Trust & Reconciliation Committee Final Report

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Introduction

Over the past several years, The Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Columbia (UUCC) has experienced a period of painful discord. This discord has been unpleasant for many, leading to alienation and hurt feelings, and has led to individuals leaving the congregation altogether. Some in the congregation, notably African Americans and those with families that include African Americans, have reported a hostile racial climate. Others who left reported a concern that the congregation was becoming intolerant of diverse views and expression, tolerant of incivility, and suffering from top-down decision making by leaders. For the purposes of this report, we'll refer to this discordant situation as *"UUCC's troubles."*

The Trust and Reconciliation Committee *("TRC")* was chartered by the UUCC Board of Trustees (*"board"*) in September, 2020 to diagnose this discordant situation, and to recommend approaches to making our interactions, including our conflicts, healthier, more constructive occurrences that better serve our principles and values.

We caution readers of this report and observers of the UUCC progress in addressing the troubles from taking an oversimplified perspective of the situations that led to this point. This is a story that includes discussion of racism, age and seniority, our UU principles, leadership, spirituality in thoughts and action, and dissent. To put it in plain language – this is *not* a situation of two distinct groups vying for power within our congregation (such as anti-racists v. Fourth Principle Group). To frame this as a win/lose or us/them proposition is naïve at best and does a disservice to our human complexity.

Limits & Caveats[1]

The TRC used a particular form of one-on-one **active listening** as a primary method of gathering diagnostic information. 89 volunteers from the congregation spoke to us. We aggregated and discussed our findings to form the basis for our report.

Limitations and caveats. We wish to caution readers about the following important limits to how our work should be interpreted. (See Appendix B (Methodology), page A-7 for details.)

- The 89 active listening speakers are a highly self-selected sample, and thus quantitative conclusions cannot be drawn.
- TRC members are also participants in UUCC's "troubles." We are not disinterested, which can create bias (although our diverse perspectives helped to limit it) and conflicting loyalties, but also added richness and nuance to our work.
- It is also possible that because TRC members are congregants, certain speakers may have been reluctant to speak frankly, for reasons of social desirability (including fear of being judged), and fear of creating additional conflict.
- Listening sessions were used primarily to understand the dynamics of conflict required by the board's charge. We did not record every word of every speaker; but rather, in most cases, the gist of their comments.

Thank you, in advance, for your attentive examination of this report. Insights and feedback from the congregation should be directed to the UUCC Board of Trustees at board@uucolumbia.net.

[1] Associated documents, including the methodology and theoretical background for the Conflict Diagnosis perspective, are in the Appendix.

Common Ground and Strengths of UUCC

Common Ground

In our listening sessions, we heard numerous expressions of common ground – shared values, goals, and appreciations. Remembering our common ground can prevent the zero-sum, us-and-them thought distortions which victimize people caught up in escalated conflict. Statements of common ground can guide us in approaches to transforming conflict constructively; and when conflicts arise in future, they can remind us of our promises to one another and why we made them.

- Our speakers expressed strong commitment to each of our UU Principles.
- Our speakers expressed yearning for an inclusive and safe community which provides a sense of sanctuary to all who join us.
- Our speakers expressed yearning for a climate of acceptance and the sense of being valued. They yearn for love, a sense of belonging, and the esteem of others.
- Our speakers expressed yearning for self-determination, agency, and autonomy.
- Our speakers expressed yearning for a sense of spirituality in their spiritual home.
- There was widespread affirmation on the part of our speakers in support of racial justice. At the June, 2020, annual meeting, the congregation voted overwhelming support of a resolution covenanting "to affirm and promote the building of a diverse, multicultural Beloved Community where BIPOC, LGBTQ+, and other marginalized communities find respite from racism and other oppressions." In the resolution, we further committed "to educating ourselves and to taking actions that dismantle racism and other oppressions in ourselves, our institutions, and the broader community working in accordance with each person's unique abilities and approaches."
- Our community continues to maintain rich traditions that provide a sense of commonality and shared purpose.

Strengths in Our Congregation

Judging by the comments of our speakers and our own direct experience, we the community of UUCC are …

- A community which admires and is grateful for our ministerial staff and others who run UUCC.
- People who have been able to form connections within our community in many positive ways.
- A community which has a powerful font of energy to pursue social issues and do good in our community that shows no sign of running dry.
- A community full of thoughtful, invested persons who strive to make the world, and our congregation, a better place.
- A community brimming over with compassion and caring, willing to go the extra mile to help and support one another.
- A community of people willing and eager to learn and grow.
- A knowledgeable community, of many interests and talents, which enables it to be resilient and creative.
- A community filled with courageous folk who are willing to do the hard things necessary to grow and change.

BOARD'S CHARGE #1 - Diagnosis

The board's first charge reads: "**Diagnosis**. Engage with UUCC constituent groups to seek perspectives regarding sources of existing conflicts experienced by UUCC congregants in recent years; as well as key factors (1) contributing to the destructive escalation of these conflicts and their intractability; and (2) impeding our abilities to manage them in ways that consistently affirm and promote those principles, values, and goals that we hold as a religious community."

Executive Summary: Diagnosis[2]

As directed by the board, we looked at sources of existing conflicts and key factors that contribute to the destructive escalation of these conflicts, raise the likelihood of intractability, and impede their constructive transformation, management, and resolution.

We found evidence of conflict that is escalating, which means that it is in a cycle of increasing destructiveness. We found evidence of numerous perceptual distortions common to escalating conflict, each of which can impede effective strategic responses:

- overemphasis on differences among congregants *(polarization and factionalization)*,
- oversimplification of the views and behavior of others, as well as oversimplification of the nature of our conflict,
- demonization,
- lack of trust,
- blaming others for problems, and
- suspiciousness *(which can produce reactive devaluation, preventing resolution)*.

We also found evidence of communication problems, destructive meta-conflicts *(conflicts about how the main conflict is being handled)*, inefficiency, conflict spreading and conflict intensification. Please see the Interactional Toxicity perspective by Suzi Gerb to learn more about some of the interactional issues we found.

One specific pattern of communication was mentioned as problematic: devolving conversations, often on social media, triggered by an action which some other person(s) decided merited a call-out. In these interactions, calling-out was followed by an "attempt to discuss," or, sometimes, disagreeing with the call-out. The initial caller-out seemingly felt unheard and often repeated the call-out with increasing emphasis. These interactions escalated cyclically into *ad hominem* attacks, often ending with a leader terminating the discussion. Few or none in these interactions felt heard or validated. These conflicts can be thought of as, partially, generational clashes triggered by differing norms concerning how best to practice social justice during interactions, as well as concerning the use of social media.

In examining the sources of these conflicts, we also found characteristics that make the situation potentially intractable - both highly destructive and resistant to professional intervention:

- **We found conflicts over multiple fundamental values:** over how to resolve tensions inherent in the basic principles of Unitarian Universalism *(most obviously, tensions over inherent worth and*

[2] Please see the Conflict Diagnosis perspective document by Laurie Coltri (with contributions from Jill Christianson) for a more detailed elaboration of this diagnostic perspective.

dignity, democratic process, and the search for truth and meaning), and differences over "how we do church" including prioritization in program areas.

- **We found identity conflicts** over who we are as a religious community and who we are as individuals. These may have been triggered by the adoption of a modern approach to anti-racism *("next-gen anti-racism")* with its effects-driven, potentially inflammatory shifts in semantics. These conflicts may have been exacerbated by what some speakers described as a "top-down" approach by leadership in instituting next-gen anti-racism, which reduced congregational voice and made achieving broad buy-in less likely.
- **We found threats to basic needs**: psychological safety and the sense of sanctuary; love, belongingness and acceptance; self-esteem and esteem of others; and actualization, agency and self-determination. We want to emphasize that this sense of threats to these basic needs was felt by a wide variety of people who participated in the Listening Sessions – including diverse perspectives and concerns of people who identify with the Fourth Principle Group (*"4PG"*) and diverse generational, racial and ethnic identities.
- **We found evidence of widespread sense of disempowerment.** Cultural and systemic biases and oppressions do not disappear when people walk through our doors, hoping to find a community of equality and justice. These biases also appear within our congregation, including racism. We heard from congregants who spoke of microaggressions, of resistance to doing what it will take to dismantle racism, and of a hostile climate. We also heard from White congregants who felt they were disempowered and scolded from the pulpit, by what they see as top-down leadership, and by the sense that leadership will not give them a full hearing despite their full commitment to the goal of fighting racism.

Some speakers talked with evident frustration about wanting to initiate a discussion about how best to promote racial justice, believing that this would resolve our conflicts; while others viewed these persons as unwilling to allow the targets of oppression to define their own situation and control the response. These diverse views led to what one TRC member refers to as "talking past each other."

Understanding both conflict escalation and intractability in a religious community must also take a systems approach, understanding that institutional structures and attributes often influence interrelationships between individuals and groups. The Organizational Diagnosis perspective by Becky Reese takes this approach. Among other things, it alludes to the erosion of UUCC's volunteer leadership structures over the past decade. These structures provided an important source of relationships, understanding, empathy and perspective-taking across program "silos," providing a buttress against escalating conflict. Their weakening also may be contributing to a sense of lack of agency and voice in some congregants, as well as potentially reducing the likelihood of congregational buy-in to initiatives promoted by leadership.

Conflicts that include threats to fundamental values, identity, and basic human needs, as well as conflicts which disempower, cannot be resolved by brute force or win-lose approaches. Solutions must fully address all of them, empowering all, caring for our whole community, and promoting safety, acceptance and inclusivity. In creating interventions, we must fall back on our shared commonalities of beliefs and values, and we must listen deeply and take one another's perspectives, in a spirit of curiosity and caring sensitivity.

Based on our diagnosis, we offer a series of recommendations, which are described starting at page 40. Here is a summary *(these are hyperlinks)*:

Setting the Stage: Fostering Beloved Community & 7 Principles in Implementing All TRC Recommendations
Interventions to de-escalate the existing conflict
- Professionally led workshop & followup activities: Identify and act on common ground at UUCC for justice for all
- De-Escalation Toolkit: Initiate actions that interrupt the escalation dynamic

Healthy Interactions & Right Relations
- Right Relations covenanting process & support team
- Group to support congregants through relationship issues
- Actions for Improving Our Social Media Communication

Building cultural competencies to foster Beloved Community
Fostering Vibrancy, Engagement, and Congregational Voice
- Strengthening Congregational Voice Via the Election of Leaders
- Empowering the Congregation While Promoting Engagement, Understanding, Governance and Leadership
- Planning for the Future and Navigating Change (strategic planning)

Additional recommendations, more limited in scope, are listed in Appendix F, page A-19.

Perspectives on Diagnosing UUCC's troubles

Three perspectives on addressing this charge were generated: one based on conflict theory, conflict escalation and intractability; one based on organizational diagnosis; and one addressing interactional toxicity.

We strove for unity in our diagnosis, but complete unanimity could not be attained, reflecting the diverse frames of reference of our congregation. Not everyone on the TRC agrees with each statement in each perspective. This diversity of perspective is an accurate reflection of the larger congregation. The fact that we reached broad and strong agreement on our recommendations also reflects an inherent strength of our congregation and of Unitarian Universalism – that from many diverse voices comes unified shared purpose and action.

Perspective: Conflict Diagnosis

Laurie Coltri with contributions from Jill Christianson

Conflict Diagnosis is a multistep process of developing an understanding of a conflict, as a basis for developing strategies and tactics to intervene effectively (for background information on this technique, see Appendix C, page A-11).

Describe the Conflict

The first step in any conflict diagnosis is to describe the conflict. UUCC's troubles are marked by a difference of opinion about what its troubles are about. They have been variously described as a conflict over resistance to anti-racism; a conflict over whether leadership has been too "top-down," overreaching, or authoritarian; and a problem of toxicity in our interactions. All these views are expressed in our report.

Disputes over how to describe a conflict, or about what it is "really" about, are hallmarks of destructively escalated conflict (page 19).

Sources of Conflict

Values conflicts

The values conflicts we see that helped to create UUCC's troubles can be characterized as "how should UUCC do church?" Specifically:

- Conflicts over tensions inherent within the 5th UU Principle, and between that principle and other UU values
- Conflicts over tensions inherent within the 4th UU Principle, and between that principle and other UU values
- Conflicts over priorities in congregational programming and emphasis.

The 5th UU Principle: Tension

Many speakers alluded to the issues of democratic process and congregational voice, and their seeming erosion at UUCC. This conflict has been evidenced by the rise in what we will call *"next-gen anti-racism"* (advocated by Rev. Getty since approximately 2015) and the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, although one TRC member also remembers the issue coming up with respect to children in worship (September, 2016).

Speakers who made objections avowed their commitment to racial justice but objected to the way it was imposed at UUCC as top-down or authoritarian. Some speakers said that when they objected, they were called "racist." These situations were offered as examples:

- Rev. Getty's activism, including specific examples such as the call to redefine words like "racism" to allude to the effect of conduct on people of color (POC) rather than the mentality of the perpetrator. These were seen by some as thought control and authoritarian.

- Changes and initiatives that place racial justice work in a central position within foundational documents which express UUCC and UU identity – the UUCC Ends statement and the proposed 8th Principle. The board initiated these changes and initiatives.

In the words of one TRC member, "several speakers noted a constricted lane for possible action to address racism within UUCC, which has been narrowly defined by the minister and the Board." To the extent that the board initiated these changes they were sometimes accused of being "in the pocket" of the minister. Perhaps the board is vulnerable to charges of non-independence because of the congregation's use of a slate nominations process, which makes it harder to run for board outside the slate. There is also a lack of clarity over whether the board's role is to represent constituents within the congregation or to represent the congregation's mission. Other speakers said they felt that there was an unmet need to consult the congregation in instituting these changes. These speakers objected to the manner in which these changes were instituted as contrary to fundamental UU values.

Other speakers strongly supported the efforts and approaches of the minister and board to implement next-gen anti-racism at UUCC, and saw these approaches as entirely in concert with UU values.

These differences can be reframed as tensions inherent in the language of the 5th Principle. One speaker's narrative illustrates this tension. Approximately six years ago, a Black Lives Matter banner was displayed at UUCC so it was visible from the OBIC parking lot.[3] This was done without the board of Trustees or congregational approval, though the board subsequently approved the decision. Rev. Getty, asked by the speaker why involvement from the congregation in making the decision to post the banner hadn't been sought, explained that the situation with racism was sufficiently dire that spending lengthy periods of time in discussion would have created unacceptable levels of additional harm. Rev. Getty's explanation of her actions can be understood as an exercise of the right of conscience which limited her use of the democratic process.[4]

The 4th Principle: Tensions

There was also conflict over resolving tensions between "freedom" and "responsibility" in the 4th Principle.

One area of conflict over the 4th Principle was the 2019 call by Carla Gates ("Carla"), then board president-elect, to boycott a book by Todd Eklof attacking UUA's modern anti-racism practices (hereinafter, the "book boycott").[5]

Some speakers said that they viewed any request to not read books as profoundly and fundamentally non-UU and as flying in the face of UU principles. For these speakers, there is no inherent tension between "freedom" and "responsibility" in this situation: the book boycott flies in the face of the 4th Principle because it both abrogates freedom and is irresponsible. And not only was the boycott called

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[3] This act raised the question "are we at UUCC a BLM-supporting group?" – a central matter of identity in complicated times, and at the time, more controversial than it seems today, in 2021. Ultimately, the board expressed explicit support of BLM and recommended approval of the banner to be hung on the OBIC exterior. The board's announcement of its decision is available at: https://uucolumbia.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Board-Minute-Black-Lives-Matter-April-2015.pdf.

[4] No endorsement or non-endorsement of Rev. Getty's balancing of these considerations is intended by this discussion. The point is simply that the 5th Principle contains within it two parts which can seem, under some circumstances, to require balancing.

[5] Carla's post can be read at https://uucolumbia.net/power-of-we-a-report-from-uua-general-assembly-2019/. Other documents relevant to this element of the conflict are available upon request from the TRC.

for by the president-elect – someone in power within the congregation – but also was given approval by the minister. Moreover, what made the decision even more irresponsible, from the perspective of these speakers, was the admission by both Carla and the minister that they had not read the book for which a boycott was being called.

Within the congregation, others supported the boycott. One way to understand this support is to consider their stance as an effort to express solidarity and support with those who called for the boycott, BIPOC and their allies, by not giving the book and its author money and attention. Carla herself argued in the call for boycott that giving the book this attention would be "hurtful." In other words, supporting the boycott, for these persons, was considered a "responsible" choice which justified limiting their own freedom to read. Another possible element of "responsibility" for these congregants may have been the merits of lending support to the first incoming African American woman president of UUCC's Board.[6]

Tensions over how to resolve the 4th Principle are also seen in conversations between congregants that involved possible microaggressions. These interactions express values of free discussion and dismantling oppression, which for some, seemed to be in conflict. Some at UUCC hold a subcultural norm, perhaps associated with Humanism, of presuming that controversial topics can best be understood through free discussion. Others hold and express a norm that calling-out microaggression is an important part of combating oppression. People have occasionally been heard at UUCC responding to a call-out by inviting discussion of whether the call-out was appropriate, or asserting that the call-out was wrong. Once someone objects to a call-out, the call-out is often repeated with more emphasis, with the added assertion that trying to discuss whether the call-out was appropriate is creating further harm (therefore, implicitly, irresponsible) – followed by more calls for discussion. These interactions have a circular quality; over time, they sometimes deteriorate into *ad hominem* attacks and often ended in a request by a staff member to end the conversation.

