

posted FB 3/6 By Rev. Susan Frederick-Gray

Yesterday evening, I first began seeing the responses to the UU World article “After L, G and B” published in the mailed and online version of the magazine that just arrived at people’s homes. More than anything, I want to acknowledge the harm and pain this article is creating. I am sorry for the direct harm this is causing for trans and nonbinary people both within and beyond Unitarian Universalism, including UUA staff. If we believe in the inherent worth and dignity of everyone, that belief must show up in every way we do our work at the UUA. When our UU siblings are devalued or marginalized by our work, we’ve failed to live into our values.

When something painful is caused by the UUA, I know it makes it difficult for many of you who minister to the larger community in these times. And when the harm is very personal to your own experience, the pain and burden is that much greater.

I know returning to right relationship and building trust take time. We commit to doing what it takes to regain the trust of trans and nonbinary UUs and to make Unitarian Universalism a truly inclusive faith movement.

I want to update you about how we are initially responding to this article:

1. Yesterday evening, I was in personal contact with a member of the TRUUsT steering committee and a couple other trans UU leaders to let them know what was happening, to apologize for the harm caused and to make myself available as needed.
2. Carey McDonald and I met with UU World today to discuss a path forward that centers the most impacted people and prioritizes accountability and responsibility.
3. UU World will be issuing an apology that I will link to when it is posted.

I know there will be much more to be done. For now, I just want to honor the hurt so many are experiencing and the work we still have to learn and practice to center and value trans lives and live into our values of justice, equity, diversity and inclusion.

Yours in faith and love,

Susan

Posted on FB 3/7

Dear Beloved Colleagues,

On behalf of LREDA, and in response to the article in the UU World magazine “After L, G and B”, I want to offer our love and support to our trans and non-binary colleagues. I hear your deep pain and rage. This article has caused great harm to you and nothing about that is acceptable. I am profoundly sorry that this has happened to you.

I want to lift up the call of our colleagues at Transgender Religious professional Unitarian Universalists Together (TRUUsT). From the TRUUsT statement shared yesterday:

TRUUsT will not idly accept this sort of blatant erasure of trans voices in Unitarian Universalism. We refuse to be complicit in this behavior. We call on all cisgender UUs who are committed to being allies and accomplices to amplify trans UU voices, our hurt, and our rage. Be the prophetic voice for justice and inclusivity that we believe Unitarian Universalism can be. We ask that you:

1. Read the article, if you haven’t already, and actively speak to the harm it does.
2. Read and amplify trans UU voices speaking to why this article is so harmful, such as Alex Kapitan’s Facebook post and CB Beal’s Medium piece.
3. Familiarize yourself with who trans UUs are and our experiences in Unitarian Universalism by reading TRUUsT’s recent report on the experiences of trans UUs.

4. Join the TRUUST Call to Action, which includes both actions you can take in your communities and a link to donate to TRUUsT.

Our LREDA vision commits us to “challenge systems of oppression”. The LREDA Board will be studying TRUUsT’s call for five key actions and conferring with LREDA’s Justice and Equity Team in order to discern how LREDA can help our members be the prophetic voice TRUUsT has called for within their congregations, and collectively help move our faith forward.

Join me in donating to the fund for trans UUs healing and survival as we continue bending the arc toward justice.

In faith,  
Annie Scott,  
LREDA President

From the editor: Our story hurt people

[Christopher L. Walton](#), editor

3/6/2019

UU World Magazine , published by the Unitarian Universalist Association

Transgender and gender nonbinary leaders in the Unitarian Universalist movement, along with their allies and other UUs, are expressing alarm and sharing their pain at reading an essay in the Spring 2019 issue of *UU World*, “[After L, G, and B](#)” by contributing editor Kimberly French. I am profoundly saddened and deeply sorry to have caused pain to people who matter to me and whose dignity and worth I had thought we were promoting with the piece. As the magazine’s editor, I was wrong to decide to publish this essay and I apologize for the pain it has caused.

In consultation with the steering committee of TRUUsT (Transgender Religious professional UUs Together, an organization of trans leaders), we are keeping the essay on our website rather than taking it down, but are adding a preface that points to and quotes from this apology. My apology will appear in the original essay’s place in the online Table of Contents.

Many have asked why we published this article. My intent was to model, through a personal essay about one family’s experience, ways for the majority of our readers to engage respectfully with trans and nonbinary people; the impact, however, was to hurt and

alienate trans and nonbinary people. I can point to three editorial mistakes: I planned an approach to the important topic of trans and gender nonbinary experiences within Unitarian Universalism without enough input from people who identify as nonbinary or trans. We did not model respectful engagement. Additionally, it was hurtful to put a straight, cisgender person's experience in the foreground, especially as one of the first major articles in the magazine on this topic. We should have developed another kind of story in such a prominent spot that centered trans and nonbinary voices. Finally, when we reached out to Alex Kapitan, a leader in the trans and gender nonbinary community, while researching the story and *ze urged us* against the approach I had picked, I erred in failing to grasp the important cautions *ze* offered: a story told from a cisgender perspective would cause harm. I believed, falsely, that we could address the concerns within the framework of the story I had commissioned. It was a mistake to disregard this caution, and I apologize.

Several readers have also pointed to specific language in the article that is painful if not traumatic to encounter in the magazine of the Unitarian Universalist Association. These include a reference to jokes at a high school in the 1970s that involved a homophobic slur, a reference to "so-called corrective surgery," and alarming statistics about violence against transgender people that one colleague told me felt "grim without hope." As editors, we did not have enough experience with trans issues to notice the microaggressions throughout the essay that our trans readers are calling to our attention. These specific editorial choices added pain to injury, and for that I apologize.

