



The Sharing Project

UUA Multicultural Ministries

June 2014



UNITARIAN
UNIVERSALIST
ASSOCIATION



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UUA Multicultural Ministries

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Produced by:

UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST ASSOCIATION MULTICULTURAL MINISTRIES

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ABOUT THE MULTICULTURAL MINISTRIES SHARING PROJECT

In 2013, Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) Multicultural Ministries identified a need to better understand what it means to be Unitarian Universalist (UU) in the 21st century while not a member of the dominant culture, i.e., white, able-bodied, cisgender, heterosexual (both societally and within UUism). At that time, the experiences of UUs who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and/or queer (LGBTQ), who are people of color and/or from other racial and ethnic backgrounds historically marginalized by society, and/or who are people with disabilities had never been studied. The only survey that came close was conducted in 1989 by the Common Vision project to “collect basic information about how UUs feel about the inclusion of gay and lesbian (and bisexual) persons in our religious movement.”ⁱ That report exposed many negative attitudes, deep prejudices, and profound ignorance about bisexual, gay, and lesbian people, which resulted in the exclusion of bisexual, gay, and lesbian people from UU congregations.

This reality troubled many people who were committed to making UU congregations welcoming and inclusive places for all people, especially minority groups who have traditionally experienced exclusion, discrimination, and misrepresentation within our society. Citing the principles of our UU faith—especially the first, which affirms the inherent worth and dignity of every person—the 1989 General Assembly voted to initiate the Welcoming Congregation Program recommended by the Common Vision Planning Committee. This program focused on full inclusion of lesbian, gay, and bisexual people. By the late 1990s, this was extended to include transgender people, and in the early 2000’s, people who identify as queer.

As the Welcoming Congregation program celebrates its twenty-fifth anniversary, more than 72% of UU congregations in the United States and 96% of Canadian congregations have received designation as Welcoming Congregations. As of this report, that includes, in the United States, 95% of large congregations, 94% of mid-sized congregations, and 61% of small congregations. In light of today’s changing realities for LGBTQ people, more and more congregations are now working on renewing their Welcoming Congregation status.

As champions of LGBTQ equality, UUs have come a long way from those negative attitudes and prejudices expressed in 1989 – or have we?

The Sharing Project was originally conceived to focus on the experiences, thoughts, and dreams of LGBTQ people and to assess the impact of the Welcoming Congregation Program on their feelings of welcome and inclusion – to answer the questions, “how far have we come?” and “where else do we need to go?” However, in the last twenty-five years since the Common Vision Planning Committee’s report, UUs have come to understand welcome and inclusion in a much deeper and expansive way.

In 1992, just three years after the Common Vision project, the General Assembly created a vision of “a racially diverse and multicultural Unitarian Universalism.”ⁱⁱ Five years later, the 1997 General Assembly urged “the Unitarian Universalist Association, its congregations, and community organizations to develop an ongoing process for the comprehensive institutionalization of anti-racism and multiculturalism.”ⁱⁱⁱ Considerable effort has gone into to the realization of this vision – into building an anti-racist, anti-oppressive, and multicultural UUA and its member congregations – and yet, the impact of this work is largely anecdotal.

Also in 1997, UUs expanded its vision even further to include people with disabilities. The General Assembly passed a resolution that called on the UUA to undertake “an aggressive plan to address accessibility within the Association for people with disabilities.”^{iv}

When the staff of Multicultural Ministries reviewed the original proposal, we decided to broaden the scope of the Sharing Project to gather input from people directly impacted by each of these actions by the General Assembly.

Purpose of the Sharing Project

This project was not designed to assess how Unitarian Universalist congregations are doing but rather to develop a deeper understanding of how Unitarian Universalism can best respond to the needs of historically marginalized



people today and in the future. For example, what is our role in advocating for and ministering to new generations of LGBTQ elders and youth in our communities? What are the spiritual needs of people of color drawn to our liberal faith ministry and community? How can Unitarian Universalist congregations welcome and include people with physical, emotional, and intellectual disabilities? How can Unitarian Universalist congregations address the needs of multiracial/multiethnic families?

In the Sharing Project, we examine the experiences of UUs from historically marginalized communities, to:

- Create a demographic picture of Unitarian Universalists who are from communities that are historically marginalized
- Learn how Unitarian Universalists with historically marginalized abilities, sexual orientations, gender identities, races, and/or ethnicities feel most welcome and included within Unitarian Universalism
- Better understand the needs of people from historically marginalized communities in our congregations and wider movement, now and in the future

A Word about the Name

When Multicultural Ministries conducted the “soft-launch” of the survey last July to solicit feedback and input from key stakeholders about the questions on the survey, members of EqUUal Access, an organization that promotes equality and access for Unitarian Universalists with disabilities, questioned us on the name of the survey, the “Multicultural Ministries Listening Project.” “How,” they asked, “do you intend to be welcoming to people who are hard of hearing or deaf when the very title of the survey is off-putting to them?” So before we formally launched the survey, we were reminded that inclusion takes intentional work. Even those of us whose job it is to promote inclusion make mistakes. But thanks to the gracious reminder by people with EqUUal Access, and in consultation with people from Gallaudet University, we decided to change the name to the “Multicultural Ministries Sharing Project.” Rather than “hearing” from people, we began to “gather input”; rather than asking people to “listen” to each other in a Sharing Circle, we asked them to “receive what others had to share.” It wasn’t always easy to remember and, sometimes, it felt awkward and forced, but when we remembered, we extended the circle a little wider. Thank you, EqUUal Access, for holding us accountable to our purpose.

METHODS

The Sharing Project received input in two distinct ways. The first was through an extensive survey comprised of a total of ninety-eight questions, seventy-four of which were for all respondents. LGBTQ respondents answered an additional twelve questions specific to LGBTQ concerns (including questions about the Welcoming Congregation Program), people of color and those marginalized by race and/or ethnicity answered an additional six specific to race and ethnicity concerns, and people with disabilities answered an additional six specific to disability concerns. Many questions contained multiple parts, some as many as eighteen sub-parts, so the total number of questions numbered in the hundreds.

The second way of receiving input was through a series of fourteen virtual Sharing Circles. A total of sixty-three people, randomly selected from 578 survey respondents who indicate an interest in becoming part of a Sharing Circle, participated in either a ninety-minute phone or video conference with up to eight other respondents.

Participants

Multicultural Ministries’ goal was to obtain a representative sample that included a cross-section of active and inactive Unitarian Universalists in the United States and beyond, including leaders, people not holding leadership positions, youth, young adults, adults, older adults, parents, new to UU, seasoned UUs, people across the class spectrum who hold multiple theologies, and who have experienced marginalization because of their gender identities and expressions, sexual orientations, races/ethnicities and/or abilities.

Outreach included invitations placed in the *Welcoming Congregation Bulletin*, *Catalyst* newsletter, the *UUA Congregational Bulletin*; special notices sent to stakeholder groups, such as DRUUMM, EqUUal Access, Interweave,



and the Canadian Unitarian Council; and a postcard distributed at 2013 General Assembly. Notices also appeared in social media, including Twitter and relevant Facebook groups.

Eligibility

To be eligible to participate, respondents were asked:

- Do you voluntarily agree to participate?
- Are at least 13 years of age?
- Do you now, or have you ever, identified as Unitarian Universalist or felt a strong affiliation with Unitarian Universalism AND do you have one or more historically marginalized identities/experiences in terms of disability, sexual orientation, gender identity and/or expression, race, and/or ethnicity?

