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Minister's Column

Rev. Joel Miller
Interim Senior Minister
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Two of the seven principles of the Unitarian Universalist Association call on us to work for social justice with each other and in the world. In earlier generations, our spiritual forbears were active in supporting women's rights, the right to freedom of speech, to voting rights, and to civil rights. And, more recently, we've been working for racial justice.

But even as so many Unitarian Universalists worked hard to bring more justice to this world, our forebears – and ourselves in these generations – have sometimes not reached our own goals for living lives of justice. Unitarian Universalism, nationally, missed an important opportunity to better serve the need of Black Unitarian Universalists in the 1960s, for example. Since then, our national association of congregations, the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA), has been working on goals to encourage our congregations in their own racial justice efforts--especially by welcoming more diversity in how congregations worship and support their leadership. The UUA has also pledged to represent our congregations well by becoming more assertive in welcoming diversity in its own staff.

A new UUA staff member was recently hired to oversee UUA services in the Southern Region. After the announcement of this hiring, Unitarian Universalists of color expressed great dismay that the new staff member hired is white and male. Even before this new hiring, there were very few people of color among the higher levels of UUA staff. The news about the new staff member was shocking to Unitarian Universalists of color. The new staff member was not someone who could bring more diversity of race or ethnicity to upper levels of UUA staff, and given our association's commitment to do just that, our UU people of color were hurt and angered. The measurable outcome of hiring a diverse staff by the UUA was not equal to the goals we'd set for it.

I'm simplifying a complex chain of events that followed, but some of the key events since that announcement have included the resignation of the UUA President, Rev. Peter Morales, and a commitment by many white Unitarian Universalists like myself to be better at living-out our goals for justice. Staff and other leadership here at First Unitarian are beginning to look at how our congregation can better reach its own goals for racial justice.

I will write to you again next week as we learn more from our national Unitarian Universalist community about how we can most effectively serve these needs that are greater than our own. The world needs us in times like these – needs our compassion and our commitment to work toward the peace and justice we know is possible.

Fondly,
Rev. Joel