

Co-Moderator Report to the General Assembly, June 2020

What a journey these three years have been, as your co-moderators, and what tumultuous times we have experienced together as a faith, as a society, and as a world during this time.

It's times like these that test us the most, and show us who we truly are. For three years, our faith movement has been grappling with what it means to live into our values in the deepest possible way. We've been digging deep into the call to transform the focus of this faith from comfort and conformity to resistance and liberation, to paraphrase Rev. Leslie Takahashi and Dr. Sharon Welch.

Now, in the midst of two pandemics—a global coronavirus and the epidemic of anti-Black state violence—we find ourselves and our covenanted communities being truly tested. In times of great stress and collective trauma, there is always a choice to be made. Will we give in to fear, scarcity, and individualism, or will we lean in to love, creativity, and abundance? Will we close our ranks and hoard resources, or will we actively support those who are most vulnerable and find creative solutions that will outlast this current crisis? Will we sit on the sidelines or will we join with all those calling for an end to police brutality and white supremacy?

We are inspired by how UUs everywhere are making faith-grounded choices to meet the challenges of this moment: caring for one another, finding ways to keep people employed, connecting with local Covid-19 mutual aid networks, providing support to protesters, and engaging on every level—personal, local, state, and national—with the call to defund and abolish the police. This is the best of what this faith can be.

Looking Back

The last three years have been a time of meaningful transition in the leadership of this association. We were appointed co-moderators in the wake of an enormous disruption of business as usual. Our faith community was grappling in a new way with how white supremacy culture operates in our midst—a challenge that is ongoing. We were asked to serve for a year, then another year, and then a third when an election for the next moderator(s) was delayed after it became clear that the sorts of leaders the Board and Moderator Search Committee were seeking could not commit to a volunteer role of this position's traditional scope.

This means that our role has been an extended interim role, much like an interim minister or interim DRE in a congregation. Our job was to create a bridge between past ways of doing things and the future that this faith movement is striving toward. We worked to build the

infrastructure and nurture the cultural and structural change that would support the UUA's Board, committees, and administration in breaking out of patterns and habits that do not serve the fullest potential of Unitarian Universalism.

We are proud and grateful for the accomplishments of the association's leadership during this interim period, and are honored to have had the privilege of being a part of this leadership. In partnership with the UUA's Board, committees, and administration, we have worked to evaluate and transform leadership models, deepen collaboration, and more fully value and create space for the leadership and contributions of those who are marginalized within our movement, such as people of color, queer and trans people, disabled people, low-income people, and young people.

As interim leaders, we've paid special attention to governance structures and practices that have long gone unquestioned. We've experimented with different models for the structure of the Board. In the last year we implemented a different sort of executive committee on the Board that broadens input and collaboration rather than narrowing it. We've moved away from Robert's Rules of Order and toward consensus. And we've taken a hard look at the role of moderator itself, and made adjustments to make it more sustainable and more possible for people like us—people with multiple marginalized identities—to serve.

It has not been easy for us to serve in this role, due to the many barriers and assumptions we've encountered. We've done our best to help remove many of these barriers, not only to this position but to the larger structures surrounding it, so that the future leadership of this association can represent the fullness of this faith and its potential future.

We've also embraced shared leadership in new ways—among the two of us, the Board, the committees, and the administration. There have been times over the course of Unitarian Universalism's history that these leadership bodies either didn't work together or actively worked against each other. The respectful and collaborative relationships that currently exist are a testament to the deep commitment of everyone involved to work together, take the time to build trust, and live our values—and it has shifted how decision-making happens for the better.

This spirit of collaboration and shared leadership, as well as the focus and commitment to dismantle the manifestations of white supremacy culture and oppression in all forms, has infused the work of this association's leadership over these three years. Collaboration with the Commission on Institutional Change and engagement with their recommendations has been deeply impactful. We honor the many committees that have done this, especially the Socially Responsible Investing and Investment committees, who updated their policies to more fully incorporate our movement's commitment to racial and economic justice.