A total of 1,528 people, ranging in age from fourteen to ninety-two, from forty-eight U.S. states, four Canadian provinces, and ten other countries or territories responded to the survey. 86% (1,308) of those people who started the survey met the eligibility requirements. 79% of those who started the survey completed it, although not everyone answered every relevant question. Statistics are based on all cases with valid data, except where otherwise indicated.

About the Sharing Project Report

The Sharing Project Report is designed to offer key findings of the Sharing Project Survey and Sharing Circles. Not all data collected is included here. In addition, most of the data reflected here represents responses from all respondents to the survey collectively. So, except in the Welcoming and Inclusion section, it does not show similarities and differences among the various populations engaged.

The extended version of the Sharing Project report, available on www.uua.org/sharingproject (as of July 15, 2014) shows all the findings, and breaks down the data to show results for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer people, transgender people, people marginalized by race/ethnicity, and people with disabilities. Further analysis by population will be available as it is completed.

To fully understand the findings of the Sharing Project will take years. The data is complicated, thought-provoking, and nuanced. As we break it down even more deeply to identify the differences in how people with specific identities and experiences responded (transgender people, people with disabilities, etc), it becomes even more challenging. Although we offered opportunities for people to share their positive experiences of welcoming, we recognize that more questions focused on instances of discrimination that persist in our congregations.

I encourage you to not be discouraged or disillusioned by what you read here. Realizing an inclusive multicultural vision for Unitarian Universalist congregations, where in the words of the UUA Leadership Council, “all people are welcome as blessings and the human family lives whole and reconciled,” is still within our grasp. If you doubt that, read the 1989 [Report and Recommendations from the Common Vision Planning Committee](#) (available on www.uua.org) to see how far we’ve come in the last twenty-five years. With few exceptions, the people we talked with us in the Sharing Circles and the people who wrote comments on the survey love being Unitarian Universalist and, also recognize we are yet not where we should be. But we are on the journey and that’s what matters most. I hope that this report will stimulate profound conversations in congregations across the UU universe (congregational resources to support these conversations are available on www.uua.org/sharingproject as of August 1, 2014). What people asked for more than anything else is to be in deep relationship, for people to be willing to get to know them, and to risk the possibility that they might have to change. That’s the very definition of love, and I, for one, have faith we can love this well.

Annette Marquis



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Contextualizing the Survey: Demographic Highlights

- Respondents face societal discrimination every day, including, but not limited to, slurs and jokes, poor service in retail establishments, rejection by family or friends, and being unwelcome at a religious organization
- Respondents are highly educated, although financial status is low considering the high levels of education
- Mental health issues rank highest of all disabilities identified
- Bisexuals represent a significant portion of the population

Priorities Expressed

- Building multicultural community is the highest priority
- Economic justice should be the top UU social justice priority for the next five years

Spiritual/Religious Needs

- Religion is important in respondents lives yet UU involvement is relatively recent, with a significant number joining in the last ten years
- Spiritual needs are generally unmet by congregations
- Grief is the number one reason for seeking pastoral care/support
- The majority of parents with children have had positive Religious Education (RE) experiences

People Living with Disabilities: Responses about Congregational Life

- The primary concern raised by people with disabilities of all types is that they cannot participate fully in congregational life
- Microaggressions and feelings of being different are regularly experienced by people with disabilities
- Although physical/emotional threats are not common, people with disabilities still experience them
- A majority of congregations attended by people with disabilities have welcoming facilities and resources
- Close to half of congregations attended by people with disabilities are welcoming to them

LGBTQ People: Responses about Congregational Life

- LGBTQ people feel physically safe in our congregations
- Transgender people experience higher incidences of microaggressions and feeling different from others in their congregations than people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual or queer (LGBQ)
- The majority of congregations with LGBTQ people have gender-neutral bathrooms
- The majority of UU congregations have LGBQ-inclusive policies and procedures and use inclusive language in worship
- Less than half of UU congregations have transgender-inclusive policies and procedures and use inclusive language in worship
- LGBTQ people think congregations should have education for all ages that is inclusive of LGBTQ issues but the majority of congregations do not offer LGBTQ-inclusive education
- Those who have experienced the Welcoming Congregation Program consider it to be effective. For a significant number of LGBTQ people, the fact that their congregation is a Welcoming Congregation impacted their decision to visit for the first time
- The Beyond Categorical Thinking Program helps congregations be more open to calling LGBTQ ministers

People of Color/People Marginalized by Race/Ethnicity: Responses about Congregational Life

- People of color and other people marginalized by race/ethnicity consistently experience microaggressions, tokenization, and invisibility in their congregations
- The majority of congregations attended by people of color and other people marginalized by race/ethnicity are welcoming and inclusive in their language



- Congregations attended by people of color and other people marginalized by race/ethnicity are not racially or ethnically diverse
- People of color and other people marginalized by race/ethnicity would like their congregations to be more active in social justice issues that impact people of color communities
- Close to half of congregations attended by people of color and other people marginalized by race/ethnicity regularly incorporate multicultural elements and experiences into worship



DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

While people who responded to the survey are predominately middle-age and highly educated, they tend to be underemployed without strong financial security.

Age

22% of respondents are youth and young adults, although only 2% are under the age of 18. In addition, 15% are senior citizens.

- 2% of respondents are youth, ages 17 and under
- 21% are young adult, ages 18-35
- 62% are adults, ages 35-64
- 15% are older adult, ages 65-92

Geography

Respondents represented all five UUA regions. California, which is in the Pacific Western Region, had the largest number of respondents. North Dakota and Montana are the only U.S. states not represented. In addition, people responded from Canada, Mexico, the Virgin Islands, Columbia, Portugal, Germany, Scotland, The Netherlands, China, and Australia.

Education

52% of respondents have at least one graduate degree. 79% have a college degree. Only 5% have not completed high school and that includes respondents who are under 17 years old.

Employment

41% are employed full-time. 19% are retired and 12% are on disability. 9% are unemployed, looking for work, which exceeds the national unemployment rate for September 2013 (7.1), the midpoint of when the survey was open, by 1.9%.

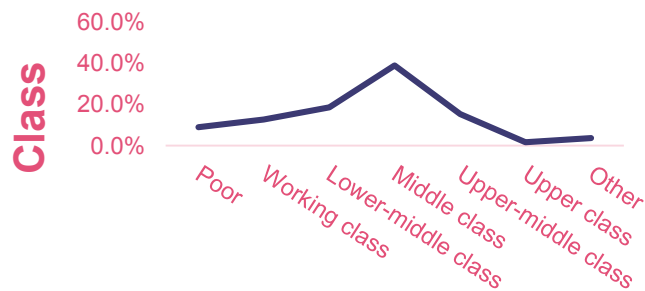
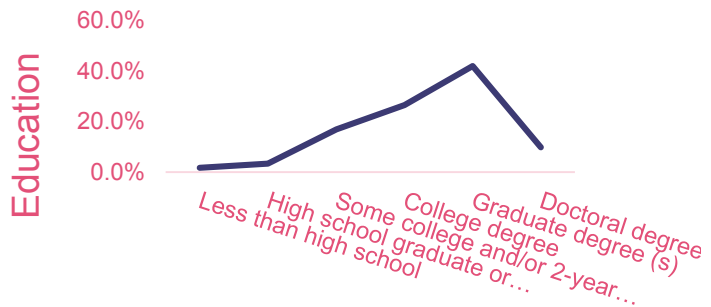
59% of those who are employed consider themselves adequately employed, while 38% consider themselves underemployed.

