

Please review these resources before the module:

1. Read these three articles/blog posts by Robin DiAngelo:
 - White Fragility <https://goodmenproject.com/featured-content/white-fragility-why-its-so-hard-to-talk-to-white-people-about-racism-twlm/>
 - White Supremacy <http://www.yesmagazine.org/people-power/no-i-wont-stop-saying-white-supremacy-20170630>
 - Agreements <https://goodmenproject.com/featured-content/white-fragility-and-the-rules-of-engagement-twlm/>
2. Watch/listen to/read Rev. Dr. Mark Morrison Reed's Fahs lecture from GA 2014
 - <http://www.uua.org/children/ga/lecture-series> (page include transcript, video and slides)
3. Read "The Religious Educator of Color" by Rev. Natalie Fenimore and Aisha Hauser and the response by Rev. Sofia Betancourt from the UUA Common Read book Centering pages 87-102 (pdf attached) or purchase from the UUA Bookstore: <http://www.uuabookstore.org/Centering-P18206.aspx>
4. View the TED talk "[The Danger of a Single Story](#)" by Chimamanda Ngozi Adiche.
5. View the TED talk [The Urgency of Intersectionality](#) by Kimberlé Crenshaw.
6. Review the UUA's [Dismantle White Supremacy](#) page, in particular this resource: [how white supremacy shows up in culture](#) by Kenneth Jones and Tema Okun.
7. Review the Anti-bias Frameworks from Teaching Tolerance, written with Louise Derman-Sparks:
 - Social Justice Standards: <https://www.tolerance.org/frameworks/social-justice-standards>
 - Critical Practices: <https://www.tolerance.org/frameworks/critical-practices>

THE RELIGIOUS EDUCATOR OF COLOR

Rev. Natalie Maxwell Fenimore and
Aisha Hauser, MSW

ONE CHALLENGE FOR THE religious education professional of color is the tension between being a prophetic voice and maintaining a pastoral role for people of color in a mostly White denomination. The prophetic role is to build multiracial, multicultural, anti-oppressive Unitarian Universalism by teaching it, preaching it, and modeling it in our faith development programs and our faith development community culture. The pastoral role is to stand with individuals of color who are hurting, questioning, angry, and rejoicing about finding a Unitarian Universalism that is not yet the beloved community it seeks to become.

At the outset of their ministry to children, youth, and families, the religious educator is often particularly concerned with how to minister to White people as a person of color. While the minister of color, whose primary role is as a preacher, has to face the projections and perceptions of the White members of the congregation as well, the religious educator has the added layer of being in a ministry that encompasses the area of family making. Family making brings a particular intimacy into the relationship between religious professionals and congregants. To be called to be with people as they grow their souls and seek meaning over a lifetime is a gift—and a great responsibility. Issues of race, culture, and class complicate this journey in so many ways, for both the professional and those they try to serve.

There are some girls in our congregation who are now seniors in high school, and they just launched. They're biracial. There's this intimacy of knowing we have a lot in common, but how do we broach the subject? We've done a lot of things together. This is really a vulnerability on my part. We have a relationship and we love each other, but I feel like there's this huge missed opportunity, and I don't know what to do with that inherent intimacy that feels almost awkward.

REV. LAUREN SMITH

Religious educators and ministers and members of Unitarian Universalist congregations and communities have to push back against stereotypes of themselves and of others. The religious educator of color must contend with the images of servant, mammy, and caretaker, which have negative and derogatory connotations in American culture, while trying to do the good work of a helping profession. It can be necessary for the person of color to consider whether to be seen cleaning up after a congregational event or whether to cook for the holiday party. A White male minister may get credit for doing these things, but how will a Black woman be seen if she does these same domestic tasks? And will there be confusion and even anger if she refuses?

As with the dominant culture outside our congregations, UU congregations may not adequately honor the importance of working with children, youth, and families. The professional religious educator may be labeled, consciously or unconsciously, as doing traditional "women's work," which has for so long been unpaid and unheralded in the church, the home, and the wider community.

