



MEMORANDUM

TO: Commission on Institutional Change

FROM: Rev. Susan Frederick-Gray, President; Carey McDonald, Executive Vice President

RE: November 12 COIC Report

DATE: December 21, 2018

This memo is to express our appreciation for the recent report and recommendations from the Commission on Institutional Change (COIC), and to let you know about how we are responding to these recommendations and taking them into account as part of our strategic planning and mission alignment. We have been in ongoing conversation with COIC members, including participating in the October design meeting in Walnut Creek, CA. In keeping with an overall commitment to transparency and communication, we wanted to capture these ongoing conversations in a memo that can be shared.

We deeply appreciate the COIC's guidance in how to reshape UUA programs and processes to help dismantle white supremacy culture and advance the aspiration of beloved community. The Commission's charge to help Unitarian Universalism fulfill its essential promise is critical for the health and vitality of our religious community. Your careful documentation forms the basis for the common awareness and ultimately the historical understanding of current realities and dynamics in our UU communities. Your approach to your work is useful to us in the present, releasing recommendations and analysis as you go rather than waiting until a multi-year process is complete to say anything publicly. This allows us to get working on the critical areas you identify, which we echo and observe in our work as well. We look forward to continued and ongoing relationship as you dig further into Associational structures, support for lay leaders who hold marginalized identities, and ways to build the trust and leadership necessary to move us forward.

As we have clarified the UUA's three-part mission – to equip congregations, train and support leaders, and advance our values in the world – it is evident that anti-oppressive and culture change priorities of the UUA are interwoven in every aspect of our work. Here are a few of the priorities related to the recommendations in your November communication which we want to share with you:

Support for religious professionals of color

This is one of the core cross-staff missional priorities this year. Our work has included investing in healthy ministries, such as dedicated “start-up” workshops for congregations with new ministers or other religious professionals of color with ongoing support throughout their first year, as well as continued robust support for professional development opportunities like the Finding Our Way Home retreat. We are increasing our own staff skill and cross-staff wisdom-sharing in how to support congregational leaders, especially through conflict situations, as well as reaching out to use consultants and adjunct support as needed. We offer direct support, including individualized pastoral and professional coaching and counseling, as well as financial and scholarship support such as through the Living Tradition Fund.

We also understand building data systems and trauma-informed response (see below) as a key part of this work. We commit to reporting on the progress in this area to the Board of Trustees, and to keep engaging the community of UU religious professionals of color about what is most needed and relevant.

Data systems to track religious professionals of color

The COIC is right to point out that UUA data systems have not prioritized tracking the career trajectories and milestones of religious professionals of color. With the UUA's recommitment to creating a faith community in which leaders of color can thrive, we are currently building an updated listing and a permanent data system to account for our leaders who hold marginalized identities. That includes racial and ethnic identity, as well as gender, sexuality and ability. In developing this system, we are also holding the need for appropriate privacy, security and usage restrictions for the sensitive information which our leaders will be entrusting to the UUA.

Trauma-informed ministry and programs

We endorse the COIC's focus on the dynamics of trauma as essential to serving people of color within Unitarian Universalism. Specifically, we have begun staff trainings in trauma-informed response for the advocates who work with individuals who file ministerial misconduct complaints, as well as with staff who work with high-school youth leaders; we have additional trauma-process trainings scheduled for staff, including regional staff, in the coming months. We are also exploring trauma-informed support for religious professionals of color through a working group in collaboration with the COIC and the UU Ministers Association. Transparency is an important aspect of this approach, and we continue to advise against non-disclosure agreements in terms of separation for religious professionals. We have just begun to assess how trauma-informed ministry can be integrated into our programs and relationships.

Hiring and human resources processes

Our human resources processes are the foundation of a healthy and equitable workplace. We completed a rewrite of our hiring procedures in February 2018, and have already seen progress towards our diversity goals. This year we are working on a compensation equity review, training for supervisors to be effective and ethical managers (especially in cross-cultural work relationships), and a new orientation process to ensure new staff members are brought along with the changes we are making. In the coming years, we will invest in ongoing improvements and policy revisions to keep with our culture change commitments (see below).

Culture change, organizational equity and inclusion

Realizing that the UUA must "practice what it preaches," we have invested significant resources in reshaping the staff culture at the UUA to ensure that we best embody the values of beloved community and create a workplace where staff of all backgrounds and identities can thrive. Part of that culture change work includes bridging and healing divides between the silos of our staff work, and creating a common set of commitments and understanding. Our objectives focus on staff skills, anti-oppressive workplace culture, communication, and leadership and advancement opportunities. Taquiena Boston, appointed as Special Advisor to the President for Inclusion, Equity and Change, has convened a cross-staff Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (JEDI) team whose members were nominated by their peers to pursue these goals. The JEDI team will be responsible for the monthly staff learning community experiences and collaborating with staff groups and identity caucuses. Aspects of culture change which the team has begun working on include power sharing and authorization, gratitude and enjoyment, relationality and embracing wholeness, and creativity and fluidity. The team recognizes the trio of racism, idealism/perfectionism and conflict aversion as another key issue to address.

By creating a new team, we are empowering them to set the direction for this work. This will be a more emergent process than a traditional strategic planning process, and we hope this will lead to a more empowering and sustainable approach to the always-present need for honest conversations and culture change. We also hope this team models a different approach for our congregations who are similarly interested in advancing inclusion and equity culture change.

What's next?

The COIC's November report also identifies a number of areas which are currently under discussion but have not become programmatic commitments. We name these with the recognition that there is much work to do in the coming years, both with the UUA staff and with Boards and Committees. Those areas of work include:

- *Examining credentialing processes* – we are in close contact with the Ministerial Fellowship Committee (MFC), Religious Education Credentialing Committee and Music Leadership Certification Committee about these discussions
- *Continuing education for ministers* – As the MFC and the UUMA hone in on a plan for providing continuing education standards, we are supporting this initiative and look forward to it being finalized in the coming year.
- *Common standards for multicultural competency* – This is a question for UUA staff and for congregational leaders, and is an area of ongoing discussion. It intersects with how we are providing training and support to leaders overall, a function which is in the midst of transition to Leader Lab and other venues.
- *Rapid Response Team* – We appreciate the COIC's recommendation in this area, and are eager to be in conversation with the COIC about the feasibility of a rapid response mediation team for congregational conflicts, especially those involving religious leaders of color. A key area to discern is the scope of work for this potential team, given the multiple layers and complex process often involved in these situations.

Finally, we wish to acknowledge the tremendous leadership and investment of time and skill that the members of the COIC are bringing to the transformational work of Unitarian Universalism. We are grateful for their ongoing work and our continuing partnership in bringing their insights and recommendations into action at the UUA.