Financial Status and Income

40% rate their personal financial situation as Excellent (8%) or Good (33%). 56% rate their financial status as Only Fair (33%) or Poor (24%), with 2% choosing not to disclose. 14% have a household income at or below the poverty level for a family of four (\$23,550) with 12% for a family of two (\$15,500). 20% have a household income over \$100,000, with 6% of that over \$150,000. Only 1.4% have a family income over \$250,000.

Class

9% perceive their economic class as Poor, 13% as Working Class, 19% as Lower Middle Class, 39% Middle Class, 15% Upper Middle Class, and 2% Upper Class. 4% had difficulty categorizing their class, some because they are dependent on others, and others because their class is shifting either upwardly or downwardly.





RELATIONSHIPS AND FAMILY

Households

23% of households include children under the age of 18, ranging from 1 to 7 children per household with an average of 2 children. The average household size, including those without children, is 2. 65% are in a committed relationship, including 3% in a committed relationship with more than one person. 18% have never been married or in a committed relationship. 15% are currently separated, divorced, or widowed and not in a committed relationship. 8% live with their parents and another 7.5% live with adult children.

Caregiving

17% are caring for one or more elderly family members. 4% in the respondent's home, 10% in another location, and 2% sometimes at home and sometimes in another location.

Parenting

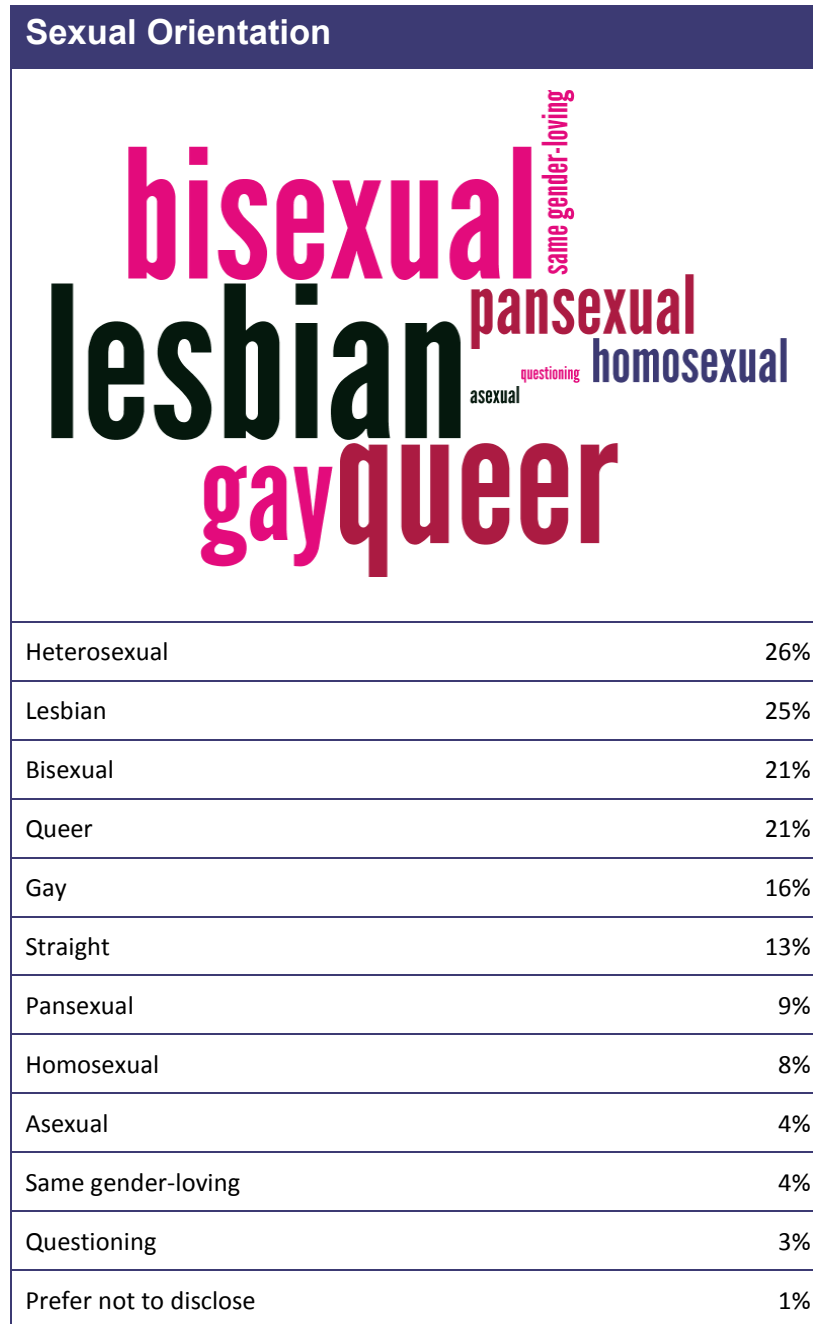
53% have, at some point in their lives, been parents, guardians, foster parents, or step-parents of a child.



IDENTITIES AND MARGINALIZATION

Respondents were asked to select the identity(ies) that “you apply to yourself in terms of sexual orientation, sex and/or gender identity, and race and ethnicity, and to indicate the disabilities that affect them”

The word clouds reflect the most commonly claimed terms used by those with historically marginalized identities dominant culture identities, such as “Heterosexual,” “Female,” “Man, and “White, European American, Caucasian, and/or Anglo American,” are not included in the word clouds). Note: most respondents made multiple choices.





Gender Identity



Female	56%
Woman	44%
Male	24%
Man	13%
Genderqueer	7%
Transgender	6%
Gender non-conforming or gender variant	6%
Gender fluid	5%
Two-spirit	5%
Androgyny	3%
Transsexual	3%
FtM	2%
Trans woman	2%
MtF	2%
Trans man	2%
Third gender	2%
Cross-dresser	1%
Agender	1%
Intersex	1%
Prefer not to disclose	0.4%
Neutrois	0.2%



Race and Ethnicity



White, European American, Caucasian, and/or Anglo American	79%
Black, African-American, African Diaspora, and/or African American Indian, First Nations, and/or Alaska Native	11%
Multiracial/Multiethnic	9%
Latino/a, Hispanic, and/or Chicano/a	7%
American Indian, First Nations, and/or Alaska Native	7%
Jewish	6%
Asian, South Asian, East Asian, Southeast Asian, and/or Asian-American	5%
Caribbean and/or Caribbean-American	2%
Middle Eastern, Arab, and/or Arab-American	1%
Prefer not to disclose	0.7%



People with Disabilities

Many people with disabilities do not claim their disability as an identity, so we tried to be careful not to equate disabilities with identities. However, because people with disabilities are often marginalized because of their disability, they might choose to connect with a disability community. Some people who do not consider themselves as a person with a disability/disabled, also indicated that they have an illness/disability in the list offered, and many listed additional disabilities not included here.