Acknowledging that we have fallen short, I want to reiterate that *UU World* is committed to sharing in appropriate and respectful ways the inspiring and powerful stories of trans and gender nonbinary people within our faith community. I am committed to listening to and learning from you. To that end, the magazine is making the following commitments going forward:

- We will expand our copy editing and fact checking process to include sensitivity readers who can help us spot what the editors cannot.
- We will redesign the editorial process to invite more input earlier in the planning phase so we can ensure that we are working from plans that will aid rather than harm. We are also looking at ways to evaluate the potential impact of a story as it nears publication.
- We will redouble our efforts to commission essays, reporting, and artwork from trans and nonbinary people, and from a wider set of contributors from marginalized communities.
- We commit to doing more to develop stories that center the voices and experiences of trans and nonbinary UUs.

I work with an amazing team of dedicated people. We want *UU World* to inspire and enrich the lives of its readers—and that's why we are heartbroken, too, that our work has fallen far short of the mark and hurt many of you. I much more fully appreciate that it is the impact of an act, not its intention, that matters. I am sorry, and you have my commitment that the magazine will do better to live up to our shared Unitarian Universalist values and honor the trust of our readers.

## What It Takes to De-Center Privilege: The Failure of this Week's *UU World* Article

Posted on [6 March, 2019](#) by [Alex Kapitan](#)

*A version of this piece was originally posted [on Facebook](#) on March 5, 2019*

Yesterday morning I started hearing from fellow trans Unitarian Universalists because I was quoted in [a feature article](#) in the spring issue of the *UU World*, the UU magazine that is published out of the denomination's national office, the print version of which is just landing in people's mailboxes.

I need to name publicly that being quoted sends the impression that I condone this article. I don't. I'm deeply disappointed in the *UU World*, in senior editor Chris Walton, and in author Kimberly French for publishing this piece. In a political environment in which trans people are being

actively targeted for violence by the state, in a context in which trans UUs are increasingly voicing the fact that Unitarian Universalism's approach to LGBTQ welcome [has failed trans people](#), an article written by a cis person, that centers cis people and cis perspectives, about trans people, is not incremental progress—it's harm.

I originally heard about the article because Chris Walton contacted me to find out if I knew any trans illustrators who the magazine might be able to hire to illustrate an article about the “growing visibility” of trans people. I immediately named my concerns about the frame of “growing visibility” in the context of what is more accurately growing \*violence\* against trans people.

Over the next two months I spent hours on the phone with both Kimberly and Chris. I urged Kimberly, back before the article was written, not to do it. I named that a cis person writing a piece about trans people would cause harm. I suggested doing, instead, a feature story of profiles that showcased the diversity of trans UUs, in their own words. I offered to provide a list of folks who could be contacted for such a piece. I thought she had heard me, so I was pretty upset when I found out three weeks later from Chris that things were moving forward with the planned article. In my response to him, I wrote, in part (in reference to my conversation with Kimberly):

*I also shared my very sincere concerns that if she did a story that centered herself, or centered cis UUs in general and their struggle to “deal with” all of the “increasing visibility” of trans people, it would further the harm that trans people are currently experiencing within UUism. If UU World wants to do a feature story about trans people, it is essential that trans people be given voice and agency and be centered in that feature story, not cis people. I can’t emphasize this enough. You have a choice here around whether to actively support trans people and help the UU movement as a whole move forward on this, or harm trans UUs by continuing the current trend of marginalizing trans people and helping cis UUs feel seen and justified in their resistance to creating basic access for trans UUs, much less fully inclusive and affirming spiritual homes.*

*Imagine wanting to do a story about Black Lives Matter that was written by a white person and was all about the “increasing visibility” of black people and the discomfort that white people have with Black Lives Matter banners, black people’s needs within UU churches, and the concept of Black Lives Matter as a movement. I know that the intentions are good, but this kind of approach will unquestionably cause harm.*



REPORT THIS AD

*I really hope you'll make the right choice. If there isn't time to do the right story/project, then wait. Please don't do a story that will cause harm and then have to rectify that harm with a better story later. Just do the better/right story.*

In a follow-up conversation with Chris, it became clear that he had firmly decided that the article by Kimberly was going forward, so I made the hard choice to focus on harm reduction, which is why I agreed to talk to Kimberly again and allow myself to be quoted in the article, even though I was denied my ask to see it before it went to print. Chris also, as a compromise, offered to run [TRUUUsT's call to action](#) in the same issue, which was a significant and unprecedented concession—but doesn't make up for the harm done.

I'm speechless about the title (for so many reasons). I'm stunned at the casual dropping of the f-slur. I'm angry at the conflation of trans and intersex identities and experiences, the over-emphasis on surgeries and hormones and genitalia, the way in which people of color and disabled people (many of whom are also trans) are also ignorantly diminished. I'm frustrated by the lack of actual spiritual content or connection to faith. But mostly I'm bone tired of cis people holding out their good intentions as progress. At the end of the piece when Kimberly writes “*...this is about building relationships. It's about being respectful and about listening and about helping fight when asked*” it feels like a slap in the face. She and Chris heard me, but they chose not to listen, to respect me and hundreds of other trans UUs, or to help fight when asked.



I invite others to join me in learning from and amplifying the voices of trans UUs. Here are some great places to start—and I'll keep adding more as I hear of them:

- “[Putting the ‘T’ First: Public Statement on This Week’s UU World Article](#),” by TRUUsT, the organization of trans UU religious professionals
- CB Beal’s piece “[Centering the Marginalized: Symphony and Triptych](#),” which goes into more detail about the harm and impact of the *UU World* article
- [Report on the Experiences of Trans Unitarian Universalists](#) by TRUUsT, published in January 2019
- [TRUUsT’s Call to Action](#) to support trans Unitarian Universalists