These interactions have been painful to everyone. Many speakers expressed a need for a sense of safety during conversations; some were challenged by the "othering," demeaning quality of microaggressions and others were challenged by the way microaggressions are called out and challenged.[7]

Values conflicts over priorities

Congregants also expressed values conflicts over how UUCC's programs are being prioritized. These conflicts were over three related issues:

- The extent to which UUCC should prioritize its program on internal elements of spirituality. which some saw in contradistinction to social justice activism. One speaker opined that there is an inherent conflict between "being a safe and welcoming community," and "challenging each other to live our values (though another speaker said there was no such contradiction in these two elements of our congregational covenant).

[6] A racialized gloss is that modern anti-racism could be construed as recommending that her call be complied with since it relates to her experience of being a Black UU. In other words, acceding to the boycott constitutes sharing power.

[7] They can be further complicated if the person calling out is an ally – in that situation observers may wonder whether the ally is correct. Some speakers complained that some call-outs, especially those done harshly, were merely virtue signaling.

- Whether, for those who accept UUCC's social justice activism, there is too much emphasis on racial justice.
- Whether, for those who accept the focus on racial justice, persons who feel we have given insufficient attention to marginalized persons other than BIPOC.

These are fundamental questions about UUCC's overall direction and the content of programs. Whether or not congregants feel they have "voice" in determining UUCC's priorities may affect their tolerance of differences over these priorities.

Identity conflicts

Identity conflicts involve threats to who we are and how we wish to define ourselves – in other words, the answer, in positive terms, to the questions "who am I" or "who are we?" These include cultural norms and values, so values conflicts and identity conflicts often coexist and can be hard to distinguish. The values conflicts over how to interpret UU principles can also be understood as identity conflicts, in the sense that UU principles are values central to UU identity. Both identity and values conflicts are strongly associated with conflict intractability.

An identity conflict was triggered by the call to redefine "racism" and "White Supremacy Culture" in terms of effects on people of color, rather than in terms of the intent or motive of those who perpetrate or are complicit in actions. Rev. Getty initiated this call on a congregational level in May, 2017 in a blogpost and from the pulpit during the "White Supremacy Teach-In" service.[8] Rev. Getty presented these redefinitions as a way to emphasize that conduct done with even the best of intentions can be complicit in allowing a system of oppression to continue – and in turn, to place responsibility on well-meaning congregants to work actively to end oppression. This perspective has been reinforced during workshops and in book clubs.

Announcing a semantic shift and asking for participation did not make it so for all congregants. The shift shocked and enraged some speakers, who worried about "being called a racist," and outraged and dismayed people who saw their beloved congregation "called White Supremacist" – for many, these shifts were intolerable attacks on fundamental elements of identity. It also provoked arguments about strategic implications of a progressive congregation being identified in the larger community as "White Supremacist."[9]

While speakers who aligned with leadership approaches to anti-racism did not explicitly mention the terminology shift, we can guess that it is probably accepted – indeed, embraced.

Additionally, some speakers of color said they felt marginalized from UUCC – and one way to understand this sense is that for them, they feel alienated from UUCC identity, though perhaps not from their religious identity as UUs.

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[8] This shift was introduced in an "In Between Sundays" blogpost and at the "White Supremacy Teach-In" worship service. The blogpost is available at https://uucolumbia.net/discomfort-language-moral-imperatives/.

[9] Our investigations do not settle the issue of whether the semantic shift has fully taken hold, though some of our conversations suggest that it hasn't. See also factual disputes, below. For the concern over the strategic implications of presenting a congregation or denomination as being racist in its actions or having "White Supremacy Culture," whether the shift has been complete within UUCC is irrelevant.

Communication problems

The Interactional Toxicity perspective, as well as the above discussion of values conflicts, shed light on communication problems that create or exacerbate interpersonal conflicts.

Conflict can also come from differences in how words are used and understood. At UUCC in recent years, there have been deliberate attempts to redefine important words, most notably those centering around racism and other oppressions. In our diverse community, where not everyone hears the same communications and new people are constantly entering, people may be using both the old and the new definitions of these terms. If a person accused someone of doing something "racist," meaning "what you did seems to be complicit with maintaining White Supremacy Culture," and the accused person hears "you're calling me a hate-filled White Supremacist no better than the KKK," an obvious problem results.

Threats to Basic Human Needs

Conflicts that involve threats to basic human needs are associated with intractability. At UUCC we see a number of threats to basic human needs generated by the troubles.

- **Safety** – BIPOC and others have expressed a threat to safety and security that comes from being "othered" and demeaned during discourse that contains microaggressions, creating a hostile environment. These speakers expressed a sense that the minister had their backs. Others said they had experienced a sense of being attacked, criticized or humiliated during call-outs and similar interactions, and wished for a less judgmental community. Some expressed a fear of what will become of our religious home as a result of what they saw as moves toward top-down, authoritarian control by the minister, and a number of speakers said that the minister had taken sides against people like them. Across the listening sessions, speakers yearned to restore a sense of sanctuary, but they differed as to the sort of changes that were needed to attain it.
- **Love and acceptance** – Speakers yearned for a climate promoting affiliation, friendship and intimacy with others: a community to satisfy relational needs.

  Speakers almost universally said that we should be kind to one another, but they differed about what constitutes kindness. Some speakers focused on ending what they saw was a longstanding climate of hostility against people in marginalized groups, such as African Americans and trans people. No doubt they saw ending microaggressions, to the extent possible, and taking reparative actions if they happen, as essential aspects of their being treated kindly.

  Others saw unkindness in "callout culture," which seems to be defined, for many of them, as shaming people in public by harshly or demeaningly calling out microaggressions. (Some speakers contrasted this concept with "calling-in," which was variously described as calling out in a kinder fashion, and/or addressing microaggressions in private.) One speaker called the concept of safety in discourse unachievable, and another thought that some calls of verbal harm were being used as a ploy to shut down discourse.

  Several speakers said they had experienced broken relationships, and that the conflicts were creating undiscussable topics among family members. Some said that they had friends "on both sides" of the conflicts, and felt torn and afraid to express their views. Among the speakers, a sense of grief and pain was expressed for UUCC community members who had

been lost, with a handful especially expressing their sadness and grief at Maureen Harris' resignation. The depth of emotions, tears, and pain expressed during the listening sessions was very high overall, particularly among those who seemed to consider themselves as not fitting into a "faction," as well as in those who primarily were critical of leadership's role in the current Troubles.

One indication of the sense of threat to love and acceptance, as well as to safety, is a sense, expressed by some, of lacking pastoral care.[10] Numerous speakers identified a deficit of pastoral care, and, at times, bias in the delivery of this, care by Rev. Paige Getty. The minister sets the tone within the congregation; while the Karuna Team is an important resource of UUCC, there are times when members seek the attentive presence of the minister. Examples:

- In taking concerns to Rev. Paige Getty, one speaker stated that she was told by Paige that she is "not equipped" to address concerns related to the speaker's background and experience. This resulted in the speaker feeling sidelined and undervalued, rather than embraced.
- Speakers cited their personal experience in not receiving pastoral care from Rev. Paige Getty after specific requests for support as they struggled through situations following suicide attempts and tragic family deaths.
- A White member sought support and guidance from Rev. Paige Getty following a congregational leader verbally abusing this member following what was perceived as a racial incident. While the member sought ministerial intervention and the parties did get together to discuss the incident, there was no resolution or acknowledgement of the transgression.
- Various speakers reflected their belief that the minister is selective of who receives direct pastoral care, with the belief that preference is given to what appears to be an "inner circle."

- **Esteem of others, sense of belonging and acceptance, and self-esteem** – These needs, which are often intermingled in human experience, can be rolled up into a single category which we might call "social needs." Social needs are reflected in several UU Principles, and also in our congregational covenant.

  In its most extreme form, threats to social needs can result in ostracism, the social rejection or cancellation of a person from a community. At UUCC, the climate has been experienced as hostile by some persons from some marginalized groups, such as BIPOC. Some at UUCC report being accepted by their (small) BIPOC cohort but experiencing hostility, invisibility, or uncomfortable attention in the larger (majority-White) UUCC community. Some reported denigration, "othering," humiliation, and insults. Microaggressions can also be devastating to self-esteem and other social needs.

  Other speakers seemed to regard call-outs and harsh criticisms of "lack of wokeness" as experiences that "other," "shame and blame," humiliate, and insult. Some also reported that the pulpit is a source of humiliation and denigration, due to frequent allusions to "complacent White liberals" as a substantial reason for the persistence of racism ("being called racists from the pulpit"). One speaker reported judgmentalism and social rejection from their peer group because family responsibilities prevent high engagement with social justice activism. Some

[10] This perspective on pastoral care is offered by Jill Christianson.

speakers felt ostracized, and others reported that they knew of people who feel this way. Some speakers said that if other congregants can't get onboard with next-gen racism, it would be better if they left, and two speakers attributed this view to Rev. Getty. Several complained that group finger snaps during meetings were exclusionary or othering.

One congregant, a member of long standing who had been a social activist, was criticized (some say, extensively) at a board meeting for their authorship of a blogpost, which had lifted up the compromise between enslavement advocate John Calhoun and Henry Clay as a positive example of people cooperating in spite of disagreement. This person left UUCC, according to several speakers, because of this experience.

- **Spirituality** – some have said that their spiritual needs are not being met by the current balance in programming (see "Values Conflicts over Priorities").
- **Agency, autonomy and self-determination**[11] – The governance and practice of democracy within UUCC relates directly to the realization of our UU seven principles. The listening sessions reflected a growing concern that over time, the decision-making balance within UUCC has tipped, giving greater weight to the Executive Team and less to the board or congregation at large. A former board president referred to this current calibration as invoking a structural implosion within UUCC. The congregational agency, or active stake that members have in the direction of UUCC, has changed. This theme relates to Maslow's work related to Self-Actualization in the organizational context, with variables of belonging and safety. Some examples include:
  - The Council structures, with the Leadership Council, have unraveled, which has led to an imbalance between the congregation and the Executive Team and the board.
  - Speakers identified the need to revisit the UUCC mission and bylaws, as well as the ends, through a process that could actively engage all members of the congregation. (It is noted that the board has recently sought congregational input on the ends.)
  - Some listeners cited the need for expectations and guidelines for the board elections and candidacy to be clearer and available to all.
  - Within the congregational structures, several speakers identified that there are limited opportunities to raise disagreement and pointed out the importance of transparent, easy to access, modes for exercising dissent. These speakers expressed desire for details for how members express concern and raise topics with the minister, the board, and across the congregation. This would include further definition in the use of social media and member outreach.

Differing attributions of causation

There were at least two ways in which speakers' attributions of causation came into conflict.

First, speakers differed in what has produced our conflicts. Some identify the cause as resistance to change. Perhaps this perspective could be framed this way: "we want to move forward into dismantling White Supremacy Culture, racism and other oppressions. Change is hard and it's natural that resistance would be encountered. It's important to persist." Others identify it as a failure to work together on a common goal. This perspective could be framed this way: "everyone wants to dismantle

[11] This section is contributed by Jill Christianson

White Supremacy Culture, racism, and other oppressions, but the approach to instituting it has been authoritarian and has hurt people. We feel that what is needed is to sit down in facilitated dialogue."

On the topic of HOW to eradicate racism, our speakers were virtually unanimous in wishing to eradicate it, but the listening sessions reveal a disagreement about what tactics will work best. Some speakers argued that tactics such as the terminology shift, the treatment of microaggressions with calling-out, and the establishment of affinity groups for BIPOC are counterproductive. Other speakers supported next-gen anti-racism; said that tactics tried before did not move the needle; and said that without fully embracing next-gen anti-racism, we will be complicit in allowing a devastating situation to persist.

Those advancing next-gen anti-racism also express a meta-concern. If part of dismantling racism is sharing power, then, it is argued, it is necessary to defer to racially marginalized persons to direct how racial justice work should be conducted. In this respect, the failure to adopt next-gen anti-racism is itself racist (using the term "racist" as meaning any action which, intentionally or not, tends to perpetuate White Supremacy Culture).

With respect to interactions at UUCC, one source of frustration articulated by some speakers is their unfulfilled wish to work together to develop a mutually agreed approach to congregational interaction: one that both gains the benefits of calling out microaggressions, and helps those called out feel respected, valued, and included.

Factual disputes

We did not hear a great many factual disputes, apart from those generated by meta-disputes. Factual disputes are typically the easiest to resolve, except that in UUCC's case, the factual disputes are occurring in an escalated-conflict situation, which creates biased perception and exacerbates confirmation bias and reactive devaluation.

Often the factual disputes we heard about were of the "one person said this, and another said that" variety. In one illustrative case, a congregant and some observers say that the congregant was "called a racist," while the other person and other observers characterized the communication as "calling out something the person had done as racist." The fact that two groups of people were physically present and each heard something that confirmed their own beliefs and outrages is strongly suggestive of biases created by conflict escalation.

Although many of these situations appear to be more about how call-outs are made, it's possible that some who object to calling-out do not understand the damage caused by microaggression – we found diversity among our speakers in their familiarity with next-gen anti-racism. This situation would be described as a dispute of fact.

A factual dispute also occurred in the responses of certain speakers to the book boycott. (These speakers admitted to having a relatively attenuated connection with events at UUCC.) Some referred to "banning books" and others related the book boycott to Naziism or fascism - in other words that congregants were commanded, not requested, to refrain from reading the Eklof book.

Power Analysis

By power, we mean, here, the ability to influence another person or group. For purposes of UUCC's troubles, two concepts related to power are important: legitimacy and alienation.

Legitimacy. Power is likely to be harmful if it is viewed by others as wielded illegitimately. Some types of power, such as coercion, are prone to this perception, but any use of power can be seen this way. Illegitimate use of power can disempower the user of the power from wielding various forms of "soft power" going forward, because the user is seen by those persons as less moral, less attractive, and less trustworthy, leaving them only more coercive, unilateral choices.

Alienation. Illegitimate use of power is strongly associated with alienation -- a sense of difference from, negativity towards, and a desire to resist the user of power. Thus, use of power seen as illegitimate to some people can trigger or worsen conflict escalation. This does not mean that power should never be used that way, but it does mean that it should be used carefully, and that (if preservation of a healthy community is a goal) healing measures should be planned.

Another aspect of power pertinent to UUCC is that it is ***situational*** and ***multidimensional.*** Persons who are relatively powerful in relation to some people in some situations may be less powerful in relation to other persons, or even the same persons in other situations. People may be relatively powerful along some dimensions and relatively disempowered along others. Power produces influence in some situations but not others.

Within UUCC, power is organized structurally by foundational documents (Articles, Bylaws, Board-Staff Linkages, Administrative Limitations) and Congregational Ends; and informally by multiple parameters – social connections, past leadership positions, and other elements of personal power. The reader is referred to Becky Reese's Organizational Diagnosis perspective for further details of structural arrangements at UUCC.

Power imbalances in larger society do not go away when people step through our doors, and, in spite of best intentions, power imbalances can persist and do damage. We have previously noted that some speakers who are BIPOC said that they experience a hostile environment at UUCC. This may be due to their visible minority within the community; to the actions of some congregants which may "other" and demean (inadvertently or not); and to suspiciousness and fear coming from lifetimes of experience outside of UUCC.

Although we don't know the extent, some BIPOC and people with BIPOC family have left due to this hostility, leaving UUCC less racially diverse and inclusive. This conclusion was reinforced with testimony from BIPOC and their families at a board meeting in summer, 2019. One speaker to the TRC said that they fear being at coffee hour or in the sanctuary at worship. This absence of diversity makes it harder to offer a safe and welcoming community to BIPOC who remain.

Racism and other oppressions are, fundamentally, structural power imbalances, and a central element of next-gen anti-racism involves sharing power with people who belong to marginalized groups. Next-gen anti-racism at UUCC addresses power-sharing at both substantive/programmatic levels (e.g. offering book clubs, classes, and workshops on anti-oppression, which directly offer training and knowledge about hidden impediments to power-sharing and options for remediation) and at meta/relational levels (e.g., deferring to members of marginalized groups in deciding what changes to make, and how).