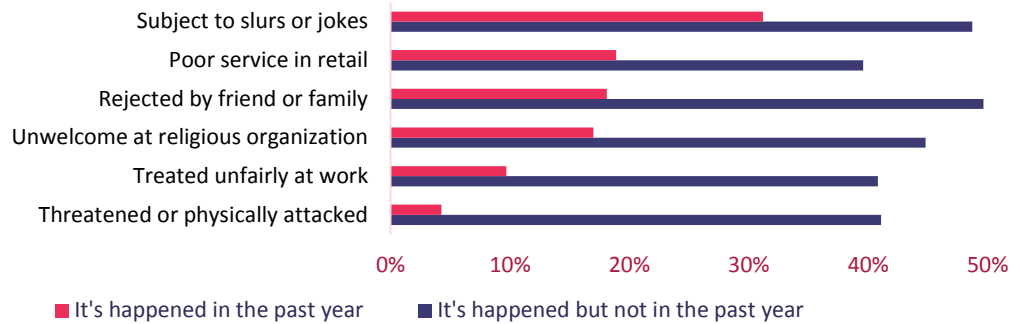
The percentage of respondents with mental health issues, including anxiety disorders, mood disorders, psychotic disorders, co-occurring disorders, eating disorders, personality disorders, etc. is particularly striking.



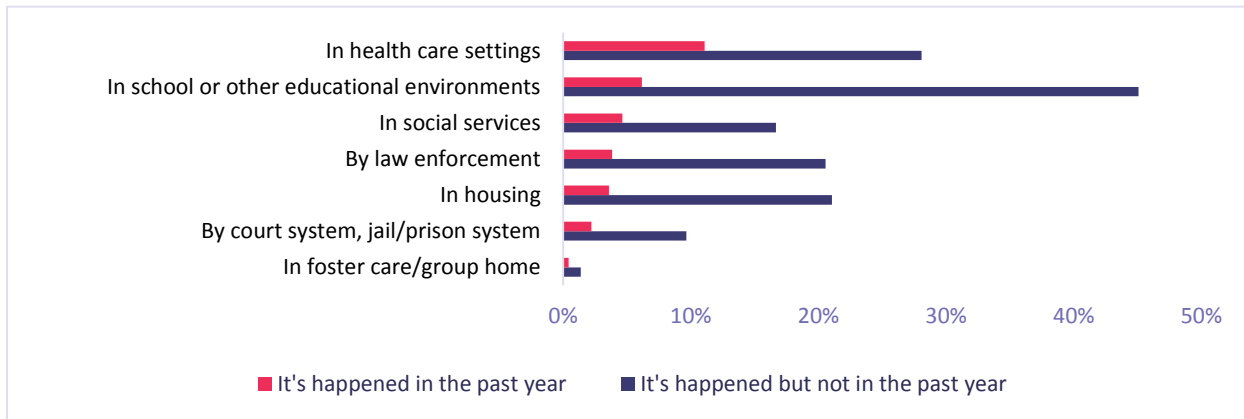


EXPERIENCES OF DISCRIMINATION IN THE WORLD

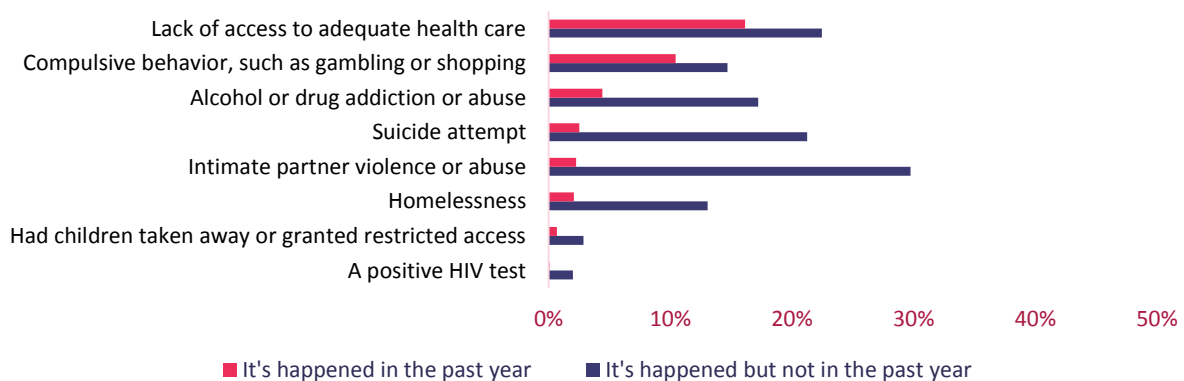
Experiences of discrimination and harassment are common for people who are or are perceived to be a person marginalized by society. Although many of these incidents occurred longer than a year ago, a significant number have occurred in the past year.



School and education environments are the most common settings where discrimination, harassment, or violence occurs, followed by health care settings.



Respondents have also had the following negative experiences, including over 15% who have lack of access to adequate health care.



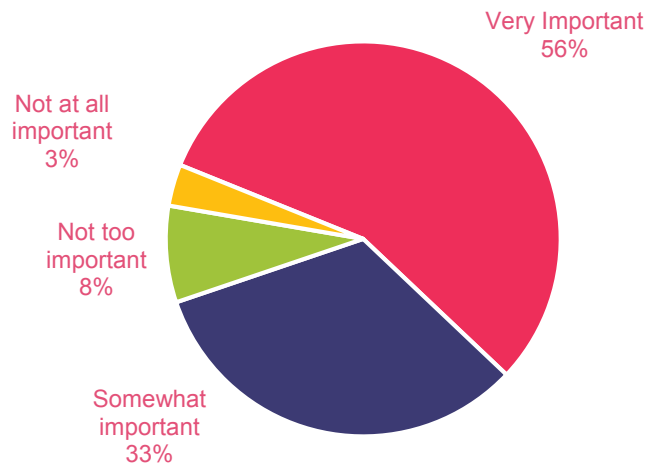


Religion and Faith

Most respondents identified mainline Protestant and Roman Catholic as the primary religious tradition(s) they grew up with. A surprising 19%, however, grew up Unitarian Universalist.

Religion	Primary
Protestant - Mainline (e.g., Methodist, Evangelical Lutheran, Presbyterian, Episcopal, United Church of Christ, etc.)	27%
Roman Catholic	21%
Unitarian Universalist	19%
Evangelical and Independent (e.g., Southern Baptist, Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, Assemblies of God)	8%
None	5%
Agnostic	4%
Jewish	3%
Protestant - Historically Black (e.g., African Methodist Episcopal, Church of God in Christ, Apostolic Holiness Church)	3%
Atheist	3%
Mormon (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints or LDS)	1%
Earth-centered tradition, including Pagan and Wicca	0.9%
Buddhist	0.9%
Theist	0.5%
Jehovah's Witness	0.4%
Native American / American Indian / First Nations tradition	0.4%
Quaker	0.4%
Muslim	0.2%
Orthodox (Greek, Russian, or some other orthodox church)	0.2%
Hindu	0.1%
Nation of Islam	0.1%

How important is religion in your life?