Unitarian Universalist communities and staff and ministry structures must strive to present images that can counter those so very present in society at large. That is what our religious education programs do in the ways that we develop curricula and set up learning experiences; for instance, we present multicultural images of families, including LGBT families, telling stories from many cultures, honoring many religious traditions. But this work is only partially successful if we do not counteract how religious education professionals are treated in UU communities. Is the work honored? Are duties, salaries, and benefits comparable?

When the religious educator of color is also the only, or one of the few, religious professionals of color in the congregation or other UU community, this dynamic is compounded. It is not unusual for the religious professional of color to be identified as the support staff or facilities staff and not as a professional staff member.

We have to be clear that when we invite people of color in, we're inviting them into a difficult place where the options available to them are both a gift and a curse. They can do and be anything they want. What the religious educators of color and the ministers of color can provide is more information about the system. We can say, for instance, "Fine, don't connect your children of color to anybody else of color, but I can tell you how that's probably going to play out for you. If that is your choice, that is your choice, and this community will walk that walk with you and help you pick up the pieces, but there will be pieces that have to be picked up."

REV. NATALIE MAXWELL FENIMORE

In congregations with hierarchical governance models, the religious education lay professional is often not a part of the executive team. While this may appear to be an objective management decision, it can, in fact, amplify the perception that the religious education professional of color is not a decision-making leader. The religious educator can feel marginalized and disrespected—and unable to bring the issues of families of color to the leadership table.

A question we don't often ask ourselves but that is as important, if not more important, than the question of ministering to Whites, is this: How do I, as a person of color, minister to other people of color within Unitarian Universalism? What are my relationship and my obligation going to be to the spiritual health and faith formation of people of color within Unitarian Universalism?

This is a critical question for all ministers and religious professionals of color in Unitarian Universalism, but it is especially critical for the religious educator of color because the religious education community within our faith movement is the location of the most diversity. Our religious education programs and communities attract families longing for a place that welcomes and reflects the diversity that they may have in their own families—interracial, intercultural, multicultural families formed through birth or adoption—as well as families of color with young children developing racial identity within an overwhelmingly White religious community.

And so we find ourselves as religious educators, in what is often the most diverse population in our congregations, engaged in ministering to families of color who are trying to grow vital and healthy souls in what can look like an unwelcoming, non-inclusive environment. The religious educator of color is often walking alongside people of color who are members of the congregation or in the youth group, or whom they meet at camps and conference centers and in online forums. We are orienting them to Unitarian Universalism and interpreting it, and providing

If we have more variety in our professional ministries, we give our families more information, more examples, more resources, more people to walk different roads with them. There are roads with them I can't walk. I can learn about them. So that means that I do feel obligated to be trained, to be aware of multiculturalism. I was able to tell a parent about Korean Lunar New Year, something she didn't know even though she was Korean American, because she had dropped all that to assimilate. It's my ability as a professional to give that as a gift back to her family as an option, and that's what our ministries can do. We can help people to be whole in some very serious ways by giving them back their ability to claim parts of themselves they had to drop along the way to be successful Americans. So for me as a person of color, that's something that perhaps comes to my awareness differently than for a person of European descent. So that's what I think that we can do, especially in religious education, because people are at such a vulnerable place. They're trying to figure out what their faith can offer them for a lifetime going forward, and in my role as a lifespan religious education professional, I'm responsible for the people from the nursery to the grave.

REV. NATALIE MAXWELL FENIMORE

a space to explore the cultural and racial contexts of our faith tradition.

This is a mixed bag of experiences. While on the one hand, our faith professes solidarity with the oppressed and marginalized, Unitarian Universalism's demographics do not reflect the diversity of society at large. Religious educators of color find themselves invited to represent the welcome of diversity into Unitarian Universalism with their very bodies—their physical presence is the invitation to others. We carry the welcome. We embody the multicultural vision and the commitment of the faith to that vision.

I got a call a couple of weeks ago from another religious educator of color, and they said, "Well, the parents want to talk about race with the youth," and I said, "First you have to talk about it with the parents, because the parent is the primary religious educator. That's true. If we're lucky, we get them for four hours a week, maybe two hours."

AISHA HAUSER

We are often quickly invited into the personal life of the parent of a child of color in a Unitarian Universalist community. We can find ourselves in intimate and gut-wrenching decisions about child rearing—and in some funny moments too.