At UUCC, leaders have made substantive/programmatic and meta/relational changes to make this happen. Some speakers complained that the minister implemented these changes by means of top-down or undemocratic tactics. Visibly, the community – what happens in worship, how resources are

used, even the language we use – has been changed over roughly the past half-decade. Leadership seemed, to some, to have not sought buy-in from, or even given notice to, a significant part of the community.

In addition to these changes, a number of speakers complained that Rev. Getty – had "taken sides" against them. Some alluded to statements they heard from Rev. Getty that "she would always side with the marginalized." This perception related both to interventions in heated conversations on social media; and in her responses to efforts to complain or obtain resolution. Some speakers reported an empathic conversation, but no substantive changes. (On the other hand, a different speaker commented that "not doing what somebody wants" is not necessarily equivalent to not being heard.)

By inference, this use of power was seen by some as exercised illegitimately, and appears to have led to alienation, anger, pain, and grief. This alienation, in turn, is likely to have escalated the conflict and may have led to reactive devaluation of other efforts to exercise "soft power," such as efforts to educate and pulpit exhortations. This same conduct was seen as legitimate ways to create a more inclusive and welcoming community by other speakers.

Some speakers alluded to what they saw as illegitimate uses of power by members of 4PG to counter the actions of leadership. These included congregating at board meetings (which some described as "supervising" or trying to intimidate), using the congregational email list to disseminate their messages, withholding pledges, and threatening to leave UUCC.

Empowerment issues also occurred during discourse. One bedeviling example illustrates these power issues. UUCC has had in the past, and probably has now, a disproportionate number of professionals (doctors, lawyers, scientists, professional diplomats, engineers and the like) and academics. Perhaps these persons hope to use their professional knowledge for altruistic purposes. What, then, does such a person do when confronted with a terrible problem like "how to dismantle White Supremacy?" They offer their expertise. In our listening sessions, some White speakers made assertions about what would be best for African Americans. The problem is that sometimes this also amounts to not listening to those most affected, and ignoring the fact that marginalized folks come with a bounty of experiences and contexts crucial to make informed choices. Moreover, the mere act of jumping in, without first asking "how do you see it and what can I do to help," can be seen as trying to control the agenda and as power-hoarding. This kind of interaction can be both microaggressive to the marginalized, and dismissive and disrespectful to the person whose offer to help is rejected and criticized.

Empowerment issues are also seen in the concerns stated by non-BIPOC persons who are marginalized in the larger society – speakers who identified themselves as being LGBTQ+, as POC who are not Black or Brown, as females, as persons of limited wealth, as physically or developmentally disabled, as persons with mental illness, etc. Concerns were raised by some that they are not being supported.

A shift in power may ultimately empower all, but when a group is made to give up power, it is often felt as real, tangible, fear-inducing, even heartbreaking loss.

The loss may be particularly hard on those most likely to find today's approach to anti-racism mystifying and objectionable – people of advanced age. Old people, even White males, can suffer marginalization. (Although White male speakers did not address their own marginalization, some others expressed worry about this cohort.) Some may be dealing with, or worrying about the onset of, age-related losses which are disempowering – such as physical, sensory or cognitive declines, the end of a career vocation, the inability to get around, and the deaths of loved ones and friends. Some may be long-term UUs whose perspective is that Humanism, the benefits of civil argument in discourse, and

the strict adherence to democratic process, are necessary bulwarks against authoritarianism, tyranny, and oppression. Some of them have expressed concerns that UUCC is embarking down a fearful path.

Ageism is also a disempowering, marginalizing force, and there is some evidence of it at UUCC. One speaker mentioned that, in a social media interaction, a group of UUs were called, pejoratively, by a young White female, "dogmatic old White men." This speaker asserted, with obvious disgust, that the post was "loved" by Rev. Getty and others. Some older congregants have been Unitarian Universalists for many decades. As one person once remarked, in explaining why they left UUCC and the denomination, "I no longer recognize the church that I love." Although most speakers who self-identified as "old" denied feeling that they were being ostracized from the UUCC community, some did say that the institution was verging on intolerable, and some said they felt outraged or humiliated.

A sense of disempowerment is a strong impediment to constructive conflict transformation. Disempowered parties sense that they cannot hold their own in a decision-making environment and often refuse to participate or are obstructive. If the process goes on without them, they risk further disempowerment and alienation from the community. As a religious congregation, we need to look for ways to give our constituent groups enough power to act effectively within a covenantal structure, and to be able to come to church with a sense of safety.

Conflict Escalation & Intractability

Conflict escalation is a dynamic, destructive process triggered by the perception that a conflict presents only zero-sum, win-lose solutions. An escalated conflict creates destructive biases in perception that hamper the ability to solve problems. These same biases tend to prompt behavior that exacerbates escalation and creates intractability.

Knowing how a conflict has become escalated can help identify ways to ameliorate the situation. For more about conflict escalation, see Appendix C, page A-11.

Conflict escalation

The following evidence of conflict escalation was revealed by our listening sessions:

Obstruction

Some speakers who agreed with how UUCC leadership were implementing anti-racist actions saw actions of those who objected as obstructing progress. Those who disagree with this approach saw leadership as obstructing paths to dialog among congregants to find a mutually acceptable solution.

Emphasis on difference

One striking example of emphasis on difference is that congregants – even TRC members - couldn't even agree on the nature of UUCC's Troubles. Another example arose in describing the racialized elements of the conflict. Speakers universally and without prompting affirmed their commitment to racial justice, and yet this point seems to have been lost in the dispute, with some congregants being accused of not caring. And this is one area where we have data to quantify this phenomenon: the June 2020 racial justice resolution, inspired by the proposed 8th Principle, passed at UUCC's annual meeting

by a margin of 186 to 25[12]. Indeed, some of the speakers who objected to leadership's approach to racial justice work are seen regularly at monthly BLM vigils.

"Talking Past Each Other"

At UUCC, the differences of opinion about whether, and to what extent, UUCC's troubles are about anti-racism may also have triggered a vexing situation which one TRC member has called "talking past each other."[13]

Some speakers, who generally characterized the problem as "overreaching leadership," said that they yearn to meet with those with whom they are in conflict, to work on developing mutually acceptable solutions. These persons seem passionate about making UUCC a more harmonious, safe and inclusive place for all, and a belief that the degree of common ground between congregants is being underestimated. They also express commitment to ending racism. They said that their offer of discussion has been rejected, and that they are being labeled as "racist" for even proposing it. Some speakers also pointed to their life experience in working to counter racism, as well as their professional expertise in some instances, to make the point that they have a lot of positives to offer. They find it enraging, terribly discouraging, even tragic, that their offers to be part of the solution are rejected and even seen in a negative light.

Other speakers, who tend to be those who see the conflict as about resistance to next-gen anti-racism, said they were reticent, or opposed to, further discussion. These same speakers also point to what they see as heavy-handed power plays by the 4PG. The result has been impasse and a great deal of frustration.

We think a factor which led to reticence to meet and solve problems through mutual discussion may be that next-gen anti-racism conceptualizes White Supremacy Culture as a power imbalance. In this view, when White people insist on defining racialized problems and developing solutions to them, they perpetuate this power imbalance, and thus perpetuate White Supremacy Culture. One speaker, who self-identifies as a White male senior and is sensitive to this issue, describes his role as that of a "foot soldier" in a struggle whose parameters and approaches need to be defined by those who are most negatively affected, and who also have direct personal knowledge of the problems of living while Black.

This perspective holds that, to rectify power imbalance in a racialized conflict, those victimized by racism must be ceded the power to define what the problem is, and how to resolve it. Thus, for these persons, neither altruistic intent, nor passion to make things better, would be determinative. Rather, they view ceding control of the agenda and process to those who are victims of oppression as essential to dismantling White Supremacy Culture. From this vantage, a White congregant asking BIPOC and their allies whether they are open to discussing the problem, or whether recommendations would be welcome, might be acceptable -- so long as the person asking or offering is prepared to accept the reply "no, thanks." (Complicating the situation is that we are a congregation of over 400

[12] There were also 4 abstentions.

[13] This is a highly nuanced situation - any written discussion is vulnerable to oversimplification. But despite these limitations, we feel it's important to mention it.

individuals, and if multiple individuals make similar requests, it could become oppressively exhausting.)[14]

We in the TRC think that, tragically, in this talking-past situation, value for all is being left on the table. For marginalized persons, it's vital that they control if, when and how discussions about their own welfare occur. It's vital, as well, that their voices be centered; that their background, experience, and context be respected; that their perspectives be taken seriously; and that their wisdom about how to dismantle White Supremacy Culture be honored. This does not mean that dialogue cannot occur; it just means that dialogue must be clearly planned and framed to address these needs and concerns. Perhaps, if non-marginalized participants (and their allies) propose, frame, and participate in dialogue in ways that promote these needs and concerns, it can lead to outcomes that benefit everyone. Because our conflict is escalated, substantial trust-building will be needed to get to this point.

Please see our recommendations for further thoughts.

Oversimplification

A common cognitive bias created by conflict escalation is oversimplification - particularly oversimplification of the motives of those that one perceives as being "on the other side" of a conflict. We heard from speakers who complained that this was happening.

Another common form of oversimplification is what is sometimes called "binarization" - oversimplifying a conflict situation into a win-lose, us-and-them narrative. We think this may partially explain concerns that we heard from some non-Black people of color, and others, who say their needs and concerns are being ignored and left unaddressed.

Demonization

Several speakers alluded to demonization at UUCC. Some, who identified as White men, said they felt demonized by Rev. Getty during a sermon in which Rev. Getty referred to "racialized conflict" in our community on social media. The previously alluded-to incident on social media described on page 19, in which participants were called "dogmatic old white men," is an example. One speaker said that the application of the word "racist" to people (or their conduct – this point seems sometimes to be conflated in these listening sessions) amounts to demonization, though others would disagree on this point.

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[14] Escalated conflict creates perceptual biases that reinforce individuals' beliefs about what the conflict is about. Several speakers saw conduct by members of 4PG as heavy-handed and intimidating, citing the use of the congregational email list to disseminate a letter in July, 2019 stating objections to UUCC leadership's actions; and dispatching multiple members of their group to attend Board meetings during the 2019-2020 church year. This conduct fed the narratives of the conflict being about resistance to sharing power with marginalized persons. Speakers who saw the conflict as being about overreaching leadership appeared to see these same actions as an appropriate reaction to being denied congregational voice.

On the other hand, several speakers who saw the conflict as being about overreaching leaders argued that leaders had refused to offer opportunities for genuine discussion. Speakers complained that events (such as the Paula Cole Jones Community of Communities workshop in August, 2019) that were pitched to the community as "discussions," turned out to be disappointingly directive. Other opportunities were dismissed as *post-hoc* justifications for unilateral actions, rather than genuine discussions. These interpretations fed speakers' narratives about heavy-handed leadership. No doubt those who see the conflict as about resistance to anti-racism have a different interpretation – when they mentioned the same workshop, it was in a positive light.

A frustrating element of the situation is what cognitive scientists would call "epistemic freezing," a fancy term that means that people get locked into their perceptions, and over time their perceptions become more and more narrow and extreme. Some of this narrowing of perception seems as if it might be occurring at UUCC. If perception is locked in, individual shifts in behavior over time may not be taken into account. Frozen negative perceptions of others may cause people to feel that their good-faith efforts to respond to others' concerns have gone unacknowledged.

Disrupted communication

Problems with communication have been discussed elsewhere in this diagnosis. A related communication problem is conflict aversion. Perhaps because we are a religious congregation, and wish not to hurt one another, much of the time when active disputing breaks out, it is simply terminated. This stops the bleeding but does little or nothing to correct the underlying problems.

Low trust

Lack of trust is a central problem affecting UUCC and impeding efforts to get past our conflicts. In the case of African American congregants, likely some of the mistrust has been born in the larger world. Unfortunately, congregational demographics and the actions of congregants – the coffee hour experience, for example – have not allayed this mistrust. Instead, said a speaker, they never knew when the next microaggression would occur.

The societal context outside of UUCC means that building trust for this group will be very challenging. None of us are mind-readers, and there is a long history, particularly at the national and denominational levels, of broken promises made to marginalized groups, particularly African Americans and indigenous Americans. Given this past history, it is likely that trust with BIPOC congregants can be built only with a strong record of accountable actions delivering on promises.

In the case of folks whose beliefs aligned with the 4PG, there is mistrust of the actions of the minister, who has been perceived by some as grabbing too much power; and the board, who are considered by some as tools of the minister or as failing to consult the congregation on important matters. Some speakers expressed dismay about what they saw as unnecessarily harsh and *ad hominem* attacks against themselves or people with whom they identified, often on social media. In one example, speakers attended a workshop which they said was advertised as an effort to resolve and heal conflict, [15] but the event, they complained, turned out to be a workshop promoting the 8th Principle. These experiences also undermined trust.

Factionalization and demonization, which impair and distort perception, also destroy mutual trust by increasing the sense of difference and creating the appearance that "the other side" is less than moral.

Establishing and maintaining trust will be a fundamental task of reconciliation.

Blaming "the other side"

This phenomenon was evident, with some persons tending to blame UUCC leadership or Paige, and others blaming members of the 4PG, for lack of progress in dealing with UUCC's troubles. Other

[15] A detailed message about this workshop was sent to the congregation using its MailChimp system. The text can be found here: https://mailchi.mp/uucolumbia/message-about-recent-uucc-conflict-2424751

speakers regarded the situation as a tragedy and did not assign blame. Several speakers explicitly stated that they did not blame Carla.

Conflict intensification and spreading

To see intensification and spreading, it is necessary to take a long view, back to 2015, when UUCC began to get active with the BLM movement. Visible intensification is seen in episodic outbreaks on social media, in the struggles of 2019 over the book boycott, in the 8th Principle discussions, and in the withholdings of pledges and resignations of some members.

Meta-conflicts

Many of the complaints we heard from speakers seemed to concern meta-conflicts: interactions leaving people hurt or demeaned, efforts to promote negotiation and resolution said to have gone unanswered or dismissed, complaints about the minister's handling of social media and other disputes, and conflicts over staffing the TRC. The proliferation of meta-conflicts palpably increased the misery quotient at UUCC and made it more difficult to engage constructively with underlying issues.

Reactive devaluation

Reactive devaluation is a form of implicit bias: the discounting of suggestions made by someone who is perceived to be "on the other side" of a conflict. The presence of reactive devaluation makes it significantly harder to reach consensus on solutions to conflicts. We can't be sure that reactive devaluation is present because we generally have only one side of any story, but we did hear suspiciousness of the motives of persons "on the other side" -- which is the trigger for reactive devaluation. In addressing UUCC's troubles, it will be essential to be on the lookout for reactive devaluation; and to prevent it, wherever possible, by having consensus on interventions across existing factions.

Inefficiency and expense

A committee member who attended a board meeting, and at least one speaker, heard board members express frustration that so much effort was being expended dealing with the conflict that they were losing valuable time needed for other work.

Rising sense of frustration, fear, rage, sense of threat

We heard these emotions within our speaker sample, especially frustration and fear. Sadness and a sense of heartbreak were also prevalent, perhaps more so; these illustrate the love and commitment of our speakers to the UUCC community. Building on this shared love and commitment will be essential going forward – it is one of our greatest assets.

Intractability

We think this is the kind of conflict which could easily become intractable. The situation is complex, and the fundamental struggle over how best to eliminate racism and other oppressions has been bedeviling institutions other than ourselves. UUCC's troubles involve conflicts over fundamental values and threats to identity, as well as multiple threats to basic human needs. These are all indicia of a conflict prone to become intractable.

Additionally, the conflict has been subject to the dynamics of escalation. Seen through a dynamical lens, the escalation process contains "attractors," such as intensification of perceptual bias against

those labeled as "the other side," which tend to keep a conflict spiraling ever further into destructiveness. Relationships are damaged and trust is destroyed, making strategic planning and implementation more difficult. These features would tend to move the conflict farther toward intractability.

Opportunities for hope

A conflict is not considered "intractable" until efforts to transform it fail. And we have not reached that point. So we would do well to consider this moment an opportunity, a liminal space.

The past several years have been tumultuous and disequilibrating, which, paradoxically, while tragic and painful, opens doors. We have lost friends and loved ones. At the national level there are new and resurgent concerns that threaten everyone – more obvious and violent bigotry and hate; polarization and lack of overall consensus on important matters we used to take as common knowledge; an attempted Federal insurrection; and incidents of police brutality which have created mainstream outrage unparalleled in history. The franchise is under threat and we have suffered a crisis of confidence in our institutions. Our planet is in peril.

The pandemic lockdown, as hard and tragic as it has been, may have put a little emotional distance between us and our past difficulties, as some speakers noted. We are getting vaccinated; and perhaps we will return to our sanctuary with greater appreciation for each other, made more poignant by separation and loss.