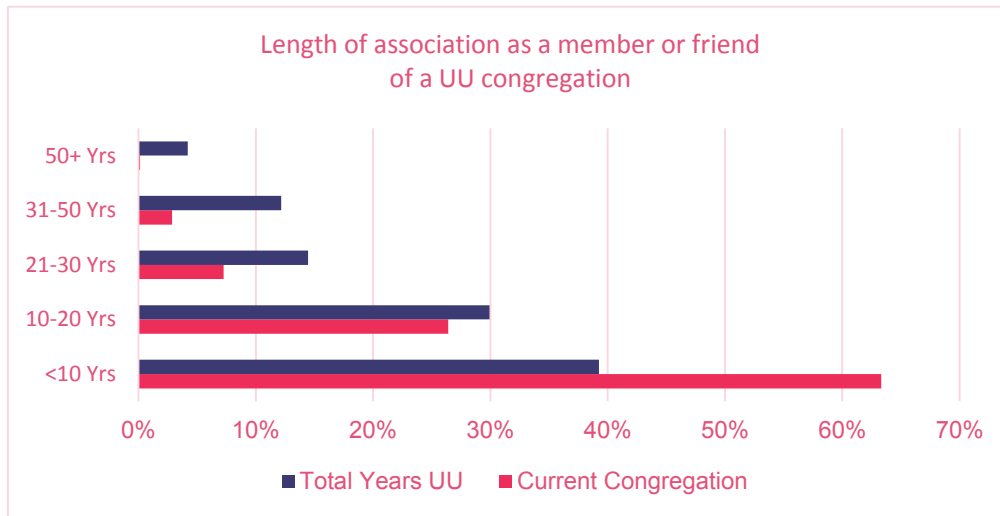


Relationship with UU Congregations

74% of respondents are members of at least one congregation (70% one congregation; 4% more than one) and another 16% are active participants or regular attendees (including 3% who are youth group members).

Current membership status	
I am a member of a congregation.	70%
I am a member of more than one congregation.	4%
I am an active participant or regular attendee of one or more congregations, but not a member.	13%
I am a member of a youth group.	3%
I attend events or groups at a congregation but do not go to services.	4%
I am an occasional visitor to one or more congregations.	14%
I am a paid staff member or called minister.	12%
I used to be a member, friend, or a regular attendee, but am not currently connected to a congregation.	10%

48% have been members, regular attendees or active participants of only one congregation, while 24% have been members of two, 11% three, 6% four, and 10% five or more. 3% have never been a member, regular attendee or active participant of a congregation.



Reasons for Joining and for Staying

When asked why they decided to attend their current or most recent congregation, the most common answer cited was to deepen their spiritual life (50%). However, only 16% report loving the spiritual depth of their congregation as the primary reason they stay with their congregation.

51% stay because they love the community of people they found there and 43% believe their congregations helps them feel grounded and/or renewed and/or better prepared for life and work outside the congregation.

38% decided to attend their current congregation because they heard they would be welcomed in all their identities. This is consistent with why they stay with their current congregation. 38% report being able to be themselves there.



Major reasons respondents decided to attend their current or most recent UU congregation (up to three choices)	
I wanted to deepen my spiritual life.	50%
I heard the congregation would welcome me in all my identities.	38%
I wanted to make liberal religious friends.	36%
I respected the congregation's social justice reputation in the community.	27%
I had been a UU before and when I moved to a new city, I wanted to connect to the local congregation.	26%
I wanted religious education for my children.	17%
I experienced a life crisis and needed a religious community to help me through it.	15%
I read/listened to the minister's sermons/blog postings online and liked what I read/heard.	11%
My partner/spouse or other family members attended and I wanted to go with them.	9%
I entered into a paid position at the congregation.	9%
My parents/guardians brought me or I was born into the congregation.	6%

Major reasons respondents stay with their UU congregation (up to three choices)	
I love the community of people.	51%
It helps me feel grounded and/or renewed and/or better prepared for my life and work outside the congregation.	43%
I can be myself there.	38%
I feel like we're making a difference in the world.	26%
I love the intellectual stimulation of the congregation.	25%
I feel connected to the minister and/or staff.	16%
I love the spiritual depth of the congregation.	16%
I want my children to be raised in a liberal faith environment and/or benefit from religious education.	15%
I have a paid position with the congregation.	10%
I depend on people there for pastoral, spiritual, or physical support and aid.	9%
I feel like I should go to church and the UU church is better than anything else out there.	9%
My family loves it.	4%

Level of Involvement

58% attend services or teach religious education three or more times a month. 17% attend one to two times a month. 25% attend less frequently (8.5% every few weeks, 13% rarely, 4% never).

20% of respondents have a paid position with a congregation, the UUA, district, or region, including 10% who serve in some ministerial capacity. 2% serves as religious educators, and 2% as music directors.

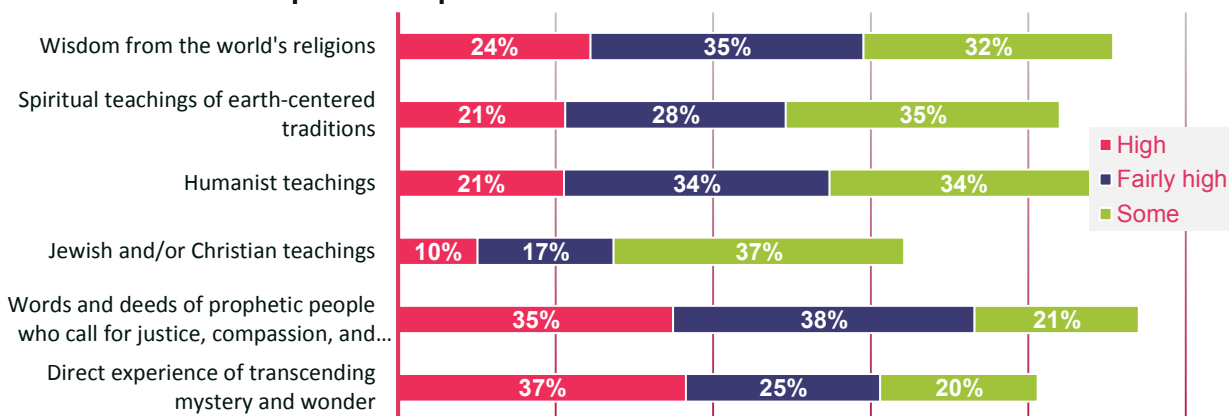
41% do not currently serve in any volunteer role in a congregation. Of those who are serving, 40% serve on a committee or congregational team and 11% serve on the board.

Of those who are currently serving or have served in a volunteer role within the Unitarian Universalist Association, 22% serve/have served on a district board, 39% on a committee/working group and/or 10% as a district consultant for a total of 70% who serve or have served at the district level. 5% serve/have served on the UUA board, 31% on a UUA committee, and 5% a UUA consultant for a total of 41% who are and have served at the national level. 3% have served on an international board or committee.



UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST THEOLOGY

Level of personal spiritual connection to each of the UU sources



When asked to name “additional sources and/or spiritual practices that inform your UU spirituality,” Buddhism, yoga, and mindfulness and meditation practices were commonly named. Womanist, queer, feminist, and liberation theologies were also mentioned, as were science and nature.

Pastoral Care Needs

When asked which of the following issues might you seek pastoral care/support from a UU congregation or faith community, the top ten answers were:

Grief	50%
Aging	34%
Mental health issues	29%
Couples enrichment and/or counseling	26%
Disability/accessibility challenges	21%
Family counseling needs	21%
Parenting	21%
Trauma/Abuse	19%
Financial issues	18%
Sexuality	13%

It’s important to note that between 9% and 12% of respondents might seek pastoral care/support for the following issues:

Legal issues	12.0%
Addiction/compulsive behavior	11.9%
Multiracial/multiethnic family	11.8%
Homelessness	11.3%
Coming out	11.2%
Hunger	11.0%
Gay issues	10.6%
Other (please specify)	10.4%
Bisexuality / pansexuality	9.7%
LGBTQ youth	9.6%
Polyamory or open relationships	9.3%
Racial identity development	9.3%
Transgender issues	9.0%
Lesbian issues	8.6%

Although they were less commonly chosen, between 2% and 7% might seek pastoral care/support for alternative sexual communities, including leather, kink, BDSM, online role-playing, etc. (7%), family planning (5%), gender variant children (5%), HIV/AIDS (4%), and intersex issues (2%).