Parents of color might ask the religious educator of color to work with them to incorporate the history, theology, and traditions of their racial and cultural groups into the UU community. Families of color might ask, "Can I still honor Jesus? My

parenting is more conservative than what I see here. Why is that? Why don't you dress up for church? Why don't you have a basketball court? How do you treat your elders? Why aren't the children in the worship service more? Help me—my young Black son was stopped by the police!"

People in multiracial or multicultural families have asked religious educators of color such questions as, "How do I comb her hair? Should I take her to Chinese school? My husband is from a Muslim family; will you teach anything about Islam?" There are so many stories. White parents have told religious educators that they feared they would never completely connect with their children of color. White parents have found themselves completely unprepared for the isolation their children of color experience at Unitarian Universalist camps and conference centers where they have no peers of color. White parents have confessed their discomfort with their children dating those from Muslim backgrounds. The religious educator of color sits and listens to these stories—sits with the pain of the parents and the children involved. It is not unusual for the same parents who did such deep sharing to then pull away because they are embarrassed and afraid of their own revelations. When parents move to push aside the relationship and not acknowledge professionalism in these interactions, it can be hard for the religious educator of color not to experience them as painful spiritual domestic work.

The professional may have to organize people of color groups or caucuses or small group ministry or reading groups. When they do this work, they have to be wary of becoming the focus of the confusion and even anger of some White members of the community who may be shocked at not having their interests at the center for the first time. Does supporting families of color put our jobs at risk? Maybe.

The professional religious educator is often the advocate for children, youth, and young adults of color—forging racial identity

development and faith development. This work gives rise to a myriad of emotions for everyone—anger, confusion, sadness, frustration. The religious educator of color is often a bridge, stretched in all directions, trying to connect everyone through our faith. It can be exhausting.

For religious educators of color, there is also the role of “representing race” in Unitarian Universalism. People come in different shapes, sizes, and colors. On the face of it, there is no problem with that—it is an opportunity to celebrate the expansive genius of creation. However, human cultures put greater value on some sizes, shapes, and colors than others. Seeing a person of color as a religious professional in UU congregations is an announcement to the world that we are antiracist and multicultural. As a lay leader of a UU congregation said, “It would be great for our young people to see a person of color in the pulpit as an example.” While people are often told that they can be themselves—individuals in UU community—the minister or religious educator of color is often denied that individuality and asked to represent race instead. This can be spiritually draining and sometimes insulting. It does not take into account the individuality of the person.

Ministers and religious educators of color are individuals. We have different and specific backgrounds. We cannot be all things to all people. One person cannot represent all the ways that Black, Latinx, Middle Eastern, Native American, Asian/Pacific Islander people—or anyone—move through Unitarian Universalism. For the religious professional of color not to be recognized as an individual is painful. For Unitarian Universalist congregations and communities to learn to relate to people of color in their uniqueness, while also acknowledging their historical cultural context, is both a learning opportunity and a spiritual exercise.

For religious professionals of color to do all that we must do as religious educators—to offer a prophetic and pastoral voice—we

must have continuing professional development. The congregation, community, supervisor, and Unitarian Universalist Association must provide supportive learning experiences in workshops, classes, gatherings, and trainings. Time and financial support are essential. So much must be learned—information about different cultures and how-tos in multicultural learning, pastoral support, and identity development. The professional is challenged to move outside their comfort zone as much as any member of a congregation and community where they find themselves.

I’m constantly struggling with which response to choose.

Early on in my ministerial development, I had a really difficult interaction with a powerful person in our denomination who was referring to me as Ayatollah. I wasn’t exactly sure what to do. One mentor of color advised me to choose a pastoral response. That was smart advice as it is a brilliant ministerial tool to use. But I couldn’t swallow it. Now I’m finding more and more in my ministry that I am less and less willing to engage with that kind of thing. There are people I actually refused to be with one-on-one anymore, which was a really difficult boundary to set because it erodes my sense that ministry “meets people where they are at.” It is a constant tension in the context of racism—the need to decide which skill or tool to use in what situation and the criteria with which to make that decision.