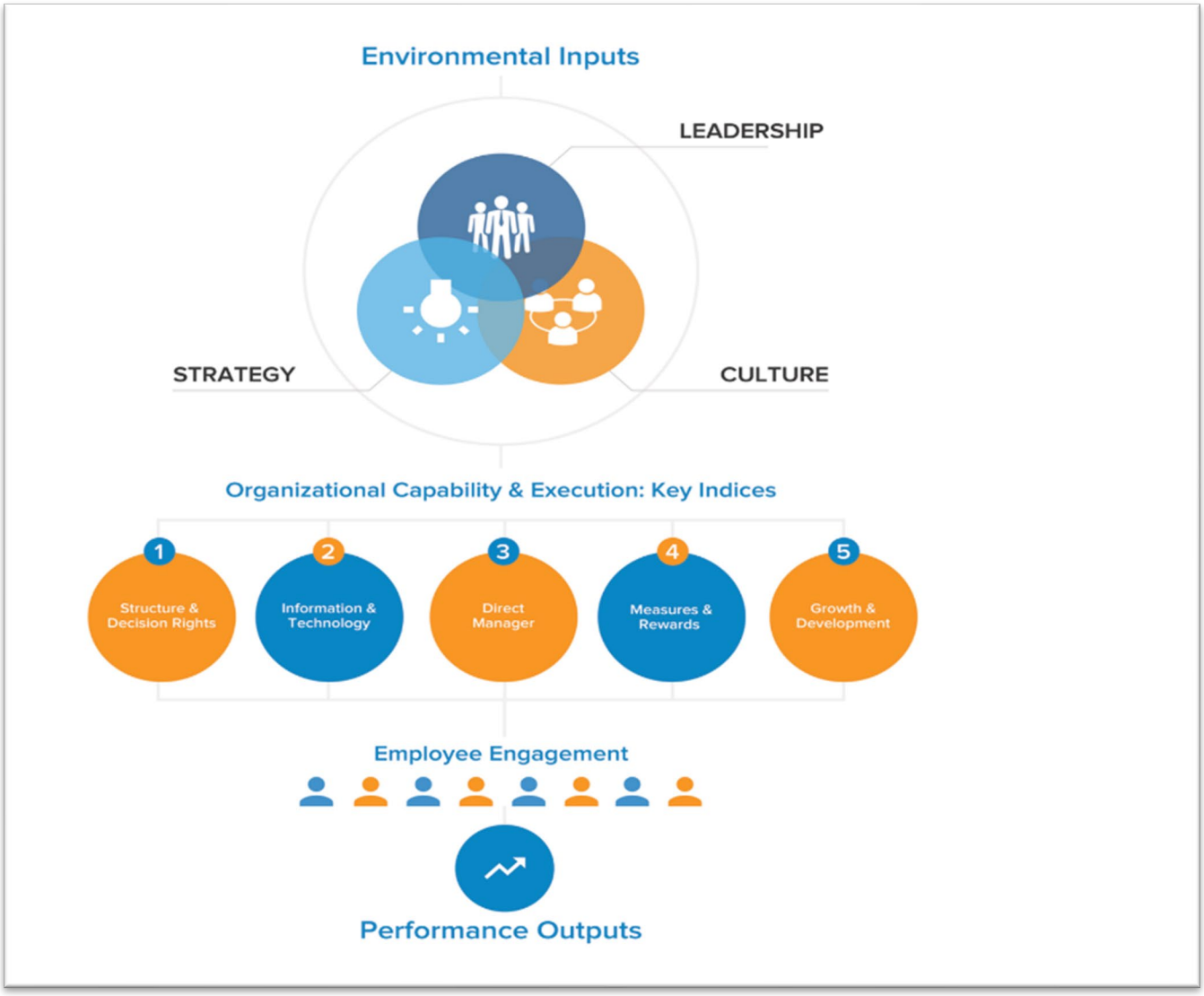
Our dramatically changed world offers radically new and very urgent opportunities to work side by side. With our considerable shared values and compassion for one another, a new world of possibility opens, so long as we truly listen to one another with a sense of curiosity and imagination, and attune to and honor one anothers' perspectives. We will need to embrace the imperfections of others, and be willing to tolerate it in ourselves. And finally, we will succeed if we act restoratively, remember our humility, and treat future conflicts as opportunities to express our shared values in beloved community.

Perspective: Organizational Diagnosis

Becky Reese

This organizational diagnosis aspect of the summary is based on Falletta's Organizational Diagnosis Model (2008)[16] – See diagram below.

Falleta's Organizational Intelligence Model



When an organization is in conflict, it is useful to examine the organizational dynamics in the context of an organizational diagnosis model. Falletta's Organizational Intelligence model (Falletta, 2008) is a simple one that can be adapted, with only minor adjustments, to fit UUCC's situation. The source of data for this model is usually an organizational survey, and interviews with leaders. The TRC has drawn from our listening sessions, documentation (from

[16] Falletta, S., & Combs, W. (2018). The organizational intelligence model in context: A comparative analysis and case profile. *OD Practitioner, 50*(1), 22-29.

UUA and UUCC), and insights from TRC members. Certain pieces of this analysis are responsive to the UUCC Board's charge to the TRC, most prominently, as relates to contributions to escalation, intractability, and structural or governance impediments to effectively managing issues. Beginning with the UUCC Leadership section, diagnosis details include information shared during the TRC's listening sessions.

Environmental Inputs (Nation and UUA)

Nation – Developments in the United States Reflect the National Climate, of which UUCC is a Part …

- The increasingly polarized political environment in the US (including escalated and exaggerated perception of threat from "others") is leading parties to take ever more extreme stances. These divisions have intensified, both in words and violent actions, over the past several years.
- The Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted stark inequalities in access to healthcare and social services based on race, ethnicity, economic class, and residential areas. This can be seen in exposure faced by essential workers, housing density and insecurity, education and interruptions, hunger, access to Covid-19 vaccines, as well as infections and deaths from Covid-19. Heightened awareness of individual and institutional racism and resulting outcomes in policing evidenced, for example, in the murders of George Floyd and Brianna Taylor, and preferential police treatment of White individuals.

Unitarian Universalist Association – Developments in the UUA Impact Our Congregation

- The UUA has pivoted to strongly focus on equity and addressing institutional racism following the controversy over the southern regional hiring decision in 2017.
- Some UUCC congregants and other UUs view a shift of the UUA's role as an association from being a resource for independent congregations to directing priorities via UUA leaders, seminaries and policies implemented by UUA affinity or professional groups (including DRUUMM, LREDA, UUMA)
- The UUA report of the Commission on Institutional Change (2020) identifies leadership (including ministerial) roles as having the authority to "lead with the sort of agility needed in these times of rapid change." This is perceived by some as a shift in power from congregations to leaders.
- The UUA sees a shift to stronger emphasis on activism as necessary to sustain membership in the denomination in an environment where institutionalized religion is becoming less popular.
    - The strategy is, in part, intended to draw younger members to align with progressive shifts in cultural norms and demographics.

- Younger members are purportedly seeking spiritual support for the first time rather than fleeing unpleasant experiences in previous religious institutions. (Commission on Institutional Change, UUA - 2020).

UUCC Leadership

Leadership & Governance Structure

- UUCC leadership consists of the Executive Team (Minister and Executive Director) whose authority to act is conferred by the Board-Staff Linkages document and limited by policies defined by the UUCC Board of Directors. In turn, the board's authority derives from the congregation through the bylaws and input/engagement with members of the congregation as a whole. UUCC has followed a policy governance model since the late 1990's. It is noted that implementation details of the policy governance model differ across UU congregations.
- The Executive Team function has a collaborative relationship with the board that some perceive as exerting undue influence on the board.
  - Some perceive this exercise of informal influence to have increased over time since the establishment of the Executive Team.
  - This trend has varied year to year, but generally seems to have accelerated in the past 3-5 years, diminishing the extent to which the board and Executive Team seem to engage in dialog with or seek input and/or consent from the entire congregation, who are the "owners" in UUCC's policy governance construct.
  - It must be noted that the 2019-2020 board held conversation circles to seek views, and the 2020-2021 board has significantly increased its efforts at transparency and conducted a survey about the Ends.
  - Neither board engaged the congregation in discussions relating to decision-making or priority-setting except at the annual meeting (2020).
- The distinction of roles between the board and the Executive Team may need more clarity and transparency
  - Some speakers felt that the board's close relationship with the minister is a conflict of interest in their role of holding the minister (via the Executive Team function) accountable.
  - Some believe the board's role is to speak on behalf of the congregation while others believe the board is to do so only based on direct consultation and engagement with the congregation.
  - Others contend that the board's allegiance is to furthering the mission and not to the voting constituents, and that this is inculcated at the annual board retreat.

- The power in the ministry has now reached a level of serious concern to some speakers.
- Multiple speakers advocated for re-establishing the Committee on Ministry. (Note: this Committee is being re-activated as of the publication of this Report.)
- The UUCC congregation has not been given the opportunity to engage in discussions about the appropriate level of ministerial authority despite the congregation being the "owners" in our policy governance framework.
- Conflict Resolution
    - There appears to be a lack of clarity on whether resolving conflicts is the responsibility of the board or the Executive Team. (This calls for review and clarification of governance and policies.)
        - During 2019-2020, the minister referred representatives of the 4PG to the board to raise concerns they had already raised with her (as a member of the Executive Team).
        - The board engaged with 4PG representatives in November and December of 2019. Subsequently, the board voted that working to resolve the conflict was not within their responsibilities.
        - The minister then moved forward with representatives of the board to work toward resolution. (via discussions with Howard County Mediation and Conflict Resolution Center.)
        - The 2020-2021 UUCC board chartered a temporary board committee to diagnose the conflict and make recommendations.
    - UUCC Board complaint and inquiry policy needs
        - There seems to be agreement that working to resolve major conflict at UUCC is important, but it is unclear how authority and responsibility for doing so is distributed between the board, Executive Team and congregation.
        - The board's complaint process has proven sorely inadequate to address or resolve the current situation, and therefore needs to be enhanced.
        - Some have suggested that conflict resolution should be the responsibility of a currently non-existent lay-led function.

Leadership Behavior Issues Related to the Conflict at UUCC

Leadership Qualifications and Intent

- The UUCC minister is highly qualified, creates inspirational and thought-provoking services, and cares about individual congregation members and the well-being of the organization.

- Elected UUCC boards sincerely dedicate themselves to supporting the best interests of the congregation.

Leadership Responses to Conflict

- Over the period from ~2018 to the present, numerous concerns and objections were raised to the board, particularly following the explosive escalation in the summer of 2019. Some speakers indicated that there has not been an effective response, nor resolution. Speakers attributed these failures to:
  - Over-reliance on written correspondence which has contributed to further misunderstandings.
  - Avoidance of mutually generative dialog, which is often a source of learning.
    - The minister engaged in one-on-one meetings with many congregants, especially in the fall of 2019.
    - More than a few speakers experienced these sessions as empathetic listening, but with a rigid refusal to accept input or to consider alternate viewpoints.
  - Avoidance of investing time in (potentially productive) conflict at the individual and group levels.

Leadership Style

- Some speakers indicated that the minister has adopted a directive (some called it authoritarian) style of leadership.
  - Paige shared with a TRC member that her directiveness is intentional and supports the antiracist movement at the UUA.
  - Consistent resistance to discussing the actual concerns of congregation members is a source of significant escalation.
- The fact that the minister chose to take sides in the conflict rather than engage with the entire congregation to resolve concerns significantly increased escalation, and entrenched positions.
  - The minister used advocacy (telling and selling), rather than engagement in generative discussion, to promote an agenda and associated approach which some view as divisive and counterproductive.
  - One speaker noted, "You can't have peace negotiations led by one of the two generals fighting the war."
- The minister's protective stance with people of color is appreciated by several speakers who benefit from that support. However, some speakers were concerned that it could also reinforce BIPOC mistrust of the motivations and potential actions of the rest of the congregation.

UUCC Culture

- Characterization of General UUCC Culture
    - UUCC membership (as most UU congregations) is skewed toward highly educated, middle and upper middle-class suburban politically liberal White people raised in another religious tradition (mostly Christian) who value freedom of conscience and independent thought, especially freedom to define their own religious beliefs and how to act on them.
    - A culture of being pleasant and loving toward others to foster a mutually supportive community has included avoiding discussion of controversial topics among people who may hold different views except when raising those views publicly is essential to informing a congregational vote (e.g. the vote on immigration sanctuary support and discussions regarding adopting the proposed 8th principle).
    - A TRC member notes that this culture of being nice may contribute to the reactivity to call-out's expressed to long-term members by those embracing antiracism.
    - The 7 UU Principles are based in humanistic thought, are central to UU identity, and permeate the UUCC culture.
        - However, different interpretations of the meaning and prioritization of the 7 Principles and the language in the UUCC covenant have not been discussed, and likely contribute to disagreements regarding deeply cherished values.
    - The recent protracted *Troubles* within UUCC have led to a high level of mistrust among members, especially those with differing viewpoints.

UUCC Strategy

- The congregation's mission and Ends statements define the purpose and programmatic direction.
- The Executive Team is empowered to define the means through which the congregation's members, supported by staff, accomplish the Ends.
- In 2017, the UUCC Board developed a strategic plan for its own operations.
- There is currently no other strategic plan or direction for the congregation.
    - The mission, vision, and ends have not been substantially revised through a congregation-wide process since 2004.
    - Collaboratively developing a strategic plan can be an effective way to engage people in change efforts.

Organizational Capability & Execution Key Indices

Structure and Decision Making

- UUCC's staff is managed by the Executive Team, consisting of the Minister (for program) and Executive Director (for administration).
- As stated in the governance section, congregation members hold authority for key decisions as defined in the bylaws and delegate authority and responsibility to the board to develop policy. In the application of Policy Governance, the board's policies (laid out in the Board-Staff Linkages document), and statements of limitations set the parameters for the Executive Team to lead the organization, with much of the actual work being conducted by members and lay leaders.
- Each lay-led committee or function has a staff member liaison or board liaison for committees of the board.

Information & Technology

- Staff manages the website and communications
    - Regular electronic communications are sent to the UUCC community, in a variety of forms. This includes:
        - Information about activities
        - Inspirational and spiritual messages
        - Podcasts with a relational and informational focus
    - Members of the community contribute some of the content,
- Information about UUCC committees and activities
    - Difficult to find information via website searches (e.g. members of membership committee, RE council, Auction team, OBIC Board, etc.)
    - Not clear whether some groups still exist (Creature Connection, Social Action Council, Bike Group, etc.)

Direct Manager (interpreted as oversight of lay-led activities)

- Council functions appear to have atrophied considerably in the past 5-10 years. (Noted by several speakers)
- One speaker indicated a shift away from lay-led committees beginning in 2012.
- Some speakers also noted that the Leadership Council (consisting of committee leaders) has not convened for at least a couple years.

- Councils or committees are a primary mechanism for members to engage in leadership, develop relationships, and contribute in ways that build commitment to the organization.
- Many functions that were previously lay led have been taken over by paid staff.
    - Reduced volunteer availability/willingness is one possible reason.
    - However, it is the sense of the TRC that some volunteer roles with existing willing volunteers have been transitioned to staff.
    - There have also been frequent suggestions by leaders that some roles (performed by volunteers) should be paid instead.

Measures & Rewards

- Annual awards are presented to a few key volunteers at the annual meeting.
- Appreciation ceremonies & gifts are provided to RE teachers
- Structurally, the board holds the Executive Team accountable for results on the Ends, but it is unclear what measurable criteria are applied to evaluate success.

Growth and Development

- Board members are invited to participate in regional and national UU events and educational programs.
- Staff engage with professional contacts (ministers, religious educators, administrators, etc.) and participate in development programs.
- RE teachers are offered a training program at the beginning of the RE year.
- Various educational opportunities are available to UUCC community members, through services, RE, and information about programs in the community or via the UUA.
- Other volunteers may be provided with on-the-job training (such as for Sunday morning teams, audio-visual tech, etc.)
- There is currently no lay leadership development pipeline or process for the nominating committee to draw from.

(Member) Engagement

- Engagement can be partially assessed as the level of participation in programs and social activities, both as participants and as volunteers.
- Numerous speakers in the listening sessions reported becoming disengaged as a result of the ongoing conflict.

Performance Outputs

- There are no direct measures of performance for this religious organization, beyond results on the Ends, listed above as measures of Executive Team effectiveness. Indirect measures include:
    - Number of members
        - Some speakers suggested that the conflict may be partially caused by challenges with adapting to congregational growth.
        - The size of the congregation has been approximately steady between 400 and 450 for over 10 years, rather than growing. This is sometimes characterized as failure to break through to the next stable size.
        - Lack of growth in membership (despite outreach efforts) may be a reason for concern about performance.
    - Worship & RE attendance
    - Volunteers in services and programs
    - Pledges
    - Results of surveys or workshops to engage congregation in planning for programs (such as music or RE)
- Activities that align with the Ends (or Incubators) are reported annually.