Some respondents would not seek pastoral support from their congregation:

- “I can’t imagine a UU congregation or UUA helping with basic issues such as hunger, disability, trauma, etc.”
- “I would not seek pastoral support from the congregation. There is no one giving any such support.”
- “It seems like UUs don’t care if you have problems.”
- “I would like us to come out as a polyamorous family but in talking with congregants there still seems to be some issues/judgments that make me fearful.”



Adult Religious Education

When asked, “what topics are you interested in learning more about with/from/for a UU congregation or faith community,” the top five answers were:

- Building multicultural community (61%)
- Anti-racism/oppression (49%)
- Cross-cultural communication (49%)
- Mental health (41%)
- LGBTQ spirituality (40%)

Children’s Religious Education

81% of families with children participate, or have participated, in children's religious education (RE) in a Unitarian Universalist congregation or community, 28% currently participate, and 54% have participated in the past.

90% described their child/children's experience in religious education (RE) affirming to their personal, spiritual, and emotional identity development (28% extremely affirming, 35% Very affirming, 28% somewhat affirming).

In 47% of the families whose children participated in RE, some or all of the children, youth, or adult children identify as Unitarian Universalist today.

Parents had much to share about their child/children’s experience with RE. Many of the comments saw RE as a positive force in their children’s lives, especially the *Our Whole Lives* (OWL) sexuality education program.

- *“This has been the cornerstone of my children’s lives. I am amazed with each passing year at the depth of the programs. While we don't get a full report of the CRE [Children’s Religious Education] experience on Sunday mornings, I know it has a tremendous impact on their values and decisions.”*
- *“It has given them a great place to learn about religion, explore their personal spirituality and learn to grow with and respect other's differing opinions.”*
- *“It is extremely important for children to see other families like theirs. It is equally important for them to see everyone being accepted for who they are.”*
- *“OWL saves lives.”*

Others raised concerns about the quality of RE their children received, especially when the children were not of the dominant culture.

- *“Both have struggled to experience a deep connection as people of color...particularly my son.”*
- *“My disabled child mostly is relegated to the sidelines...not much effort is put into including her although there is much talk of her worth and inclusion. I think more education and resources are needed for children with disabilities in our communities.”*
- *“Although I think my daughter's experience with the RE program was positive for the most part, unfortunately there were members of the RE committee who seemed to judge her based on the fact that she lived in subsidized housing, and there were years when she was left out of a lot of the activities due to transportation issues and miscommunication in general.”*



Role of Social Justice

87% see social justice as essential (46%) or important (41%) in their personal faith journey.

When asked, “Which of following social justice issues do you personally think the UUA and UU congregations should commit, or continue to commit, resources to in the next five years?” Economic justice, racial justice/antiracism, and environmental justice/climate change led the responses, with LGBTQ equality, and access to health care close behind.

Social justice priorities	
Economic justice	42%
Racial justice/anti-racism	31%
Environmental justice/climate change	30%
LGBTQ equality	28%
Access to health care	27%
Immigration reform	18%
Marriage equality	16%
Mass incarceration	15%
Reproductive justice	15%
Women's equality	13%
Gun violence	13%
Education reform	12%
Disability justice	12%
Voting rights	10%
Religious freedom	9%
Employment non-discrimination	4%



Preparation to Face the Moral/Ethical/Spiritual Challenges of the Future

The open-ended question, “What do you think you and your family most need from a congregation or faith community to feel prepared to face the moral/ethical/spiritual challenges of the future?” elicited a wide-range of responses. Many centered on the need for acceptance of them and of their families. Several noted the feeling of becoming invisible as they’ve grown older, particularly when they develop mobility and other issues that prevent their full participation in the congregation, and pleaded to be remembered and noticed.

Here are a few representative comments:

- *“I need a congregation or faith community that seeks to practice together the hard work of being in relationship across deep cultural differences and divides - a congregation that sees its “community” as truly encompassing people from all walks of life and sees its ministry as fighting for a more just and equitable world for its community members of all classes, ages, abilities, races, sexualities, gender expressions, politics, sizes, and more. I need a congregation or faith community that pushes me to be and grow my highest self in deep relationship with other people, from a spiritually grounded place.”*
- *“Worship services that inspire the human spirit with music, musicians, choirs, liturgy, praise, silence, guided meditations in building covenantal beloved community!”*
- *“To feel welcome, accepted, heard and valued.”*
- *“My son is gay and recently came out. I want to help him mature and be confident in himself.”*
- *“We need a place that we, as a multi-racial, diverse family, feel comfortable and that we can share and learn about other liberal religious and social views.”*
- *“Acceptance as we are. The more a faith community embraces the people who are ‘different’ the more I feel I will be accepted despite the fact that I have no visible ‘difference’”.*
- *“UU faith communities have far more to say about my right to get married or have children in my (same-gender) marriage than how I can make my marriage and family strong and healthy and navigate family hardships. UU communities need to break the silence on what it takes to create strong families and engage with their larger communities to help make that a possibility for every family.”*

I need to know I matter, just my one voice, although changed, I matter to our great faith community. I need to know there is still room for me.



WELCOME AND INCLUSION IN CONGREGATIONS

In this portion of the survey, respondents opted into three sections based on their identities and experiences. Only those people who answered “Yes” to the qualifying questions responded to that section.

Race and Ethnicity Welcoming and Inclusion

27% answered “Yes” to “Do you identify as a person of color, multiracial, and/or otherwise as someone with a marginalized race/ethnicity?”

Disabilities Welcome and Inclusion

56% answered “Yes” to “Do you have a visual, hearing, mobility, mental health, intellectual, learning/attention, cognitive, and/or other disability of any kind, including chemical sensitivity and food allergies?”

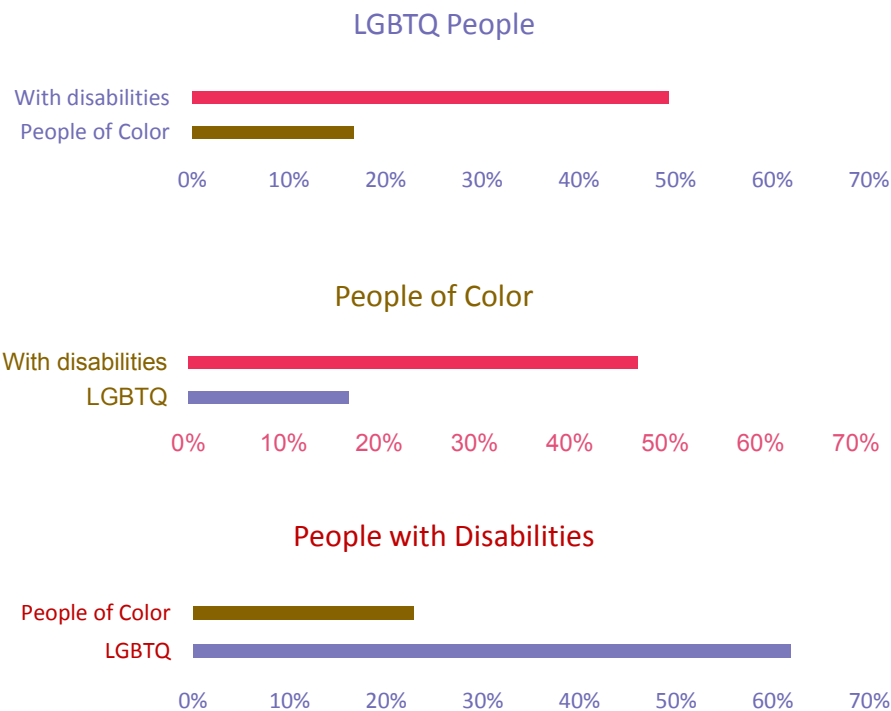
LGBTQ Welcome and Inclusion

55% answered “Yes” to “a. I identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, or otherwise as someone with a marginalized sexual orientation.”