REV. MITRA RAHNEMA

Self-care is a term that is used often and almost casually in Unitarian Universalist professional circles, but it is essential to the survival of the religious education professional of color. The ministry they provide in our communities is a ministry of presence, of accompaniment, of attentiveness. This ministry invites in the whole person. It is not easy; our buttons get pushed very, very often.

It is possible to swallow your feelings in order to get the job done, to assist others, or to see the emotions of others as being more important than your own. It is also the case that the dominant White culture and UU culture can view expressions of emotion by people of color as unprofessional, overwrought, or not intellectually valid. So where do you go for relief and support? Find a place or make a place. Be with colleagues of color; find a UU community of color separate from the place where you work.

Be clear with those in communities that you serve that you cannot be everything to everyone in the religious education community. Invite other professionals on staff to be present in the religious education community. White colleagues can be a resource for White families struggling with questions about race, class, and culture. White colleagues can teach and preach about issues of race, class, and culture. We must share the work in order to maintain our spiritual health.

While they can be diminished by the challenges of the role, the purpose and joy that exist for the Unitarian Universalist religious educator/minister of color make this a wonderful and fulfilling ministry.

RESPONSE TO NATALIE MAXWELL FENIMORE AND AISHA HAUSER

Rev. Sofia Betancourt

I WANT TO BEGIN by thanking Aisha and Natalie, as well as the Committee for Antiracism and Multiculturalism (CARAOM), for ensuring that the gifts and needs of religious education professionals of color are well represented in this important gathering. Too often when considering the needs of religious professionals of color and of the settings in which we serve, the focus is solely on an ordained ministry. This is not only a profound disservice to our gifted colleagues but it also undermines the health and well-being of the very communities all of us work so hard to support.

Our writers Aisha and Natalie ask a frequently unexplored question about our obligation to the spiritual health and faith formation of people of color in the Unitarian Universalist community: "How do I, as a person of color, minister to other people of color within Unitarian Universalism? What is my relationship, my obligation going to be to the spiritual health and faith formation of people of color within Unitarian Universalism?" I had the privilege of serving for four years as the director for Racial and Ethnic Concerns for the Unitarian Universalist Association. This experience offered me various points of entry into communities and congregations across our movement that were developing an antiracist, anti-oppressive, multicultural ministry. Many times this work resulted in gatherings like this one, where a group of committed Unitarian Universalists would come together to identify best practices, share difficult truths, and refocus our work for

I was credentialed as a religious educator at the master's level before I was ordained, and I was so isolated because

I was not on the ministerial track. I was serving a congregation where I was in charge of religious education programs for three hundred children. I trained and oriented and gathered more than a hundred volunteers in my congregation every year. I was the person who told them what Unitarian Universalism was about. None of you were there and none of you were part of mentoring me. None of you were part of knowing what I know, nor

I part of knowing what you know. The people who mentored me when I came to Unitarian Universalism as a twenty-year-old were mostly White. A group of older White women scooped me up and took care of me as I learned my way in Unitarian Universalism, and that was sometimes problematic but full of love for me. It might have served me as a congregant. It was not a great model for ministerial formation for a person of color.

REV. NATALIE MAXWELL FENIMORE

the journey ahead. Over time I noticed several of our committed regulars giving feedback about the very obligation that Natalie and Aisha name. They pointed out the UUAs tendency to fund events where UUs who identify as people of color or as Latinx or Hispanic would learn about dismantling racism together. They wondered aloud when we might have the opportunity to organize some of our meetings around theological beliefs and spiritual practices for UUs of color. What would it mean if we did not have

to justify our time together with an antiracist, anti-oppressive, multicultural agenda that many of us were already committed to, thanks to the good work of those who had organized before us?

When I was a student at Starr King School for the Ministry, I had the gift of participating in the early years of Rev. Lilia Cuervo's Spanish language ministry at First Unitarian Church of San Jose. Right away I noticed how centralized the needs and experiences of families were to the worship life of the community. I remember how Lilia often expressed the need to provide strong religious education as a first inroad into serving Latinx communities well. She recommended hiring a religious educator before a parish minister, something that would still be considered radical today. In essence, she reminded us of the primacy of faith formation for spiritual growth and wellness. I believe this is true across many communities of color, and I agree with Aisha and Natalie that a religious education professional of color provides a recognition of self and invitation into spiritual health that are badly needed among UUs of color.