Perspective: Interactional Toxicity

Suzi Gerb

Overview

This goes beyond just a difference of opinion

While UUCC clearly suffers from disagreements of philosophy, direction, priorities, and how best to achieve them, we also believe our problems suffer from a culture that has normalized and turned a blind eye to toxic interactions among members.

In short, we have a problem of fundamental disagreements, but we *also* have a pattern of interacting with one another that jeopardizes relationships and makes it harder for us to work out solutions. Even were we to settle the differences that separate us, we are concerned that the toxic culture will remain unless we also work on ways of preserving productive relationships among congregants and between congregants and their community.

What are toxic interactions?

By toxic, we mean that they jeopardize and inhibit relationships vital to progress. They put distance between us and result in people feeling alienated from our community, which makes our mission as UUs and as people of conscience, harder, not easier. They cause bad feelings to fester, so that what normally might be a benign disagreement spirals into full-blown disaffection and even enmity. Those looking on, who might not understand the dynamic of the ill-will generated by past toxic interchange, may find themselves shocked and baffled that a seemingly resolvable interpersonal conflict has ballooned so.

Our first principle affirms the inherent worth and dignity of every human being. Therefore, we are inclined to view any erosion of the relationship between a congregant and our community to be a negative event and something worth working to prevent. Put another way, all members of UUCC's community have value, and distance between anyone and their sense of UUCC as a spiritual home diminishes everyone.

Why are toxic interactions a specific problem at UUCC?

There are several factors that have allowed the problem of toxic interactions at UUCC to balloon to the point that it seriously threatens our community goals.

1. We often don't notice them. When they happen we don't see the damage they cause, or at best write it off as a necessary evil. We don't see the harm they bring.
2. Because of this, we have mistakenly attributed our problems to issues solely of conflicting points of view.
3. Our leaders, both our paid pastoral staff and our elected lay governors have not always been proactive addressing these interactions as they happen or undoing the damage they cause.
4. There is no one to go to who can be counted on to address the harm done to relationships and to the sense of community when these interactions happen.
5. As relationships erode, the sense of safety and of shared mission necessary for moving us forward toward our goals is imperiled.

What toxicity isn't

We need to make it very clear up front, that by toxic interactions we don't mean that people aren't "nice" or "polite".

Niceness and politeness are often constructs defined by a dominant culture and are historically used to silence oppressed and marginalized groups. There are situations when it is entirely appropriate for someone who feels attacked or unsafe to communicate in a manner that may be labeled as uncivil or impolite.

Such interactions may not be toxic, and indeed may help forge stronger relationships, especially if members of a dominant culture learn more about what marginalized groups find threatening and furthering of oppression.

So when we decry the level of toxicity at UUCC, we're not just saying we all need to be "nicer" to one another.

What we are saying is that when challenging exchanges happen, we haven't been sufficiently cognizant of their potential to cause damage to relationships within our community and have insufficiently attended to repairing that damage in a timely way.

Symptoms of toxicity

The examples in this section are not intended to be exhaustive. They are included to illustrate the many faces toxic interactions wear at UUCC.

- People heard a top-down prohibition against discussion of the Gadfly papers anywhere within UUCC's space. Leadership denies ever having made such a proclamation. Neither side seemed to be able to find a way to bridge these differences in perception or to move on, leading to an icy lack of dialog that allowed interpersonal chasms to form.
- People joined groups to foster better understanding of the realities of racism and White Supremacy in America. Several we heard from said they found them unwelcoming and, on occasion, hostile. This represents not only a missed opportunity to educate people but also a source of feelings of alienation from the community.
- It is commonplace for people from many points of view to make assumptions about the beliefs, motives, and goals of groups within the congregation without checking those assumptions through dialog. For example, some we heard from assumed members of the self-named 4th Principle Group are racist or at best don't care about racial justice. In fact, many have put a lot of effort into educating themselves about issues of racism and how they can contribute to improvement. These assumptions have prevented exchanges that might have illuminated common ground.
- Many members we heard from who belonged to marginalized communities, spoke of hearing remarks that left them feeling degraded, dehumanized, and less than welcome at UUCC.
- Some of us have fallen into the habit of assuming that anyone who disagrees with us must just need more education or information. We cannot conceive that two parties may be equally well-informed and simply reach separate conclusions. When this happens, it can look as if there is only room for one point of view within the walls of UUCC. Anyone who sees things differently may conclude they don't belong here.
- Some speakers felt they were being labeled racist or White Supremacist by leadership. This alone was enough to cause negative feelings on their part so powerful to change the character of our

gatherings. No actions seemed to suffice in bridging the rift this caused, leading some to feel their motives and value to be under suspicion.
- Very often attempts to make amends for harm and to repair relationships are rebuffed because they do not take the form that the person being approached would prefer. On occasion, they are met with demands for an apology in a specific way or for some specific action being taken to atone. These result in loss of opportunities to restore damaged relationships.

Situations that are prone to toxicity

There are a number of elements that surfaced multiple times during our listening sessions that comprise the toxic environment in which relationships degrade and fester. They are worth specific mention here.

Microaggressions

Microaggressions refer to communication and actions that harm the sense of safety of a marginalized member of the community. The name is a misnomer in two ways. First, their impact, despite what the prefix "micro-" might imply, is not small. They are called microaggressions because they are so easy to miss by those who have not been subject to their damage. They are glaring and can feel repetitive to the point of being incessant to those who receive them. And, contrary to what the "aggression" component of the expression might imply, the person committing the microaggression may have no intention of being aggressive at all. Often they may hold the target in high regard and believe they are offering nothing but support.

Unfortunately, our listening experience tells us that microaggressions are alive and well at UUCC. Members of our congregation who represent marginalized communities describe numerous microaggressions as they share their stories. It is critical that UUCC have a mechanism for addressing microaggressions as they occur.

However, we also need to make sure that the fallout of addressing the microaggression doesn't damage the relationship with our community for any of the parties involved. It is critical that a sense of safe community be restored to whatever extent possible for the marginalized who face microaggressions. It is ALSO important that the person who committed the microaggression be helped to remain in right relations with our community. They, too, are endowed with the inherent worth and dignity that our first principle recognizes in all people and occupy a precious place within UUCC. Failure to take this second step imperils the community itself.

Callouts

Callouts are the name that has been given to pointing out behavior or communication that appears to harbor elements of oppression or is not consistent with a just world.

Often callouts are done publicly with varying levels of civility. Many see them as a necessary and vital tool for social justice. Others see them as creating a culture where safety for everyone will be degraded. On occasion, they may embarrass the individual being called out and carry unwarranted assumptions about that person's motives and values. Ideally, they are done respectfully, which can make them more effective. However, when the sense of safety felt by members of marginalized groups is imperiled, the niceties of delicate communication can be seen as a secondary to restoring that safety.

Callouts, like microaggressions, can represent a hazard to relationships. When callouts are used, it is vital that the possibility of damaged relationships be acknowledged and addressed, and timely steps taken to repair any damage. If this is not done, the legacy of a callout will be toxic.

Cancel Culture

Cancel culture is the name given to the practice of a community inflicting social damage on someone whose stance on some issue is deemed to be harmful to society. Like callouts, cancel culture is subject to much controversy. Some see it as the only tool by which the powerful can be brought to open their eyes to the injustice they are causing. Others express concerns that it represents a form of coercion, of thought policing, that attempts to strong arm individuals into agreement. It has been called undemocratic and counter-judicial. There is no appeal process to being cancelled. No vote is taken. Those who have the power to inflict social damage inflict it based on their individual conscience and their personal understanding of the actions of the party being cancelled.

A fear of cancel culture does seem to pervade the thoughts of some we listened to. That fear in itself, even when no cancelling is actually going on, may be toxic enough to cause rifts in relations between individuals and our community.

Shutting Down of Discussion

There is a perception, right or wrong, that certain subjects are taboo for open discussion in UUCC spaces. This is not an all-or-nothing issue. Pretty much everyone agrees that certain ideas cannot be given voice in our space. ("Let's discuss whether people with this identity have less well developed intellect than people with this other identity…") However, there are edge cases as well, judgment calls, where a decision needs to be made: Is this ok to discuss or not?

In cases when we decide that a particular topic is not ripe for debate or discussion, the possibility of damaged relationships exists as the rule is imposed. On such occasions, if insufficient attention is paid to the potential to erode people's sense of safety and belonging, and such erosion is not addressed or mitigated, the harm can be far-reaching.

Toxic social media culture with loose moderation

A significant portion of the issues we encountered either started or worsened (or both) on social media. The anonymity of speaking in online posts and replies, taking place as they do with text on a screen rather than faces and voices, makes it easier to offend and harder to know whether someone intends to offend. It might be tempting to suggest that UUCC divest itself of social media altogether.

In the 21st century, this is effectively impossible. Social media is also arguably the only way that some community members maintain their ties, and eliminating it would cut loose many precious souls.

However, if we do not recognize the sensitive and volatile nature of this medium for creating a great deal of bad feelings very quickly, we put ourselves in danger. The situation is seen to have improved markedly in recent months, but we're hearing that there was a period during which unfettered back and forth caused such harm to relationships that several high profile departures resulted.

Cycles of toxicity

There appears to be some commonality in the way some conflicts unfolded into toxicity. Because of its frequency, it is worthwhile to document this dynamic and note the ways it becomes toxic.

- Often such interactions begin with a microaggression, one not motivated by ill-will, possibly inadvertent.
- These interactions often involve a callout of the microaggression. In such cases, parties to the conflict and onlookers are usually fixated at this point on whether the callout was deserved and whether it was delivered in a respectful way. No one, congregants and leaders alike, addresses effects it may have on the relationships among the people involved and with their community.
- The originator of the microaggression may protest that its severity should be up for debate or that the callout was unreasonable. At this point there is often justified concern among onlookers that this response will compound the microaggression and erode the feeling of safety among those who are affected by it.
- Allies will chime in, repeating and escalating the callout, rightly concerned about the continuing effects of the discussion on the UUCC climate, but with no one attending to the stress and strain on relationships from the escalated nature of the dialog.
- At some point, a lack of civility may be identified, usually from the point of view of the microaggression originator's cultural lens. Allies will tend to call out the concern for civility as telegraphing a lack of concern for the target of the original microaggression. Those claims may or may not be well-founded, but once again no one attends to the relationship damage resulting from the interaction.
- At some point, a member of the congregational leadership will step in, typically issuing a statement in support of whichever party would seem to have the lowest level of privilege. That staff member or lay leader would then typically back off leaving relationships that may need healing not attended to.

Why are toxic interactions a specific problem at UUCC?

We don't notice them

The problem of toxic interactions and their damage to relationships tends to be mischaracterized by the congregation. Those who view conflicts through a social justice lens will see it as an issue of privilege, believing the problem to be one of those traditionally accustomed to privilege being reluctant to give it up. Those who are troubled by the approach to social justice in our culture may attribute the problems to UUCC uncritically adhering itself to trends and bandwagons in the modern social justice landscape.

Yes, UUCC *does* have an issue with people who don't want to give up privilege.

And yes, UUCC *is* currently embroiled in a controversy of just how to live our values, that often pits those who are convinced to follow modern currents of activism against those who see them as wrongheaded.

But focusing on these as the sole causes of our problems has meant that we haven't always dealt with the way in which our interactions are straining and stressing the relationships among congregants and between those members and the community itself. We have a privilege problem and we have a controversy about how activism should happen. Those have tended to be visible and recognized. We ALSO have a problem with toxic destruction of relationships from the ways we communicate that has been easy for us to miss.

When interactions of the sort described above occur, we've been primed to ask what their effect on the climate of UUCC has been, and what, if any, marginalization needs to be addressed. We haven't been

accustomed or sensitized to ask in what ways relationships have been injured and how they should be healed.

Lack of shared understanding of how to interact

UUCC brings together a rich diversity of ages, cultures, backgrounds, and life situations. That's pretty universally thought to be a good thing. But it represents a hazard as well. With diversity of background comes diversity of communication styles. What may look like effective communication for one person may be seen as aggressive and threatening to another. We have put no time as a congregation into understanding the differences in the way we interact and being aware of occasions when interactions among those with diverse backgrounds might cause differences of perception severe enough to pose a threat to relationships. This lack of awareness has caused bad feeling to fester into decaying relationships in ways we as a community may not even have noticed.

Lack of help or recourse

Our leadership, including both our pastoral staff and our lay leaders, has very diligently paid mind to the plight of marginalized members of the community and their sense of safety. However, they have neglected the effects of our interactions on relationships within our community. When a problematic interaction occurs, the reflexive action appears to be to determine which of the parties to the interaction operates from the lowest level of privilege and make sure their voice is amplified. That isn't wrong per se, but it can be problematic for two reasons:

1. It is not always obvious who has the most privilege. While racial, cultural, and identity elements tend to be obvious on the surface, issues of background, disability, and level of social support may be hidden sources of disadvantage or privilege.
2. That practice ignores the likelihood of damaged relationships. By actively taking sides, a leader may hamstring later efforts to act as a healer of relationships.

There does not appear to be any recourse for those who feel their relationship with UUCC or individuals within it have been harmed. We have heard from many who went to leadership with concerns and came away disappointed and with a feeling that their concerns were not addressed.

Disagreement in a space such as UUCC should be expected to be commonplace. But if we have no easy way to work on the conflict or to use the occasion to increase our level of understanding of one another and deepen our appreciation of the situations of other members of the community, a toxic environment results. Not only do we miss a chance to use the conflict constructively, but relationships will decay from the lack of contact between the parties to the disagreement.

Conflict-averse culture

Several speakers identified conflict aversion as a barrier to healthy interactions and relationships at UUCC. Conflict aversion can also be toxic because it allows conflicts to fester. Participants may feel unheard and may feel that their needs and concerns are going unrecognized or unaddressed.

Sense of safety eroded

The net result of all the elements in this subsection is that some people report UUCC no longer feels like a safe place. This community is home to many people and provides a critical support in our lives. When relationships erode to the point of dysfunction and toxicity, our ability to provide that support and safety is compromised.

BOARD'S CHARGE #2 – Recommendations

The board's second charge reads:

> "Taking into account the need for wide representation, the challenges posed by the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, and UUCC's budgetary constraints, develop recommendations, including:
>
> potential way(s) forward for UUCC congregants to better manage existing conflicts, enhance mutual understanding and, where possible, positively transform relationships;
>
> other processes, resources, and/or other measures that UUCC might employ to better manage future conflicts, strengthen trust, and deepen mutual understanding between and among those in the UUCC community."

The recommendations below seek to offer a comprehensive perspective of how to enhance the quality of our communication and functioning within UUCC which leads to individual and congregational agency (or actualization). We seek to fortify UUCC as a spiritual home for today's members while embracing those newcomers in our wider community ahead.

Statement of Shared Values and Objectives

In developing these recommendations, the TRC brainstormed values and objectives to undergird their selection process. These represent what the TRC hoped to accomplish, and why.

Shared Values

- Promote basic needs of all
  - Love
  - Compassion
  - Integrity
  - Justice
  - Kindness
  - Grace in the face of imperfection
  - Promote congregational voice, agency, self-determination
- Ensure the recommendations are do-able
  - Feasibility
  - Cost
  - Rapidity
  - Time-appropriateness (long and short term)
- Consistency with & promotion of 7 Principles and Beloved Community
  - 1st Principle – respect dignity of EVERYONE
  - Value uniqueness of each person

Objectives

- Build increased trust and engagement within congregants, across the congregation & staff
  - Build trust through accountable actions
- De-escalate current conflicts
  - Healing wounds
  - Build cross-connections
- Build a community where people feel safe and offer a sense of sanctuary. Preserve and nurture relationships vital to achieving our common purpose.
  - Join together to build Beloved Community and dismantle racism and other oppressions. Develop a shared vision for how to approach our antiracism work.
  - Build subcultural competence
  - Foster a culture of inclusion which takes action to address bias when it occurs.
  - Re-establish or enhance sense of community
  - Build empathy and perspective-taking
  - Build trust through accountable actions
  - Increase effectiveness of communication & relationship-building. Look for multiple approaches to this goal.
  - Strengthen pastoral care resources.
  - Make communication expectations clearer.
  - Build empowerment across the congregation
- Establish mechanisms for timely, effective resolution of future conflictual issues
  - Prevent other damaging conflict from happening again or reaching this point

    - Support positive, constructive, relationship-enhancing approaches to conflicts when they come up
    - Foster role clarity in handling conflict
    - Ensure that mechanisms are enforced and enforceable
    - Build in the concept of grace in the face of mistakes.
    - Foster a restorative approach.
- Ensure governance & planning processes adequately serve UUCC
- Rebuild trust in leadership (clergy, staff, board)
    - Role clarity in handling conflicts
- Increase the effectiveness of communication among UUCC.

Specific Recommendations[17]

Special note about these recommendations: many refer to requiring a steering or development group. But we think it is not necessary to set up separate committees or task forces for each one. The nature of many of these (short term) and the similarity of focus will allow multiple recommendations to be assigned to single groups, perhaps even to groups that currently exist.

