

## UUCJ Town Hall, January 14, 2024: Questions and Responses

**Questions and Responses.** Questions submitted during or immediately after the Town Hall are reproduced verbatim in bolded black. PRO and CON responses are identified beneath each question. PRO responses support a YES vote at GA 2024 for the proposed revision of Article II of the UUA Bylaws. CON responses support a NO vote.

**Was there any objective evidence presented by the Commission on Institutional Change (COIC) in *Widening the Circle of Control* that there was widespread racism in Unitarian Universalism, or was there just claims that this was happening?**

PRO: From the perspective of many who support the proposed revision of Article II, there is no such thing as objective evidence. Facts are tied to viewpoints. Viewpoints grow out of personal and group experiences. People in minority groups, Black, Indigenous, and People Of Color (BIPOC), must cope within the culture of the majority as well as navigating their own cultures. This gives them the best viewpoint to truly understand what is going on in the world. Their stories tell the truths everyone needs to hear.

CON: From the perspective of those who oppose changing Article II, facts are facts. No change should be considered without objective evidence that supports the change. Asking only for stories of harm experienced by BIPOC individuals does not constitute objective evidence. Combining hundreds of stories into five Avatars and refusing to share the actual stories heard in the “research study” further disqualifies the study results.

PRO: The correct name of the COIC report is *Widening the Circle of Concern* (WCC). It is disrespectful of the questioner to change the name.

CON: Expressing the title as *Widening the Circle of Control* lifts up the emphasis on accountability that is present in *Widening the Circle of Concern*. Accountability means control. The proposed new Article II replaces the aspirations expressed in the Seven Principles with Covenantal relationships which are morally binding and potentially accountable.

COMMENT: Proposals for accountability entered UUA discussions after 2017 with the movement to include an Eighth Principle dealing with antiracism. Antiracism in this context refers to white racism in the context of White Supremacy Culture. In April of 2017, the UUA Board declared that the Unitarian Universalist Association is “swimming in a sea of White Supremacy Culture.” Following up in a forum at GA 2022 titled “Accountability, Justice and Wholeness – UU Theologies of Liberation,” Rev. Sonia Betancourt, now president of the UUA, said, “Covenant without consequences is not actually Covenant.”

To achieve the level of cultural uniformity imbedded in a Covenantal approach, the aspirational Seven Principles must be discarded or reworded to remove wiggle room in relation to behaviors that express the six values at the core of the proposed revision of Article II. Where the Principles allowed individual UUs to calibrate their own behavior, *Widening the Circle of Concern*, on pp. 130-132, calls for monitoring of individual and group behavior. The nuts and bolts of any system of accountability will be articulated in Article III of the UUA Bylaws which are up for review beginning after GA 2024.

Breaking news: A new “Accountability Launch Team” was inaugurated at the Saturday, January 20, 2024, UUA Board meeting. The mission is “to close the gap between who we want to be and who we are.”

**What part did “avatars” play in pushing these claims rather than actual survey results? Were the results locked away?**

PRO: The Avatars were the best way the survey results could be expressed. Asking for more than that is evidence of White Supremacy Culture. The five stories expressing the results of the survey are written as

letters from five composite individuals or Avatars. Each Avatar represents many individual stories heard. Individual stories are not revealed for fear of backlash against the individuals who told the stories.

CON: This approach has no objective validity. There is no transparency between stories collected and the Avatars presented. This fallacy, added to the fact that only stories of harm were solicited, renders the research results useless at best, dishonest at worst.

**What are the ramifications for congregational polity to have our UUA telling us we have 114 action steps to take to be properly antiracist? In other words, how does this affect our ability to make our own decisions on how to run our congregation?**

PRO: The 114 action steps constitute positive guidance for a church that sincerely wants to be antiracist. To question them is racist. Getting White Supremacy Culture out of the UUA will take changing white UUs ways of thinking and acting. The baseline is well expressed by Robin DiAngelo in her bestselling 2018 book, *White Fragility*, published by UUA owned Beacon Press. "A positive white identity is an impossible goal. White identity is inherently racist; white people do not exist outside the system of white supremacy." There is a lot of important work to do.

CON: Antiracism that sees a positive white identity as an impossible goal has zero track record for changing discriminatory laws and practices in our society. Policy-focused antiracism where everyone works together across racial and economic lines, on the other hand, has a strong track record for changing discriminatory laws and practices. John Lewis and Martin Luther King Jr. brought white and black people and groups together to dramatically change the legal and economic conditions of life for minorities in America in the Civil Rights Movement. Everyone willing to work on the problems was considered an asset to the cause. Church Based Community Organizations like ICARE in Jacksonville and other integrated organizations continue that asset-based approach with many positive results. "When we all work together, GREAT THINGS HAPPEN."

**I've heard there will be changes to Article 3 that could potentially decertify us if we don't behave. What happens to the congregation, the assets, our money? Are you going to give us information on this?**

PRO: Like UUA President Sonia Betancourt said at the 2022 General Assembly, "Covenant without consequences is not actually Covenant." Congregational polity issues are not covered in Article II of the UUA Bylaws. Rather, they are covered in Article III and will be reexamined by a committee process beginning after the 2024 General Assembly. There are no changes in UUA congregational polity at this time.

CON: Like UUA President Sonia Betancourt said at the 2022 General Assembly, "Covenant without consequences is not actually Covenant." Congregational polity issues are not discussed in Article II of the UUA Bylaws. Rather, they are covered in Article III and will be reexamined by a committee process beginning after the 2024 General Assembly.

**Are you going to provide the congregation an opportunity to discuss the GA vote outcome? Is the congregation going to be able to participate in "What Now?" after we find out GA's result?**

PRO: That is the UUCJ plan.

CON: That is the UUCJ plan.