2% answered “Yes” to “b. I identify as transgender, and/or see myself as part of what is often considered to be a transgender/gender non-conforming umbrella, and/or have transgender, transsexual, or intersex history.”

11% answered yes to “c. Both a and b apply to me.”

Many respondents qualified in more than one area.

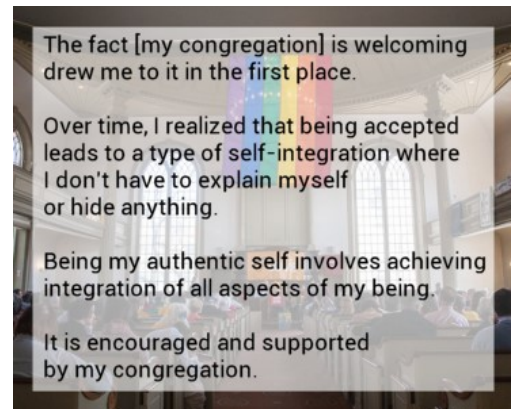


4% of respondents qualified in all three areas as *LGBTQ people of color with disabilities*.



LGBTQ Welcome and Inclusion

Congregations have come a long way in the twenty-five years since the Welcoming Congregation program's inception. In fact, respondents report that 71% of their congregations participate in community LGBTQ events such as Pride, Transgender Day of Remembrance, National Coming Out Day, etc, and 53% of congregations observe these events internally in the congregation. 59% engage in lobbying, letter-writing, protesting, and/or other advocacy and witness on behalf of LGBTQ rights. Also 59% have developed relationships with LGBTQ organization(s) or community group(s). Others do collections to benefit an LGBTQ organization or group (41%) and/or offer film screenings, panel discussions, and/or other community events open to the public on LGBTQ issues.



Congregations don't do quite as well when it comes to opportunities for LGBTQ people to meet socially (35.9%), organizing an LGBTQ-related congregational group or task force (31.8%), hosting an Interweave chapter (23%) and/or running or providing building space for LGBTQ-related support group(s) or drop-in space(s) for youth (29.8%). However, the fact that one-third of the respondent's congregations host these things is still significant.

Many LGBTQ people wrote about how much they love their congregation. One person said, *"I don't think it's possible for my congregation to be more welcoming."* Another wrote, *"I love my UU church people making a difference in the LGBTQ community and doing so with their church tee shirts on for the world to see!"* These sentiments are shared by many.

However, *"Stop using the acronym. My identity gets lost in it,"* was a common opinion expressed. Bisexual and transgender people do not feel included in all of our congregations. One person captured it well, *"I think our work needs to be on bisexuality, transgender/genderqueer identity and queer communities. We need to grow in our understanding of gender as a continuum, and move away from marriage equality as being the single justice focus of GLBT equality."* Transgender people repeatedly expressed a desire to separate sexual orientation from gender identity. *"Being transgender is a medical issue,"* one person wrote, *"and has nothing to do with my sexual orientation."*

In addition, several people shared comments similar to this one, *"I'd love to see more open inclusion of marginalized sexual minorities - BDSM and polyamorous in particular. I have to keep those secret in every area of my life. It would be nice to feel specifically welcomed."*

The Experience of LGBTQ people in Congregations

LGBTQ people report low incidences of feeling physically unsafe (4%) or experiencing physical violence (1%) in our congregations in the past year. However, the fact that it is being reported at all is a cause for serious concern.

While the percent of all LGBTQ people who experienced other negative incidences is also a cause for concern, people who are transgender have had significantly higher rates of negative experiences overall in our congregations in the last year than people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or queer and are not transgender.

- 28% of all LGBTQ people experienced microaggressions such as unintended slights, questions founded on untrue assumptions about identity/experience, unconscious heterosexist language, subtle alienation, etc., while 45% of transgender people did.
- 23% of all LGBTQ experienced the feeling of being the only person like you / different from everyone else, while 40% of transgender people did.



LGBTQ Experience of Discrimination within Unitarian Universalism





LGBTQ respondents were asked how important a particular issue is to them and how they thought their congregation was doing in that area. One area that seems to show progress is in regard to gender-neutral bathrooms. 65% of LGBTQ people (76% of transgender people) think having gender-neutral bathrooms in their congregation is extremely or very important. 53% of congregations are reported to have gender-neutral bathrooms (59% in congregations where trans people are members) and another 16% don't know if gender-neutral bathrooms are available (only 7% of transgender people don't know this). Although this doesn't fully meet expectations, it's heading in the right direction. LGBTQ people were asked how important a particular issue is to them and how they thought their congregation was doing in that area. Reported here are some of the findings in this area. Reported here are all respondents (more transgender-specific findings are available in the full report online).



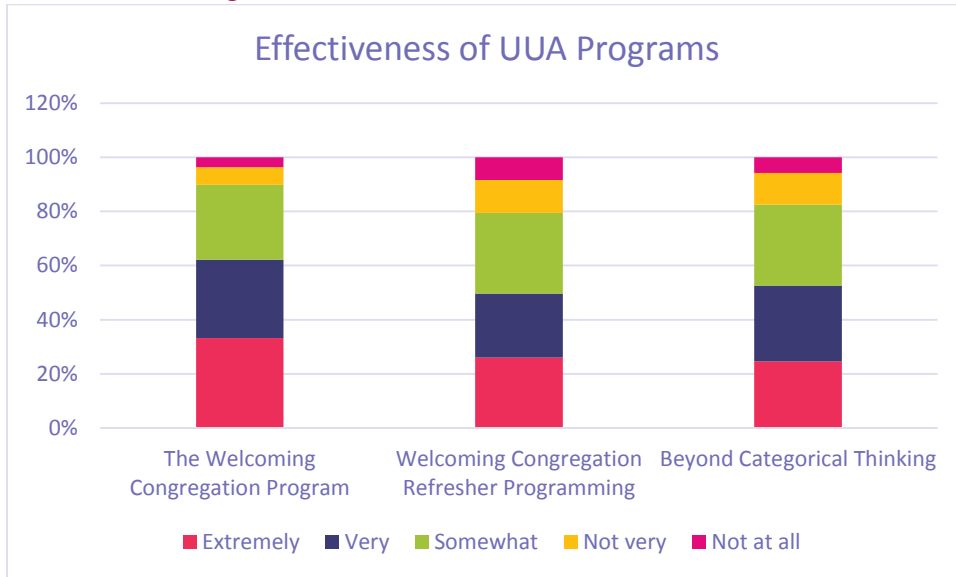


Welcoming Congregation Program

77% of the LGBTQ respondents are currently or recently associated with a congregation designated as a Welcoming Congregation and another 2.6% are in congregations that are working on it, and another 1% are considering it for the future. It’s possible that some of the 15% who don’t know if their congregation is a Welcoming Congregation might also be from one already designated.

