

Subject: Staff diversity controversy

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From: Peter Morales

To: # All UUA & Beacon Staff

Dear Colleagues,

I am sure that the vast majority of you are aware of the recent discussions on social media regarding the hiring of a regional lead position in particular and the UUA's personnel practices in general. I want to give you an update on where we are and what we intend to do to respond to concerns that are being raised. I also want to place this issue in the context of our recent history and in the context of our entire Association.

I have asked UUA moderator Jim Key for time to discuss this topic at the April meeting of the UUA Board of Trustees. That meeting is April 21-22. I will submit a report on this issue as part of my president's report. I cannot, for reasons of confidentiality, speak to the particulars of the hiring decision. The larger issues, as many have pointed out, are the practices and the culture of the UUA.

There are two fundamental truths I want to convey. First, we are not where we ought to be in terms of the diversity of staff, particularly at the leadership level. I don't know of anyone at the UUA who disagrees with that. Second, and this seems to have been lost in the focus on the immediate situation, we have made significant progress. We need to hold both our shortcomings and our successes if we are to move forward together.

Some background

Let me share some important facts about the diversity of our staff.

I will begin with the Congregational Life staff group. When the full incorporation of field staff into the UUA began in earnest seven years ago, *there were no people of color* among the program staff. In the past, district boards made the final hiring decisions, not UUA staff. Since the UUA has made the hiring decisions there have been 14 hires in Congregational Life. Of those 14, *six have been people of color*.

At the UUA staff overall, we have gone from 14 percent people of color in 2008 to 20 percent today. At the level of managers, we have gone from 12 people of color (5 percent) to 19 (9 percent).

We have made progress. It is also true that our progress has been slower than I would like.

The larger context

I am afraid that the current controversy is distracting us from a larger long term issue. That issue is that the membership of our congregations continues to be overwhelmingly white and of European origin. In the *UU World* readership survey done a couple of years ago, 98 percent of the respondents identified as white. *The staff of the UUA is far, far more diverse than the membership of our congregations*. A central challenge of our movement continues to be to learn to cross the borders of race, class and culture.

That said, we have seen a steady rise of POC among our youth and our religious professionals. I see a new generation of leaders emerging.

Looking ahead

Clearly, we need to do a better job of bringing diversity to our staff. We need to review our practices and look at new ways of recruiting, selecting, mentoring and promoting people so that our staff is the embodiment of our aspirations. My upcoming report to the UUA Board of Trustees will explore this in more depth. That report is public and I will see that it is shared with staff.

I realize that this controversy has been (and continues to be) emotionally draining for a number of us. There is a disturbing tendency to treat UUA staff as somehow the "other" and to criticize with incomplete information. I am deeply saddened by what I see happening. I see people dedicated to racial justice and creating a multi-cultural future feeling as though they are being personally attacked. None of us is above criticism. Each of us should be accountable. However, I wish I were seeing more humility and less self righteousness, more thoughtfulness and less hysteria.

We are all committed to creating an open, diverse, excellent and effective Association. Working for justice is at the center of what we do. We are in this together. The stakes today are very high. Our core values are under attack. Let's not attack one another.

Thank you, each of you, for all the good you do.

My prayer is that we use this controversy as an opportunity to move forward together.

Faithfully,

Peter

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