Setting the Stage

Fostering Beloved Community & 7 Principles in Implementing All TRC Recommendations

We often take for granted our 7 Principles, but our Speakers often referenced them in their heartfelt comments to us. Moreover, we swim in a metaphorical sea of White Supremacy culture, and our actions are likely to perpetuate this aspect of our culture unless we are explicit and intentional about confronting and dismantling it.

For these reasons, we recommend that the board explicitly charge those who implement our other recommendations as follows:

- That, in fulfilling your charge, you affirm and promote the UU 7 Principles and our UUCC Beloved Community Resolution, the latter specifying the need to dismantle racism and other oppressions.

Interventions to de-escalate the existing conflict

Professionally led workshop & followup activities: Identify and act on common ground at UUCC for justice for all

Host an expertly facilitated large group organization development-based workshop to begin to build understanding and cooperation, which is a prerequisite to rebuilding trust, and to generate ideas and enthusiasm toward improving intergroup relations within our congregation. The intended outcome would be to develop a strategy for how to move forward together as a community on areas of common interest.

We propose establishing an organizing team of 3-5 people with diversity of thought and experience to develop a request for proposals to be provided to potential facilitators and to prepare a decision package for the board, including costs, after receipt of proposals. It is likely that the timing of the workshop would be in the early fall of 2021.

Initiate actions that interrupt the escalation dynamic

TRC identified numerous symptoms of conflict escalation at UUCC. Fortunately, one can interrupt the dynamic, prevent conflict escalation, and begin to de-escalate a conflictual situation which has already become escalated, just by working to reduce each symptom. We list the symptoms, along with some approaches to reduce them, in Appendix G, page A-20. The list is offered with the

[17] For additional recommendations see Appendix F, page A-19.

recommendation that it be provided to leaders and staff as a toolkit for managing and preventing destructive conflict.

Healthy Interactions & Right Relations

Right Relations covenanting process & support team

The TRC has concluded that an intentional focus on Right Relations, through a covenanting process would foster the goals named by the board in Charge #1.

A Covenant of Right Relations (or Healthy Congregations Covenant) is a written document developed by leaders, agreed to and owned by the congregation, and practiced on a daily basis as a spiritual discipline. It is an important step in clarifying expectations and creating a safe environment in a congregation. It addresses the questions, "How will we live together when we don't understand each other and we don't agree?" "What promises shall we make about how we want to be and what we want to do together?"

A Covenant of Right Relations is not a set of rules, but a set of promises made with the intent of keeping them. It creates a common standard for everyone to follow, and is intended to change behaviors, not personalities. It serves as an affirmative commitment to each other about how we intend to treat each other and those who come into community with us. It is a statement about who we aspire to be as individuals and what we aspire to be as a community.

We recommend that a committee, populated by members, representing the total diversity UUCC be created to develop a Covenant of Right Relations. Due to the urgency of entering into Right Relations, this work should be divided into four phases:

1. Implement an Interim Covenant of Right Relations. Survey available covenants from other UU Congregations and adopt or adapt relevant portions for implementation within (suggestion) 6 months for use by UUCC as we move forward.
2. Implement a Covenant of Right Relations. Develop and implement a UUcc Covenant of Right Relations. This Covenant will supplant the Interim Covenant and Congregational participation and buy-in is critical.
3. Implementation is key. Develop an implementation plan for roll out of the Covenant which should include processes for early intervention when UUCC members fall out of right relations
4. Growth of the Covenant. As time goes on, shortcomings will become apparent. implement a process for the Covenant to grow and remain relevant.

It is important that such a covenant not only directs us toward practice that leads to better relations among our community, but also commits us to the ongoing task of learning what that means -- of understanding which practices promote better relations and which practices cause problems.

Group to support congregants through relationship issues

We recommend that UUCC form a group of community members who serve as a place to go for support when relationship issues arise. Relying solely on pastoral staff to serve this purpose has not been effective.

The group would ideally be made up of volunteers from among the congregation and possibly one or more staff members. Group members would need to receive special training that allows them to perform all the group's functions effectively.

We see the group helping in the following areas:

Listening - First and foremost, it would serve as a first stop for anyone who needs to be heard about an issue they are experiencing within the congregation.

Facilitated Resolution - There will be times when the group needs to facilitate conversation and reconciliation among parties to a conflict. When that happens, they should be charged with focusing on preserving and developing the relationship among the parties (as opposed to, for example, trying to determine who is right and who is wrong).

Advocacy - On occasion it may be appropriate for the group to work with someone who comes to them to make sure their voice is heard by an appropriate member of UUCC's leadership. This may involve discussing with someone how they will approach leadership, accompanying them, or, on rare occasions, speaking to leadership on their behalf. The group should be discouraged from advancing issues anonymously, since that makes it very difficult for leadership to follow up.

Suggestions for Change - Depending on the issues involved, it may on occasion be appropriate for the group to suggest change to UUCC's processes, policies, or culture to congregational leadership.

It is not clear whether existing structures (e.g. the Karuna group) can have their scope expanded to meet these functions or whether a new structure is needed. In either case, the following factors will be vital to determining the group's ultimate success:

- The group must receive careful training on how to address the sensitive issues that come their way.
- The group must have the unequivocal support and energy of congregational leadership both while starting, and on an ongoing basis.
- The group's existence and function must be aggressively publicized and promoted, both initially and on an ongoing basis. The congregation needs to be aware of their existence, be motivated to take advantage of the opportunity to work with them when necessary, and understand how to approach them.

Improving Our Social Media Communication

A consistent driving force of the conflict we see within UUCC is social media. As has been otherwise noted UUCC has an issue with how we communicate with each other, however social media serves to exacerbate those issues.

We propose two actions to facilitate a safer online environment. The first is official moderation. Moderation must be mandatory on all social media. Even in a small group of only 20-30 people having a designated moderator to deal with issues as they arise is necessary. We propose a committee/taskforce that is charged with:

1. Creating the rules of moderation
2. Enforcing the rules

An example of such rules would be policies for when arguments inevitably break out, policies for when someone says something offensive, etc. These policies would need to include actions to be

taken by moderators such as deleting messages, silencing people for a duration of time, or otherwise getting involved. These policies would need to differ from platform to platform, and it would be up to this committee to create the overarching rules as well as platform specific policies.

This committee, or a sister committee, would then need to designate moderators and give them the power to perform moderation on each social media platform. These moderators would not only be charged with enforcing the rules by silencing people and deleting messages, but also with attempting to disarm conflicts when they arise. The moderators, although not neutral, are a third party which can help with conflict resolution, or point members towards a higher power should a conflict arise that is out of their purview.

Our second proposal is that UUCC create an official social media medium for people to share requests and stories and socialize. In the past this function was performed by the Yahoo group, however that was unmoderated and now defunct. Currently this function is ostensibly fulfilled by Realm, however Realm has not been adopted by the community, and either needs to be advertised to get the community to adopt it, or else made defunct. Ideas for platforms that could replace it would be Discord[18] or Slack or the like. Whatever platform is selected, it should be created by the UUCC staff and they should have the power to enforce rules on their own, along with the presence of moderators with these powers.

If an official social media platform for general socialization is not formed, then there is a high chance that an unofficial one will emerge, in which case we are in the same situation we were in before, unmoderated social media. However if officially created and properly moderated, social media has the power to greatly increase community engagement, and to foster a stronger sense of belonging than any other medium.

Building cultural competencies to foster Beloved Community

A multiracial, multicultural community that interacts healthfully and thrives requires us to be able to understand and interact with persons from other cultures. These skills are the essence of cultural competency.

When we talk about "cultures," the TRC is including typical groupings such as nationality of origin, race, religious background, etc., We also include other groupings such as age cohort, social class, gender identity, and sexual orientation, which can be associated with common norms and experiences.

Some of our discord (most notably that around microaggressions and their aftermath) seem to have been exacerbated by lack of cultural competency. We think the congregation must become intentional about building and maintaining cultural competencies.

The TRC recommends building cultural competencies in areas that have created current problems (for example, race, belief system, age, gender identity, and social media user). A variety of methods could be used to deliver this content, including workshops, speakers and RE. An existing standing committee, or newly convened committee, can take the lead on proposing and implementing cultural competency solutions. *An example of an intervention to transform conflict via cultural competency: adult RE course, targeted particularly toward non-marginalized congregants, which*

[18] For information on how to perform moderation on Discord (and moderation in general) see: Discord Moderator Academy

gives learners a "toolbox" to identify microaggressions, listen actively, constructively respond to microaggressions and to being called-out, and participate in restorative behavior. We also recommend efforts to increase cultural competencies that make our congregation more welcoming and inclusive. *For example: committee would review cultural competency and recommend approaches to improvement; periodically hiring a paid expert to help us audit our cultural competencies. This standing committee could also consider and recommend a variety of approaches to get these competencies to the broadest swath of congregants.*

Fostering Vibrancy, Engagement, and Congregational Voice

In conversation with UUCC Members and Friends, the TRC received many comments that indicated a lack of understanding of the Governance Process at UUCC and unfamiliarity with how decisions are made. The TRC recommends three projects below, and suggests that the board take a broader look at Governance and communication with the Congregation.

Strengthening Congregational Voice Via the Election of Leaders

It is recommended that:

The board name a short-term task force to recommend to them policy changes in the UUCC nominating/election process for the Board of Trustees in 2021-22 fiscal year and future years. The focus would be to ensure elections are transparent, democratic, and inclusive. Consideration will be given to timelines for the nomination process; opportunities for candidates to share their bio, vision and photo; public fora and ways for candidates to communicate with members prior to the election. The task force will also consider the merits of ranked choice voting before making their recommendations to the board.

Empowering the Congregation While Promoting Engagement, Understanding, Governance and Leadership

The TRC found that the old Council system, including the Leadership Council, has atrophied. Speakers complained about lack of congregational voice in leadership and some complained about the demise of the Council system. Some members of the TRC with experience in the old system identified it as having fostered a sense of engagement, empowerment and voice in UUCC's affairs; valuable communication between the Executive, the board, and the congregation; and a broad, inclusive view of UUCC's needs among the volunteers who took part. The system also appeared to some to offer a pipeline to other leadership positions from a ground floor of simple volunteering, as well as promoting empathy and perspective-taking between program "silos."

We recommend staff convene a consultation of members to recommend a system which restores these benefits. This new or restored system should also be inclusive and represent diverse needs and concerns. *Example: a new Council/Leadership Council structure which contains major program area councils, plus Beloved Community, Membership, Youth, Right Relations, Conflict Transformation, Finance, and Communication councils.*

Planning for the Future and Navigating Change

We have heard people from our congregation express doubts about the care that goes into the strategic planning process we undergo every seven years and the extent to which the congregation is engaged in developing the vision.

The TRC have concluded that UUCC should review the documents that represent who we are and what we do. This work is necessary to empower all, foster congregational engagement, and maintain resiliency in the face of changes at UUCC, in our community, and beyond.

We recommend that UUCC re-engage in a mission, visioning/strategic planning, and covenanting process.

If this is not feasible, we should hold discussions about the personal meaning people make of these documents, particularly the congregational covenant.

We recommend returning to a practice of regular, transparent, periodic review of these processes, which actively engages the congregation.

APPENDIX

Appendix A. Listening Sessions – Composite Characterizations

These composite views are intended to give a generalized view of clusters of content expressed by TRC speakers. They are intended to convey points of view to support understanding and comparison. While not every aspect is true of each speaker, the ideas expressed fell into clear clusters. Reports that were clustered in Group C tended to reflect an interested observer's view of the situation, and varied more in content than the other two clusters. These composites are intended to be read as a means to understand and compare perspectives rather than as groups to align with (or not). The differentiation can support follow-on solution-oriented dialog.

The statements that comprise the composites do not represent the opinions or beliefs of the TRC.

Group A Composite – Let's move forward toward truly being a multicultural beloved community.

Expressed viewpoints:

- Wholeheartedly support dismantling white supremacy culture at UUCC & in the community, nation, and world.
- Believe that the controversy is about whether or not UUCC should work on anti-racism.
- View the words of the covenant and the 7 Principles as affirming the importance of anti-racism work to ensure that as UU's we provide a welcome and safe space, especially for those with traditionally marginalized identities.
- Support, and often admire, UUCC leadership's steadfast dedication to an anti-racism stance. This includes:
    - Deep loyalty to Paige and her ministry.
    - Commitment to center the voices of BIPOC in how to address racism and identify what may cause hurt or harm.
    - Agreement to curtail discussion on all topics that some (especially with marginalized identities) may perceive as harmful.
- Tend to describe anti-racism work as an important piece of their journey toward spiritual growth.
    - "Justice is love in action."
    - A recently joined member identified social justice as a primary reason for joining UUCC.
    - Many find spiritual fulfillment through activism and connecting with others on advocacy.
    - A sense of community and connection is important, but not sufficient.
- Intend to continue to use intentionally provocative language to hold people accountable for microaggressions and other racist actions.

    - This is an important part of white allyship to support people with marginalized identities.
    - Black people (especially) have for too long borne the burden of remaining silent or challenging microaggressions.
- Believe the majority of the congregation supports Paige's (and the UUA's) approach to anti-racism.
    - Believe a small number of vocal people are causing trouble.
    - Say that it might be better for UUCC if people who disagree with the anti-racist agenda resign.
        - Believe people have been pressured to reduce pledges as a way to exert power.
        - Often point out that 4PG includes people who have left UUCC. (Don't understand why they came back to complain.)
- Educating others about racism in the U.S. and the importance of anti-racism work will persuade people to join the effort.
    - The August 17 (Paula Cole Jones) workshop was an opportunity for people to learn and discuss disagreements.
    - Board-sponsored conversation circles were an opportunity to resolve concerns.
    - Book clubs are good but tend to attract people who are already on board.

Hopes and Wants:

- Want the conflictual issues to be resolved.
    - Come to a better understanding with each other.
- Desire a sense of love and home in UUCC's community.
    - "UUCC is my spiritual home and is more important than the differences we have."
    - A safe community that is interracial and intercultural, psychologically safe, and free from worry about microaggressions.
    - "Community is a human right."

Group B Composite – Let's live our covenant and 7 Principles within our spiritual community as we work together for social justice.

Expressed viewpoints:

- Support efforts to dismantle racism in selves, the congregation, community, nation, and world.
- Believe that the controversy is not mainly about racism but has been racialized by the way Paige has characterized objections.
- View the purpose of a UU church as primarily a nurturing and supportive community in which to explore individually defined spirituality (or none) without imposed dogma.
    - Support community for times of illness or grief. The long through-line of relationships is important.
    - Expect to need this support more as members age.
    - Deep sadness over beloved members who have resigned or withdrawn (recently and earlier).
    - Pastoral care is an important need.

  - Social action is also a key focus for many, but it is a secondary priority, even for strong social justice advocates.
- Many feel that UUCC is violating our covenant and all 7 Principles consistently; alienating community members who would otherwise be allies in dismantling racism.
  - To discourage reading and discussing books (and UUA censure of a UU author) violates UU values.
  - The 4PG had extensive discussions to agree on a single principle for its name. All 7 were seen as being consistently violated.
  - One speaker mutes the volume now when the covenant is recited because it is so painful to hear [the hypocrisy].
  - Numerous speakers noted that UUCC does not currently provide a safe or welcoming environment for members of its own community. Many feel shamed, judged, and unfairly pigeon-holed.
  - Belief that different mindsets about the covenant can only be understood and re-aligned through deep listening and empathetic discussion.
- Believe UUCC's governance structures may no longer be serving the congregation effectively.
  - The minister choosing a "side" entrenched the factions.
    - "You can't have peace negotiations led by one of the two generals fighting the war."
    - The minister and leaders have mischaracterized the motives of those who have expressed objections.
  - Highly value the democratic process and engagement in discussions of important topics related to UUCC.
    - There are ways to engage in the democratic process while elevating marginalized voices.
    - Even difficult topics can be discussed in a way that does not cause harm or hurt if people of goodwill work together to do so.
  - A strong desire for Paige to serve as a unifying minister to the whole congregation, serving everyone's needs.
    - Love is what religion is all about.
    - Want a minister that encourages harmony rather than divisiveness.
    - One speaker tearfully recalled a long-term member lamenting, "I have lost my minister."
- Consider the next-gen approach to antiracism to be polarizing and counterproductive.
  - Most speakers in this group explicitly acknowledged their internalized racism and their ongoing efforts to work on it.
    - Many agreed that racist comments have been made by community members.
    - Some noted that gentler ways to inform and support people to correct missteps are more likely to be effective.
  - Some speakers in this group opposed the current usage of terms White Supremacy Culture, and Racist.
  - Several speakers in this group have dedicated their life's work or primary volunteer activities to combating racism.