What I hear emphasized time and again in their essay is how rarely the primary needs of UUs of color are fully considered in UU congregations. *Consideration* is key to this reflection. Students at Starr King tell me that worship works best for them

I just grieve because I so look forward to getting together

in communities like this and not talking about white people. I just don't want to talk about white people.

I grieve that we're still in a place in which it's really important for us to talk about how we respond to racism, how to exist in a system where that's part of our reality.

REV. LAUREN SMITH

when they believe worship leaders have considered their presence in the room. This does not mean that every worship service has to speak directly to their needs or beliefs, but rather that someone has considered their presence and participation in the community and the impact of the congregation's celebration for them. This consideration can be reflected in something as simple as a one- or two-sentence acknowledgment that our backgrounds and socioeconomic locations mean we do not always believe or experience the same things, or in something as large and vital as doing

*It's not that I can't sing. I won't sing. I chose to disrupt
the ideal of who Black women are, so I don't sing. I
made a conscious decision to emphasize the life of the
mind. It disturbed people, made White people nervous,
and that was a good thing in the sixties and seventies.
I wonder what I paid for that. How do we manage the
performance piece when we're not there to perform?*

REV. ROSEMARY BRAY MCNATT

the hard work of reducing cultural misappropriation so that no one is made to feel their role in congregational life is to entertain others through their diversity.

This need for consideration can be applied to many painfully recognizable moments. Whether it is that a member never considered a person of color might be a wonderful fit for their congregation as a minister or director of religious education and is therefore shocked when one of us has the authority to do more than hold the door on a Sunday morning, or that a member never considered that children of color would participate in UU camps

and conference centers and have needs specific to their identities, or that a member never considered that youth and young adults of color might lead us in work as vital as that of the Black Lives Matter movement, or that a member never considered that religious education might serve as the vital center of an authentic multicultural ministry and should not be stereotyped as a lesser offering in our congregations, the overarching lack of consideration diminishes our communities. The question is: Who do we expect ourselves to be?

Natalie and Aisha tell us that their words of assistance or advice or just being there while a White parent raises a child of color or while a parent of color raises a child of color in the largely White UU congregation is nothing less than a theological imperative—one that can exact a heavy toll. For that theological imperative to become an applied theology, we need tools that empower. There is no question in my mind that religious education professionals of color play a primary role in ministering to members and families of color as well as multiracial and multiethnic families and community members, in addition to all their other responsibilities. Part of the challenge, I imagine, is that *people of color* is a term we use as a political act to build coalitions to dismantle the effects of White supremacy on multiple oppressed or underserved racial and ethnic identities, and it does not, in fact, automatically make any of us an expert on communities outside our own. That ability to partner well with the families least likely to find their spiritual health and faith formation needs fully considered in our congregations requires professional training that religious leaders are not necessarily expected to have.

Congregations should already be prioritizing professional development expenses for their religious educators. In response to the sacred partnering with families so beautifully described by Aisha and Natalie, congregations should also particularly support them, whether or not they identify as people of color, in pursuing

The next generation of ministers should be required to learn about how to counter oppression. They should learn about intersectionality and about the ways in which different oppressions relate to and reinforce one another. I think it equips people to look at the world in which we live and actually understand and deconstruct some things that they experience in congregational life. There are people who want and need the skills we teach, and we need to find a way to help them get it. We should be strategizing about how to make sure ministers are equipped for the things they're going to face, both outside in the world and inside their congregations.

REV. ROSEMARY BRAY MCNATT

training in cross-cultural counseling, pedagogies, and faith formation needs. This is one way we might take the time to understand where families need support. Another possibility is connecting with the work of organizations like the MAVIN Foundation, which specifically explores the gifts and blessings of raising children in multiracial families.

Unitarian Universalism will never succeed in building beloved community while refusing to consider religious professionals of color as anything more than a confirmation of our own goodness. The moment of hire is not our pinnacle of success. It is a moment of possibility. Here, together, we might partner in reimagining the spiritual journey that is to come. Here, in community, we are blessed with partners who might build alongside us a Unitarian Universalism for the twenty-first century. The question that remains is who do we expect ourselves to become?