
9. The process of credentialing warrants a deep examination and should be a special focus of the racism audit being conducted by the Commission on Institutional Change. This should include a look at the Ministerial Fellowship Committee, its procedures and the accessibility of credentialing for all religious professionals.
10. The relationship between the Unitarian Universalist Association Board, president, staff and congregations all need examining as true transformation is needed at all levels to move towards justice-making and liberation and fulfilling the aspirations of the Unitarian Universalist faith. Change at the Associational level is only helpful if it impacts the experience of people in Unitarian Universalist congregations and communities.

Chronology of Key Events

This is a rough chronology of events as related by interviewees and through articles.

September 2016 Rev. Ken Hurto announces that he will retire. After availability of the Southern Regional Lead position was made known, Director of Congregational Life Rev. Scott Tayler asks Connie Goodbread to serve as a “thought partner” in discussion how to fill the position, Kathy McGowan and Dawn Cooley propose filling the position as co-leads. Proposal is endorsed by existing Southern Regional staff, rejected by Tayler.

December 14, 2016 The Southern Regional Lead position is posted as available through the UUA. Rev. Carlton Smith and McGowan named as “interview team.” This team had an advisory function in the hiring decision and did not share decision-making authority.

January 4, 2017 Rev. Andy Burnette applies for the position of Southern Regional Lead.

January 30, 2017 Christina Rivera applies for the position of Southern Regional Lead.

January-February 2017 Rev. Andy Burnette resigns from board (the date of the resignation is not noted in the Board meetings.) He applies for Southern Regional Lead position.

Christina Rivera, Administrator at the Thomas Jefferson Memorial Church in Charlottesville, VA and a member of the UUA Board, applies.

February 16, 2017 UUA Board votes to allow board members to apply for position.

Fifteen applications were received for the position reflecting “racial/ethnic, gender, and sexual orientation diversity” as well as a mix of ministers, religious educators, administrators and one lay professional (from April 13 memo from Scott Tayler to Harlan Limpert).

March 9 --Rev. Andrew Burnette resigns from serving Valley Unitarian Universalist Congregation in Chandler, AZ

March 17: At Finding Our way Home, the annual gathering for religious professionals of color: Aisha Hauser questions UUA President Peter Morales asking, “Why are all five regional leads white?”

March 27. Christina Rivera posts on Facebook her concerns about the hiring and fit issues (<https://uuchristinarivera.wordpress.com/2017/03/27/on-being-a-good-fit-for-the-uua/>)

March 27: Black Lives of UU issues statement: The [Black Lives of Unitarian Universalism](#) organizing collective called the controversy “[a moment of crisis for our faith](#)” in a March 27 statement. “[W]e cannot effectively respond to ‘looming threats’ of white supremacy beyond us until we tackle the white supremacy within us,” the BLUU leaders said, adding, “Specific, drastic, and swift changes are needed.”

March 28: UU Ministers’ Association President Cheryl M. Walker and Executive Director Don Southworth issue a joint letter on the need to continue to address issues around race. (https://www.uuworld.org/sites/live-new.uuworld.org/files/proposal_to_appoint_a_commission_on_institutional_change_v3.pdf)

March 30: Peter Morales resigns effective April (<https://www.uuworld.org/articles/peter-morales-resigns>)

April 1: UUA Leadership Council begins comprehensive review of hiring practices. (<https://www.uua.org/uuagovernance/officers/president/past/morales/letter-uua-leadership-council>)

April 5, 2017 Further Staff resignations: the Rev. Harlan Limpert, chief operating officer, and the Rev. Scott Tayler, director of Congregational Services (<https://www.uuworld.org/articles/two-more-resignations>)

April 6, 2017 Board names Rev. Sarah Lammert as interim Chief Operating Officer.

April 11, 2017 UUA Board Appoints Tri-Presidents Rev. Sofia Betancourt, Dr. Leon Spencer and Rev. William Sinkford (<https://www.uuworld.org/articles/board-names-three-copresidents>)

April and May 2017 A call is issued by religious educators Aisha Hauser, Christina Rivera and Kenny Wiley inviting congregations to participate in a “white supremacy teach-in” as part of Sunday services. 706 congregations take part in white supremacy teach-in (<https://www.uuworld.org/articles/unpacking-whiteness>)

May 13, 2017 Moderator Jim Keys resigns, citing health reasons (<https://www.uuworld.org/articles/uua-moderator-jim-key-resigns>)

June 2, 2017 Jim Key dies. (<https://www.uuworld.org/articles/former-moderator-jim-key-dies>)

June 9, 2017 Don Southworth resigns as President of UU Ministers Association (<http://www.uuma.org/news/news.asp?id=349323>;

June 15, 2017 Co-President Rev. William Sinkford reveals compensation packages for resigned employees totaling more than \$500,000 (<https://www.uuworld.org/articles/resigning-uua-staff-received-severance>)

June 21, 2017 UUA Board votes to cap amount UUA president can award in severance packages without Board approval (<https://www.uuworld.org/articles/uua-limits-severance-packages>).

June 21-24, 2017 UUA General Assembly. Discussions of white supremacy culture as a result of Southern Regional Lead Hiring decision (<https://www.uuworld.org/articles/we-have-all-been-charged>)

December 14, 2018: Natalie Briscoe and Connie Goodbread serve together from January 1, 2018, through June 2019 (<https://www.uuworld.org/articles/news-brief-southern-region-co-leads>)

List of Those Interviewed and Their Role(s)
Pertaining to Southern Regional Lead Hiring Decision in Spring 2017

Rev. Andy Burnette, candidate for Southern Regional Lead, UUA Board member

Rev. Sofia Betancourt, co-president

Rev. Dawn Cooley, member Southern Regional Staff

Connie Goodbread, member Southern Regional Staff

Aisha Hauser, religious educator, attendee at Finding Our Way Home, organizer white supremacy teach-in

Rev. Sarah Lammert, Interim Chief Operating Officer

Rev. Harlan Limpert, COO

Kathy McGowan, member Southern Regional Staff Team

Rev. William Sinkford, former president and co-president of UUA

Denise Rimes, Moderator of UUA Board

Christina Rivera, candidate for Southern Regional Lead, UUA Board member

Rev. Carlton Smith, member, Southern Regional Staff Team

Dr. Leon Spencer, co-president of the UUA

Rev. Scott Tayler, former Congregational Life Director

Elandria Williams, UUA Board Member

Also review of documents and participation as observers in conversation with Rev. Peter Morales and the UUA Board of Trustees in April 2017.