        - Even for those who have not, it is offensive to assert that they are "moderate" or complacent about racism.
        - Many speakers participated in the civil rights demonstrations in the 70's.
            - This is a source of pride and is one part of a life-long commitment to promoting racial equity.
            - Most agree that the work needs to continue beyond the progress from that era.
            - It is disrespectful and insulting to claim that civil rights activists are using this as "cred" or an excuse.
- Believe that at least one third of the congregation objects to the polarizing approach to doing antiracism work.
    - The longest-tenured UU's tend to be the most deeply opposed to the abandonment of the movement's humanistic roots.
    - Long-term members have a deep investment in relationships, the building, and the community.
        - Cutting off the root of a tree (long-term members) degrades the health and integrity of the tree.
        - Speakers expressed deep pain, grief, and unprocessed loss related to the departures of beloved community members.
    - Decisions about pledging are individual.
        - Nobody has pressured (or even advised) anyone on pledge decisions.
        - There has been some informal sharing of thoughts and one survey for information about pledging (shared with the board).
    - Embrace friends of the community equally with members. Those who have returned to complain feel deeply connected and hopeful about the possibility of returning.
- Education and discussion opportunities seemed like indoctrination into "right think" and felt manipulative.
    - The August 17 (Paula Cole Jones) workshop was advertised as an opportunity to discuss the conflict, but was designed instead to promote adoption of the 8th Principle.
        - The workshop design did not support discussion or resolution of the conflict
        - The "clique of clickers" [poet's clap] was offensive and felt judgmental
        - At least one participant was disrespected by having hopes and dreams scoffed at during a break-out session.
    - Board-facilitated conversation circles allowed venting but did not allow for open dialog toward solutions to the conflict.
    - Book clubs are good, and some from this group participated, but the selection of books was one-sided.
    - Several Beloved Conversations participants felt it was manipulative and unhelpful.
    -

Hopes and Wants:

- Want the conflictual issues to be resolved
- Open communication channels allowing for diversity of thought and a voice in decisions
- Safety and belonging in a caring, supportive community with compassion for everyone
- Working together on concrete projects around dismantling racism

- Maintain community of lifelong friends and spiritual community

Group C Composite – Let's be a unified, caring, diverse community that accepts everyone and works together on important issues.

Expressed viewpoints:

- Dissenters no longer feel welcome at the same time as others claim to be working to expand welcome.
- Joined UUCC to be part of a safe and welcoming community.
    - The nastiness that erupted seemed to be diametrically opposed to the covenant.
        - We are meant to be supportive, safe, and welcoming.
        - Want to return to having love and mutual respect in the congregation.
        - Want people to be able to interact with each other from the heart.
        - "Being oppositional will never get anyone to change their mind."
    - The trick is to challenge without alienating.
- Would like to see more racial diversity at UUCC.
- Want us to speak to each other without judgment, and with curiosity and compassion, not right or wrong.
    - Need conversations moderated by someone outside those involved.
    - Each person should be accepted for who they are. If there's a problem, people can talk it out.
    - Painful to watch discussions by people who desire to eliminate racism devolve into misunderstandings, lack of listening, insults, and (to me at times) oversensitivity.
    - Avoid pigeon-holing people with assumptions about what they would say or think.
- Everyone wants the same thing but people disagree on the approach and who hurt whom
    - Depressed by the stubbornness and people talking past each other.
    - People make assumptions about others' viewpoints
    - Don't want relationships to break down.
    - There is a lack of trust that needs to be rebuilt.
    - Have friends on both sides
    - Feel pressured and judged by my age cohort and excluded.
    - Love the 7 Principles and wish we would attend to them more.
    - Labeling shuts down communication.
- One speaker wants more tolerance of conservative political perspectives that are in the minority at UUCC.
- Found the Gadfly Papers issue upsetting.
    - Telling people not to read the book encouraged them to read it.

Education and discussion opportunities

- Attended the Paula Cole Jones workshop in August.
    - It had nothing to do with the conflict, so it was a flop.

        - "Everybody has a good heart. We are a very smart group. We can find a solution."
    - Reading and Study groups were excellent.

Hopes and Wants

- Strong interest in discussions to resolve the issues.
    - Need to focus on common ground and goals
    - Placing blame is not useful.
    - Encouraged that we are seeking reconciliation.

Distribution Across Identities and Viewpoints

- Proportion of speakers in each group
    - Group A – 33% (n = 29)
    - Group B – 45% (n = 40)
    - Group C – 22% (n = 20)

Appendix B. Methodology

In the summer of 2020, the Board of Trustees ("board") convened the Trust and Reconciliation Committee ("TRC") to study the situation and recommend interventions to transform the congregation's approach to conflict positively and to help us heal from our troubles.[19]

The board solicited volunteers to serve, and from those who volunteered, selected these members for the Trust and Reconciliation Committee: Laurie Alderman, Jill Christianson, Laurie Coltri (Chair), Liam Estell (Secretary), Suzi Gerb, Jim Johnston (board Liaison), Alice Pham, Becky Reese, and Phil Webster.

In developing the Charge, the board consulted Laurie C., who had offered herself as a person with professional knowledge about conflict dynamics, conflict diagnosis, and creation of approaches to interventions.[20] Some of the terminology used in Charge #1 grew out of this discussion:

> **Diagnosis**. Engage with UUCC constituent groups to seek perspectives regarding sources of existing conflicts experienced by UUCC congregants in recent years; as well as key factors (1) contributing to the destructive escalation of these conflicts and their intractability; and (2) impeding our abilities to manage them in ways that consistently affirm and promote those principles, values, and goals that we hold as a religious community.

The Committee envisions the purpose of this diagnosis as giving our congregation insight into what specific interventions would likely be helpful in transforming the conflicts so that they become positive, healthy, and promotive of our shared principles, values and goals. We make specific recommendations in response to Charge #2:

1) **Recommendations.** Taking into account the need for wide representation, the challenges posed by the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, and UUCC's budgetary constraints, develop recommendations, including:
   a) potential way(s) forward for UUCC congregants to better manage existing conflicts, enhance mutual understanding and, where possible, positively transform relationships;
   b) other processes, resources, and/or other measures that UUCC might employ to better manage future conflicts, strengthen trust, and deepen mutual understanding between and among those in the UUCC community.

Conflict diagnosis is a structured and useful way to understand an interpersonal conflict so that appropriate interventions can be selected. Several relevant related concepts are referenced within the board charge:

- **Conflict escalation** is a dynamic, self-exacerbating process which creates intensification, spreading, and destructiveness of an interpersonal conflict.
- **Sources of conflict** are those drivers within an interpersonal or intergroup situation which produce interpersonal conflict.
- There are also some well-recognized characteristics of a situation that, apart from these other elements, can **impede constructive transformation** of a conflict.

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[19] Reference to Board's charge.

[20] Laurie, who holds a JD and a PhD in Human Development, is the author of a 2003 textbook, **Conflict Diagnosis and Alternative Dispute Resolution** (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall). It was followed by a 2nd Edition, **Alternative Dispute Resolution: A Conflict Diagnosis Approach**. Laurie's doctoral dissertation explored implicit misogynistic bias.

- **Conflict Intractability.** A conflict can be said to be "intractable" if it is complex, if it is doing substantial harm, and the participants in the conflict seem unable to extricate themselves, even with assistance.

The TRC used a particular form of one-on-one **active listening** as a primary method of gathering diagnostic information. The TRC was convened and charged in late summer 2020, during Covid-19 lockdown/isolation, and the increasing awareness that interpersonal physical restrictions would be long term. Much communication was occurring remotely and options for addressing the conflict were limited.[21] A benefit of this technique was that it provided the best available one-on-one contact with congregants, given the need for distancing, and could be handled efficiently with the resources available.

In this form of active listening, the listener invites a speaker to talk about whatever the problematic conflict or troubles are, and/or their hopes and dreams for improvement. The speaker may also be invited to speak of the importance to them of the relationship or community which is suffering from conflict. The role of the listener is to completely refrain from offering opinions, but to reflect what the speaker is saying (in its best possible light, removing elements that may seem inflammatory or incendiary), and then invite the speaker to elaborate or say more. The technique fully centers the speaker in the discourse. A number of speakers commented positively on the experience.

The technique was taught to the TRC by Laurie C. using a 90-minute workshop. After an overview, dyads take turns using the technique on one another with respect to a topic about which they disagree. Afterwards, participants are invited to share their reactions; and lastly the benefits and other impacts of the technique are discussed. The exercise adapts quite well to a videoconferencing environment. Zoom sessions proved very useful for this purpose.

It is important to emphasize that the listening sessions were not used to "gather evidence" to adjudicate discrepant factual accounts. The active listening sessions were used primarily to understand the nature of the conflicts, and to understand the needs, values and interests of the participants, so that the situation's state of escalation and intractability could be assessed and interventions be strategically recommended. Of course some facts are incontrovertible or are common knowledge, and facts form a context for the diagnosis. We have tried to distinguish speaker-engendered from non-speaker-engendered information. It should also be noted that speakers were promised confidentiality, and that content would be reported only in aggregate.

Given the lockdown, face to face conversations could not be offered. The vast majority of listening sessions took place on Zoom.

We offered listening sessions, by request, using a registration form, from late November through mid-January. We offer our thanks to Sara Davidson who assisted us with much of this work. Speaker volunteers were solicited with regular announcements in the Link and Chalice Newsletter, as well as periodic pulpit announcements and occasional targeted emailings. A total of 89 persons participated as speakers, listened to by nine committee members sharing approximately equal numbers of sessions.

Each committee member then presented an aggregate summary of the listening sessions to the full committee, so that we each understood what the other's experience had been. In many cases this

[21] An effort to bring in an external mediation group ended, at least in part, when the group halted progress, cited the Covid-19 pandemic.

sharing process served to reinforce what each person had heard from individual speakers. Four committee members drafted the written diagnosis; and the TRC brainstormed recommendations.

Limitations and caveats. We wish to caution readers about important limits to how our work should be interpreted.

- The 89 active listening speakers are a highly self-selected sample, and thus quantitative conclusions cannot be drawn. We believe the following elements could create biases:
    - These are people who were motivated to, and comfortable with, speaking their minds to others.
    - Persons with disabilities that create barriers to this kind of communication may have felt precluded from the process.
    - The limitations of pandemic communication undoubtedly meant that many persons chose not to participate because of the constraints on communication. (The vast majority of listening sessions occurred on Zoom, with 1 session on Google Meetup and a few conducted by telephone.)
    - Very busy persons, such as parents of young children and frontline workers, may have had insufficient time to participate.
    - Individuals who supported the Fourth Principle Group (4PG) may have had hesitations in sharing their concerns with members of the TRC, which is largely composed of individuals who have not been part of 4PG.
    - We are mindful of the racialized elements of the situation which led to the TRC being chartered. All members of the TRC identify as White,[22] and some BIPOC may have been reluctant to participate.
- TRC members were also listened to by one another and are also participants in UUCC's "Troubles." As members of the UUCC community, they cannot be truly disinterested diagnosticians. This characteristic cuts more than one way. TRC members are not individually capable of true objectivity about the "Troubles" – due to the strong passionate investments each has in UUCC. On the other hand, these persons deeply love UUCC, which motivated them to move past differences and try to accomplish the challenging tasks of answering the board's charges. Moreover, TRC members have a range of perspectives on the issues, and these differing perspectives helped to compensate for individual biases.
- TRC members also have relational connections to many other congregants and their families and friends. These can create conflicting loyalties which can make it difficult to speak uncomfortable truths. Despite these connections, the TRC have done their best to speak truth directly and in ways that can be helpful. These affiliations may also have prevented speakers in the listening sessions from being entirely frank about their thoughts and feelings, in efforts to avoid hurting people or being judged.
- TRC members also carry experiences from their years at UUCC into the encounters with our speakers and the crucible of their analysis of the Troubles. Many have found it impossible to be authentic, useful, accurate and helpful about the significance of the listening sessions without also bringing their additional observations and experiences into the interpretive process. As a committee, we have tried, wherever possible, to explicitly acknowledge an

[22] Per the Board, no POC volunteered to serve on the Committee.

independent contribution of these factors in our analysis, and to offer documentary evidence where it exists.

It is essential to note that we listened to numerous people who felt wounded, threatened, and intimidated by others in the congregation including the minister and staff. We must remember that those who stepped forward to speak to the TRC committee members were ones who felt compelled to share their experience – it reflects those who are vocal and feel they still have a stake in UUCC, not necessarily a majority of those in the congregation. Some of these individuals have stepped away from UUCC, formally and informally, through their activities and volunteer engagement, and resources. Even so, they felt it important to have their voices counted in process. We heard not only the heartfelt emotions of loss, but also raw fury and anger from multiple perspectives. Some messages were strikingly similar, using a common language, which can be attributed to the coalescing of the Fourth Principle Group (4PG).

We caution readers to not accept a binary perspective (right/wrong, racist/non-racist, opposing minister/supporting minister) of our UUCC Listening Sessions and congregational challenges. *This situation, its analysis, and remedies, must not be oversimplified.* One speaker referred to this as "We are in a systemic allergic reaction." There are complexities due our congregation's membership and staff, with wide variances in life experiences and personalities. This is the human condition of which we are a part.

Lastly, one speaker noted that "the appearance of taking no action is just as harmful as taking no action," warning that the TRC work must lead to real changes. The members of UUCC have an expectation of concrete actions to heal the wounds and move ahead.

Appendix C. Conflict Diagnosis & Intractability Overview

Conflict diagnosis[23] is a way to understand an interpersonal conflict to make designing interventions more effective. For purposes of the TRC, conflict diagnosis can help to explain where impasses and destructiveness are coming from, so that interventions can be targeted strategically and in accordance with our values.

The steps of Conflict diagnosis pertinent to the TRC's work are:

- Identify the conflict(s) and each involved person or group.
- Identify the sources of conflict.
- Determine the state of escalation of the conflict.
- Analyze disputant interests.
- Analyze power.

Sources of conflict are especially relevant for us to consider in two respects:

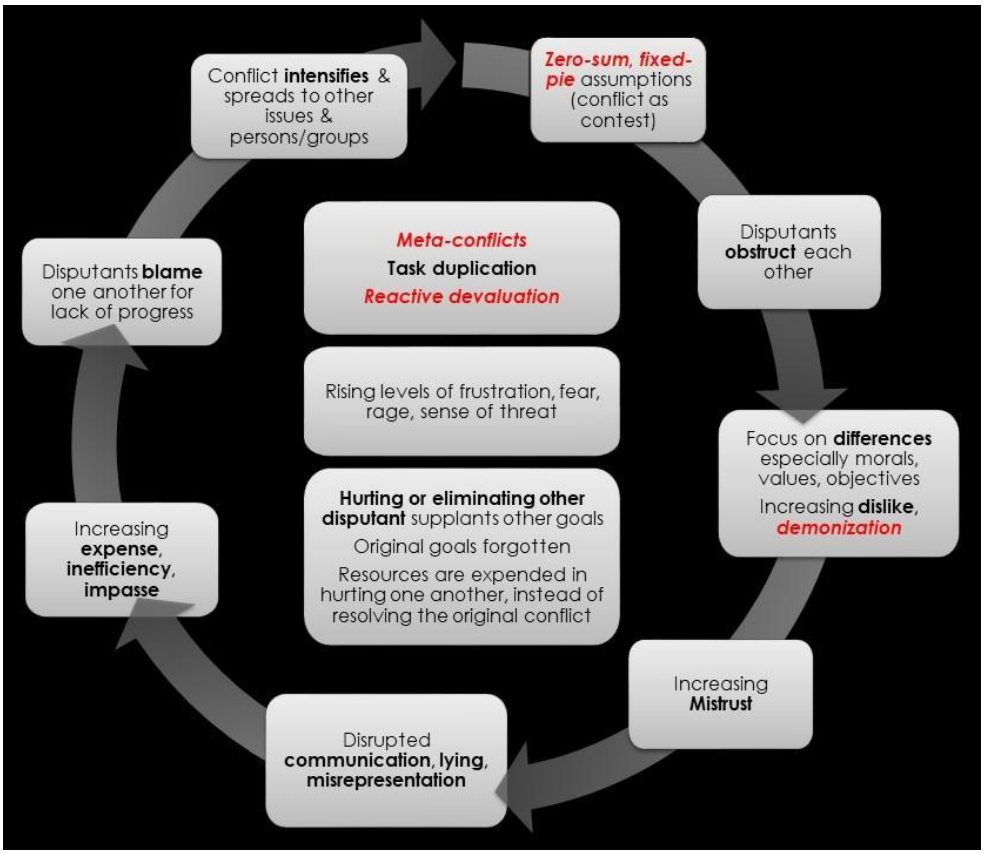
- They bear directly on the issue of intractability (discussed below).
- As a religious congregation some sources of conflict are directly in our "portfolio" of concerns - for example, whether we are satisfying persons' needs for affiliation, love and actualization.

Conflict escalation is a self-perpetuating, self-organizing dynamic of human conflict interaction. Evaluating whether a conflict has escalated can yield some idea of how difficult it will be to resolve and how destructive it is likely to be. And understanding how and why it has escalated can yield important clues to how the situation can be de-escalated and made more constructive, transformative, and healing.

