

Dear Ones,

It is with such a heavy heart that I share with you a terrible incident that happened at the UUA this weekend, when both the UUA Board of Trustees and the General Assembly Youth staff were in town. On Friday, the UUA received an anonymous, hateful letter addressed to one of our GA Youth staff volunteers, a youth of color, who is also the child of the UUA Board's Secretary, Christina Rivera. The letter was an expletive laden note insulting and attacking Christina and her child. This is completely unacceptable in our faith community.

This letter was meant to hurt and intimidate our leaders of color. We cannot as Unitarian Universalists argue about whether racism or a culture of white supremacy exists in our faith. It does, and it is actively harming people of color. It is especially heartbreaking that this was directed at a youth of color, because our young people must be able to be safe in our faith. And yet, this vile letter was but the latest example of egregious harm directed at leaders of color. We must make this violence stop.

We are moving incredible change in our faith – to live more fully into our deepest held values and theology as Unitarian Universalists. We are committed to making this a radically inclusive faith that welcomes every person in love and wholeness. We are building a liberating community that centers, values and believes people who have been harmed by systemic racism and oppression and that nurtures a redemptive love in those (myself included) whose hearts and perceptions are distorted by the culture of whiteness and white supremacy.

Two things I have said this year - this is no time for a casual faith and no time to be in this alone. We need to protect and love each other, allowing the fullness of our humanity to lead us to courage and solidarity in the work ahead. We know that when we do the work of radical change we will get push back. We will get resistance, both passive and direct, as this letter shows. Yet we will not let it turn us back, because our faith, our theology and our aspiration call us forth. And we will transform our righteous anger into action.

This also means we're going to need to get much more serious in how we hold one another's safety, acknowledging that the system of policing does not protect everyone's safety. We have many social movement partners we can turn to in order to help us think about security and wellbeing in new ways. And I ask that you too be ready to report instances of racial harassment. In the wake of this letter, we made immediate changes to help protect Christina and her family, and will be thinking differently about protection and risk going forward.

We are doing this work in the midst of a rise in hate crimes, fear, persecution and overt attacks on democracy across our country. These are difficult and painful times. And I believe Unitarian Universalism can help us find resilience and courage through a community of love and spirit. In times that are literally life and death, we are called to a great practice of love and interdependence – a greater practice of Beloved Community.

If you are a UU of color, this is your faith. You belong here. And I want to be your partner in the change we need to bring to this faith. I've got your back and my virtual door is open. I would love to hear from you about how I can be of help. I also want to encourage you to connect to DRUUMM (Diverse, Revolutionary, UU Multicultural Ministries), a ministry for and by POCI UU's and to BLUU (Black Lives of Unitarian Universalism).

If you feel dismissed by Unitarian Universalism because of any identity you hold, this is still your faith. You belong here. TRUUST (Transgender Religious professional Unitarian Universalists Together) creates community for UU religious professionals who are transgender, and EqUUal Access connects UUs who live with disabilities.

There is community within our faith that honors your identity, and I hope you will connect with this life-saving space. The UUA Board and I also talked deeply this weekend about the support that these identity-based communities need for sustainability, and will be continuing those conversations and commitments in the months ahead.

If you are a white UU and have not read *Centering and While Fragility*, I ask you to do so. As white people we need to understand both the stories of people of color in our movement, and the dynamics that shape our own enculturation into whiteness. If you are not a reader, you can find video clips from Robin D'Angelo, the author of *White Fragility*, on <http://www.uua.org>. If you've read these, then move on to *Revisiting the Empowerment Controversy* by the Mark Morrison-Reed and learn more about Unitarian Universalism's own history of racism in our culture and practice.

I shared the news of this letter, which UUA staff saw and intercepted, with the more than 40 leaders gathered at the UUA this weekend, including the Regional Leaders Group and the Journey Toward Wholeness Transformation Committee. At the end of sharing the news, we prayed for the safety and strength of all those putting themselves on the line to move this faith forward in the way of liberation; and we prayed for more courage and more brave souls joining in the work. We ended with the song from Emma's Revolution, "Keep on Moving Forward."

"We're gonna keep on moving forward, keep on moving forward, keep on moving forward, never turning back, never turning back."

So may we all together, in answer to the calling of this faith, keep on loving boldly, keep on singing loudly, keep on living proudly, keep on moving forward, never turning back, never turning back.

Rev. Susan Frederick-Gray