This spirit of collaboration and shared leadership between the UUA's various leadership bodies has had many ripple effects, such as the work to clarify the roles and responsibilities of the Board and administration with respect to the Ministerial Fellowship Committee, and the creation of a shared ethics board through the collaboration of the UUA administration, all of our role-based UU religious professional organizations, and the religious professionals credentialing committees. These are just a few examples of the many ways leaders have been working together and working toward culture shift during this time.

Looking Forward

Celebrating New Leadership

As we look toward the future, we have so much hope. We feel blessed to have had a chance to work with such dedicated, skilled, and passionate leaders who are so committed to the promise and potential of Unitarian Universalism, and we are excited about the leaders entering into new roles to carry the work forward—including incoming UUA co-moderators Rev. Meg Riley and Charles Du Mond. We look forward to being an ongoing resource to these fine folks.

Acting on the Recommendations of the Commission on Institutional Change

We are grateful to the good work and powerful recommendations of the Commission on Institutional Change, and we have faith that the Board, moderators, committees, and administration of the UUA will engage deeply with them and with the newly released report, knowing that we have to radically change how we do things in order for all of us to feel fully welcomed in our congregations and in this faith, and for more and different people to have access to power and the chance to offer their gifts to this movement.

In particular, we wholeheartedly support the Commission's recommendations regarding reestablishing anti-oppression training for all elected and appointed leaders and creating an ongoing independent body focused on accountability and systemic change, made up of representatives of identity-based groups.

Reinvesting in Leadership Development

We have faith that the Board will continue the work we started of supporting the Nominating and Appointments committees to streamline the nominating and appointments processes in ways that build in leadership development. A deep hope and dream of ours is that Unitarian Universalism will reinvest in leadership development at the highest levels,

recognizing that the two of us would not be where we are today without the youth and young adult leadership development and nurturing we received along the way.

It is vital to rebuild leadership development through youth and young adult national programming rooted in collective liberation with faith and identity formation at its core. Our young folks bring new perspectives and new ways of doing things, and have always challenged our movement to grow. Yet this faith has been losing our youth and young adults for far too long. Leadership development, leadership pipelines, and cross-generational shared leadership are critical if Unitarian Universalism is to survive and grow.

Reviewing Article II

We also look forward to the review of Article II of the UUA bylaws, that important section that includes our seven principles and six sources and our statements on purpose, inclusion, and freedom of belief. Our hope is that the newly established Article II Commission will work in tandem with the Eighth Principle Project, and that UUs everywhere will engage with this important opportunity to revisit the core tenets of our faith.

Living into the Full Potential of Unitarian Universalism

The risk at times like these—times of upheaval, and change, and doing things differently—is that the familiarity of the status quo can be very tempting. It would be easy to slide back to having a board that primarily represents the privileged among us, and leadership processes and practices that reflect the worn path rather than the harder road that collaboration, and trust, and shared leadership demand. Much progress has been made in diversifying the leadership of this denomination. But it's not enough to simply populate the table with different people. It takes a much deeper commitment to co-create a new table altogether, and constantly seek out ways to live into the fullness of our values and principles.

As challenging as the times we find ourselves in are, they also provide us with opportunities for transformation. Covid-19 has created culture shift of a kind we've never experienced before. UUs everywhere have been forced to try new things and find creative solutions. We are worshipping in ways we never thought we would, taking collective responsibility for caring for each other, seeking out those who are most isolated and vulnerable, and figuring out that things we thought were essential—like a church building—aren't actually what's at the heart of our community.

Just like with the culture shift that Unitarian Universalism has been experiencing over the last three years, there is both grief and joy, both backlash and excitement at the changes we are currently experiencing. It is okay—and important—to mourn the things we miss while

also celebrating the things we've gained. But as we move forward, as we imagine and cultivate hybrid space, may we seek out and honor the wisdom of those for whom traditional spaces never worked, creating spaces in which all of us can exist, and breathe, and share, and learn from each other, and collectively transform our faith—and our world—for the better.

Faithfully submitted,
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