The Conflict Escalation Cycle

It may be helpful to present this dynamic graphically (see below):

[23] There are many variations on the concept of diagnosing conflicts. This particular version is the brainchild of Laurie Coltri and elucidated in her textbook, Conflict Diagnosis and Alternative Dispute Resolution (2003). Originally conceived as a pedagogical tool for understanding conflict dynamics, it builds on theories and empirical research of Morton Deutsch (The Resolution of Conflict, 1973), Fisher, Ury & Patton, (Getting to Yes, 1981, 1991 & 2011) Pruitt, Rubin (Social Conflict, 1986) and many others. As the fields of cognitive and social psychology have evolved, Coltri has augmented the original framework with the maturation & evolution of dual-process cognitive theories surveyed exhaustively by Daniel Kahneman in his exhaustive compendium, Thinking Fast & Slow. These later developments have given us a window into the systematic biases that distort perception and impair the ability of people to make effective judgments during conflict, and into how conflict escalation can exacerbate these biases.



The following features of escalated conflict are pertinent to the TRC's Charge:

- Escalation creates unconscious biases in each disputant, against those they regard as "the other side." These biases, in turn, create a self-fulfilling prophecy as others react to their biased behavior. For example, if Sam is in an escalated conflict with Bree, and Sam proposes a solution, Bree may be suspicious that Sam has an ulterior motive ("reactive devaluation"). The unconscious biases produced by conflict escalation can make effective strategic decision making impossible; and thus is disempowering to all.
- When two or more persons or groups are in relationship to one another, anything that exacerbates one of the elements ("nodes") in the cycle can trigger or intensify conflict escalation. For example, if trust of one person by another is undermined by something – even something that neither of them did directly – this can trigger the beginning of conflict escalation. Conversely, escalation can be slowed or stopped by interventions which remediate any of the nodes. For example, frequently reminding disputants of their common goals can lessen conflict escalation.
- Perception is crucial. For example, if Robin believes that the actions of Sandy are motivated by an intent to obstruct, it doesn't matter what Sandy intended – this action will spark a (likely, heavy-handed) response from Robin which is likely to exacerbate escalation. This self-fulfilling feature is called "Deutch's Crude Axiom" – a conflict will tend to become what you think it is.

Interests analysis is an exploration of disputants' motivations in an interpersonal conflict. Overt demands and concrete goals/objectives are considered in terms of their underlying motivations. Like an onion, motivations can be causally understood in terms of peeling back to reveal deeper motivations. Basic Human Needs (as depicted in typologies such as those offered by psychologists

Abraham Mazlow & Eric Erikson) are the non-negotiable, fundamental, unalterable needs that every human shares and that drive behavior – the core of the onion.

Understanding underlying needs, and identifying when they are felt to be under threat, can help to create a better understanding of why a conflict has festered or become destructive, and point the way to constructive solutions. Another important benefit is that one can identify values and needs common to disputing parties. These can serve as guideposts in the search for solutions and as reminders of commonality when the dynamics of escalation create overemphasis on differences.

Power analysis is the exploration of the relationship power[24] of participants in a conflict vis-à-vis one another. Power is significant for several reasons.

- Power imbalance is one source of conflict.
- A disempowered participant is not able to effectively navigate an interpersonal conflict without being marginalized or hurt, and will often resist any sort of solution recommended by others.
- The use of power by a disputant which is seen as illegitimate by another disputant tends to lead to impasse and escalation.
- The use of power perceived as illegitimate also disempowers the user of power, because it creates alienation in those who see it as illegitimate, thus disabling the former from using any kind of soft power to influence the latter.
- Disempowerment can lead to a perceived threat to basic human needs, which can provoke fear and make the conflict more intractable.
- It is problematic for persons whose power is asymmetrical to achieve healthy interpersonal relationships.
- Finally, because some of the Troubles at UUCC are racialized, the situation cannot be fully understood without addressing power and power imbalances.

Another reason to try to come to an understanding of how power is operating in, especially, a complex situation involving groups of people is that power is multidimensional and situational.

- Persons may have a lot of power along one dimension, in one context, yet have much less of it in another. For example, a person may have a great deal of "normative power" (the power of appearing to be on the side of moral rectitude) in front of one group of people, and little to none in front of another.
- People have power across multiple dimensions. People may have a lot of "expert power," for example (having a great deal of expertise on a pertinent subject), yet have no referent ("charisma") power.
- Power use may be perceived as legitimate by some, but illegitimate by others. For example, among one group of US voters, the Jan 6 2021 insurrection at the Capitol was an illegitimate use of force intended to undermine democracy, whereas for another group it represented the restoration of what they though was the "real" outcome of the election, and therefore legitimate.

[24] The capacity of one person or group to have influence over another.

The term "intractability" is most often used to describe international or other large-group conflicts. As defined by Vallacheratal, et al, a conflict which is intractable remains escalated and persists at a hurting stalemate for an extended time despite efforts to ameliorate the situation.[25]

An intractable conflict, according to some writers, often involves many of these features:

- Complexity – numerous conflicts or conflict situations, multiple issues, multiple framings of the problems, multiple threats
- Threats to identity
- Competition over scarce resources and other threats to basic human needs
- High-stakes (eg, lives, threat of violence, livelihood)
- Structural inequalities of long standing
- Costs of extrication are great or highly damaging to all or some
- The existence of "dynamic attractors" – forces that create resistance to positive change. An example of such attractors would be the unconscious biases naturally created by escalating conflict that predispose those involved to demonize, oversimplify, reactively devalue actions by others, and blame others for the harm created by the conflict.

[25] Vallacher, R.R., P.T. Coleman, A. Nowak, & L. Bui-Wrzonsinska (2010). Rethinking intractable conflict: The perspective of dynamical systems. American Psychologist 65(*4*), 262-278. Similarly, Louis Kriesberg defines intractable conflicts as those that persist for a long time, are perceived as destructive by participants and observers, and are resistant to efforts to end them.

Appendix D. Glossary & Abbreviations

Attractors – In intractable conflict, forces which prevent the situation from being turned in a more constructive direction.

Binarization - An oversimplification of a conflict situation into two sides.

BIPOC – Black and Indigenous people of color. **POC** refers to all persons of color.

BLM – abbreviation for Black Lives Matter

Call in - a term used by some of our speakers. On the internet, this term is used variously to mean a less harsh version of calling out, or to calling attention to a harm like a microaggression by private conversation. See **Call out**, below.

Call out[26] – Used in our report: a verb meaning to call attention to a harm, such as a microaggression. Often the term also is taken to include the element of being done in public or in the presence of bystanders. **Callout** or **call-out** are nouns referring to an incident of calling out.

Callout culture (**call-out culture**) – a pejorative term meaning a way of behaving in a society or group, especially social media, in which people are often harshly criticized in public for being "unwoke." Often conflated with "cancel culture."

Cancel – Used here, to reject, remove support, ostracize, or boycott a person or group for their behavior.

Cancel culture – Used here, a pejorative term meaning a tendency to use cancellation to express disapproval for, pressure, or punish others.

Conflict diagnosis – A structured process of applying concepts from conflict and conflict escalation theories, designed to provide information that enables strategic choices about interventions.

Conflict escalation – A self-perpetuating state in which a conflict becomes more and more destructive and resistant to constructive transformation. Escalating conflicts are typically triggered by the sense that a conflict is "zero-sum" – that when one person gains, another necessarily loses.

Epistemic freezing - A term used by cognitive scientists to denote a progressive narrowing of perspective which makes people less and less open to changing their point of view.

Interactional toxicity – Interactions which jeopardize and inhibit relationships vital to progress.

Interests – generally, in conflict theory, the motivators which drive participants in a conflict. These include explicit demands, concrete aspirations, underlying interests, principles or values, and basic human needs. All interests in a conflict relate back causally to basic human needs.

Interpersonal conflict – Distinguished from "inner conflict," the actual or perceived incompatibility of goals between two or more persons or groups.

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[26] These definitions "callout, cancel, callout culture, cancel culture" may not match how these terms were used by our speakers in listening sessions. In reviewing the Listening Sessions – Composite Characterizations, (Appendix A, page A-1), please bear this in mind.

Intractability – When applied to conflict, a state of impasse and destructive stalemate, which has been resistant to intervention. Ordinarily, the term is applied to complex conflicts involving many people or groups.

LGBTQ+ – Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and other non-cis gender and sexually non-cis-binary persons.

Meta-conflicts (aka "Meta-disputes) – Disagreements over how a main conflict is being handled.

Microaggression - The definition used in our report is that proposed by Derald W. Sue, "The everyday slights, indignities, put downs and insults that people of color, women, LGBT[Q] populations or those who are marginalized experiences in their day-to-day interactions with people." Desmond-Harris, "What exactly is a microaggression?" Feb 26, 2015, https://www.vox.com/2015/2/16/8031073/what-are-microaggressions (accessed 3/29/2021).

Next-gen antiracism – a term we use to refer to an approach to anti-racist practices and orientation advocated by our minister and by recent congregational leadership.

Organizational diagnosis - A way of evaluating the health of an organization based on an analysis of its contextual, structural, and other elements. See Falletta Organizational Diagnosis model.

Reactive devaluation – a situation in which a person in a conflict, out of suspicion and lack of trust, devalues a statement or proposal by another disputant because they suspect ulterior motives.

Right Relations - A term used to denote healthy relationships in a religious congregation. See Covenant of Right Relations recommendation for details.

Sources of conflict – causes or triggers of conflict.

Appendix E. Right Relations Covenants & Associated Structures in UU Congregations

This is a brief sampling of Right Relations covenants and associated structures at a few selected congregations. In the case of Cedar Lane UU, Laurie A. and Laurie C. met with Marilyn Emery, a current team members and acquaintance of Sara Davidson (who was a staff member at the church during their Right Relations work), to talk about their process and current situation.

Covenants of Right Relations ("CRR") –

- Cedar Lane UU – Covenant (2017) - https://cedarlane.org/news-publication/covenant-right-relations
- All Souls DC - https://all-souls.org/about-us/governance/right-relations/ (all of the relevant resources for All Souls are on this Right Relations webpage, under expanding headings)
- East Shore UU, Seattle has a "right relations template" (2017) at https://esuc.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Right-Relations-Guidelines-Rev.-2-01-18.docx which applies to groups within the church – in other words they are used by groups to create covenants. However in July 2018, recognizing a need for more, a CRR was developed. The full CRR did not seem to be available online.
- UU Cherry Hill NJ have a simple and fairly elegant CRR, https://uucch.org/right-relations/
- UU Fairfax - https://uucf.org/covenant/ The webpage describes a full 1-year process of development (heavily engaging congregational voice) and culminating in approval of a CRR by the board and then adoption by the congregation at its annual meeting.
- There are also samples on the UUA website, but they're quite old; and, in particular, substantially predate the recent denominational turn to being more intentional about not perpetuating White Supremacy culture.

Creation of standing leadership groups to Promote Use of Right Relations –

- Cedar Lane UU – Report of Task Force - https://cedarlane.org/sites/default/files/Right%20Relations%20Task%20Force%20Final%207.10.18.pdf (adopted 2018, a year after their CRR was adopted. Includes advice for communicating to congregation.)
- All Souls DC – Committee on Right Relations (on the Right Relations webpage). All Souls also has an extensive and detailed Conflict Resolution Policies and Process to guide congregants and staff. Establishes a Committee on Right Relations, chosen by the board for 3-year terms. The policy contemplates that the members be well-trained and serve multiple functions, including supporting congregants through conflicts, recruiting volunteers to help with conflict resolution, and overseeing education and training.
- East Shore UU, Seattle – see https://esuc.org/right-relations-where-weve-been-and-where-were-going/. This document describes what has been going on with their committee. It is worth noting that they hired a restorative conflict consultant (her background is in peer mediation in schools) who worked with teams, including their Beloved Racial Justice Team and POC group, to enhance communication skills.
- UU Cherry Hill NJ have a Right Relations Committee to offer guidance on healthy relationships, communications, and processes. It can assist with resolution when necessary (educational and mediation function, per their webpage)

- UUCF has a separate team "to ensure that the covenant remains a living resource for the congregation. This team created a process by which problems will be addressed and resolved when the covenant has been breached." No information could be located online about its processes.

Policies on Safety and Disruption –

- Cedar Lane UU – see Appendix to 2018 Report of Task Force. CLUU also has a sexual harassment policy, and recommendations for revising this policy were included. The policy primarily covers issues involving staff, and directs the Right Relations standing leadership group to support congregants involved in conflicts.
- All Souls – "Policy on Congregant Behavior" (on the Right Relations webpage). They also have another standing leadership group, the "Congregant Behavior Committee," which investigates and recommends actions to the board, the congregants, or the congregation. There is an appeals process.

Promotion of the CRR and its associated processes

- At Cedar Lane UU – blogposts were written about the CRR for communication and to educate the congregation. However these posts tailed off and Marilyn Emery says she regrets that they didn't continue.
- All Souls – the Committee on Right Relations has roles that include "promote knowledge and understanding of conflict resolution", "provide leadership training in conflict resolution," "maintain communication with the congregation to promote awareness of the … [congregation's] … conflict resolution policy and process," and "Be available to … committees and groups that request support in such areas as interpersonal communication, listening, and dialogue."

Appendix F. Other Recommendations Worth Considering

These recommendations can be developed by congregants, staff, and leaders. They may be helpful to reducing destructive conflict, fostering healthy interaction, and dismantling oppression.

1. Explicitly address the tensions within the 7 Principles, via discussion circles, blogpost, reflection groups, or worship. *Example: discussion group is asked to "tell about a time when you struggled to live our Principles because of inherent tensions or conflicts within them." This could be kicked off by a worship service featuring reflections by congregants about some of these tensions.*
2. Organize small group discussions on aspects of antiracism, offering groups that are racially mixed, as well as groups that are all-White and all-BIPOC. Continue this, looking for ways to improve it.
3. Develop initiatives that tap members from across the congregation to share their experiences in countering racism. This can honor congregant's past experiences and current actions. This could include an anti-racism stories wall with written narratives or art, as well as storytelling events.
4. Reaffirm on an on-going basis, that members are welcome to attend board meetings; publish policies about member attendance.
5. To promote congregational engagement, energy, and voice: support staff in promoting, identifying, and developing volunteers in cases in which delegation to a volunteer is appropriate.
6. Ensure that feedback received from the congregation is a part of staff evaluations. Consider incorporating feedback received through a well-publicized complaint/feedback process (example: https://www.uua.org/interconnections/292744.shtml).
7. As members leave the congregation, conduct an exit interview which includes other congregational members.

Appendix G. A De-Escalation Toolkit

Here are some stand-alone techniques to de-escalate and transform conflict. Some can be adopted by individuals, while others are **programmatic**.

Symptom of Escalation	De-Escalation Tactics
Blaming "the other side"	Role-model blaming the situation, not the people, for problems & lack of progress. *Example: "The conflict creates disruption and prevents progress."*
Focus on differences	Foster group activities (preferably low-stress) that attract persons from conflicting "factions" and require working together. Make a list of common ground. Mine every situation for commonalities & mention them as you see them.
Oversimplification & demonization	Program, process, etc. that reveal that "each of us is much more than the conflict." *The podcast series is a good example.* Take an interest in others, especially those with whom you are less comfortable. Ask about them and their lives, listening with an open and curious heart. Visibly act in a positive way not typical for you. Use active listening in conflictual situations. Explicitly state how much you value those you interact with. Look for examples of oversimplification & demonization in your own beliefs and conduct. They are a form of implicit bias, so evaluate them critically. Listen especially for positive changes in others – these changes can be masked by epistemic freezing.
Low trust	Look for ways to be accountable and scrupulously follow through on promises. If trust is very low, written promises can be needed. Apologize whenever appropriate, and particularly when a promise is broken. Be explicit and ask for steps that will help you to trust. If you feel unsafe doing this, confide in someone you do trust, and ask for their help.
Reactive devaluation	Look for reactive devaluation in your beliefs about the conflict. This is another form of implicit bias. Look for opportunities to sincerely praise others in the conflict.
People mutually obstruct each other	Establish multiple diverse opportunities for congregants to help one another.
Belief that if one wins the other loses (zero sum thinking)	Look for actions that benefit everyone; be explicit about how they are win-win.

Symptom of Escalation	De-Escalation Tactics
Impaired communication	Listen actively & follow through on communication.
Meta-conflicts	Acknowledge meta-conflicts & apologize whenever appropriate. Blame the conflict, not the other person *("this situation is so heated that it's caused us to have friction")*
Negative emotions	Take care of yourself & look for ways to offer comfort to others, even those you might otherwise not wish to comfort. *Strong emotions & stress exacerbate biased thinking, worsening demonization, oversimplification, zero-sum thinking, & reactive devaluation.*