For 43%, the fact that their congregation is a Welcoming Congregation impacted their decision to visit it for the first time. 20% received their designations after the respondent started attending.

Effectiveness of UUA Programs



Although these UUA Programs are seen as effective for those who have participated in them, 38% have not participated in the Welcoming Congregation Program and another 10% have never heard of it; 57% have never participated in the Welcoming Congregation refresher programming and 23% have never heard of it; and 42% have not participated in Beyond Categorical Thinking, which is offered to congregations when they’re in ministerial search, and 32% have never heard of it.

General Comments about the Welcoming Congregation Program

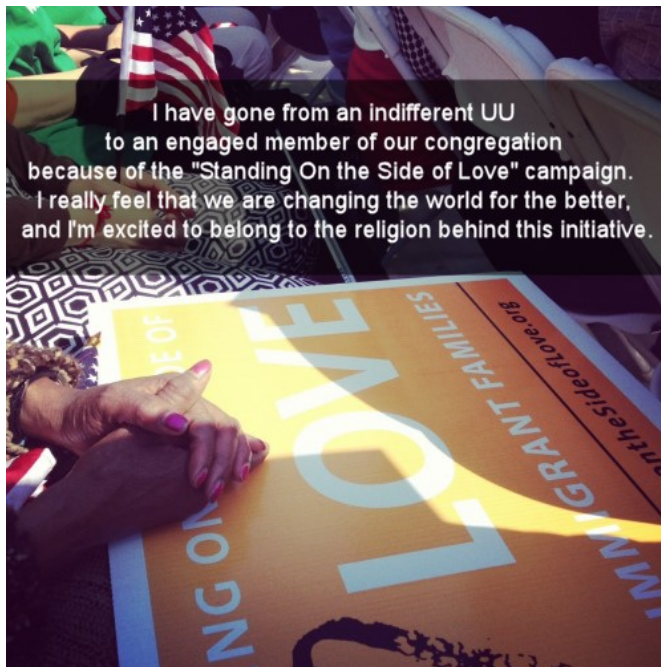
This comment summed up a number of comments about how the Welcoming Congregation Program needs to adapt to meet the challenges of the 21st century.

“The Welcoming Congregation Program needs to expand its framework to truly become a program that helps a congregation implement ongoing steps to continually becoming more welcoming and inclusive of all people - people of all sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions, and also people of all races, ethnicities, economic backgrounds and classes, ages, relationship and family structures, abilities, body sizes, educational backgrounds, employment, political inclinations, and more. The Welcoming Congregation Program could be the vehicle to help congregations engage with difference - not by educating its members about people who are "different than us who are already here" in particular ways, but by putting practices into place to challenge the boundaries of belonging, ask hard questions about what identities and experiences are privileged at the cost of building deeper, more inclusive community for all the people who are currently there and many more who are not yet, and then take steps to make slow but steady cultural shifts.”



Race and Ethnicity Welcome and Inclusion

People of color and people marginalized by race and/or ethnicity had much to say about what UU congregations and communities can do to be welcoming and inclusive to people of color, multiracial people, and/or people with historically marginalized races/ethnicities. Many people encouraged ongoing conversations about race, white-privilege, and anti-racism, conversations that appear not to be happening in far too many congregations.



"Work to educate people about how their unquestioning belief in the normal-ness of their experience is not a universally shared experience. Help people understand that they can be unwelcoming without being a bad person... that we all are unwelcoming of others at times, and that we can all strive to make ourselves more open to accept others and more willing to change to make ourselves more open to the many various and unique cultures we each bring to the table."

Others talked about the importance of diverse staffs, anti-racism training for ministers, and involvement in social justice issues that affect people of color.

"Address how national outrages, such as the Trayvon Martin killing, immigration detention, or mass incarceration can be seen and acted upon within our Principles."

Even with the challenges, people of color also have hope, "My greatest hope and joy is as a participant at Finding Our Way Home [annual religious professionals of color gathering]. Change can happen. I've heard great things about Mosaic Makers [conference for congregations on the multicultural journey] and am looking forward to being a part of that initiative as soon as it is open to me."

The Experience of People of Color in Congregations

People of color, multiracial people, and/or people with historically marginalized races/ethnicities did not experience any instance of assault or physical violence in the past year. 4%, however, report a feeling of being physically unsafe, and 4% report sexual harassment, sexual assault, and/or unwelcome sexual advances, sexual jokes, etc.

Within the past year, 43% report "the feeling of being the only person like you / different from everyone else." In addition:

- 40% report microaggressions such as unintended slights, questions founded on untrue assumptions about identity/experience, unconscious racist language, subtle alienation, etc.
- 30% report the feeling of being tokenized due to your race or ethnicity
- 27% report any instance of being perceived to be a different race than you are
- 27% report the feeling of invisibility due to race or ethnicity, as though you don't exist



Racial/Ethnic Experience of Discrimination within Unitarian Universalism





People of color and people marginalized by race and/or ethnicity were asked how important a particular issue is to them and how they thought their congregation was doing in that area. Reported here are some of the findings in this area.





People with Disabilities Welcome and Inclusion

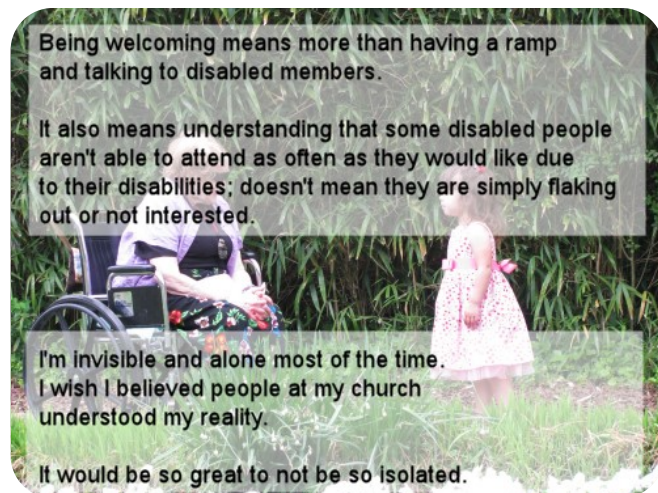
When able-bodied, able-minded people think about making their congregations more accessible, accessible bathrooms, ramps, elevators, large-print materials, assistive listening devices, sign-language interpretation, food choices, and scent-free areas are the items generally discussed. Congregations have passed the 50% marker (51%) in terms of congregations that have welcoming facilities and resources. Although that's still not adequate, it's moving closer to the goal of full access.

However, the number one disability identified by survey respondents was not related to physical disabilities. The number one disability identified was mental health issues, including anxiety disorders, mood disorders, psychotic disorders, co-occurring disorders, eating disorders, personality disorders, etc. 34% of all respondents report having one or more mental health issues. Of people with disabilities, this number skyrockets to 50%. From the comments, many congregations are ill-prepared to support people with mental health issues.

- *"As a person with Bipolar Disorder, it's difficult to find ways to discuss mental health without it becoming a giant trade off of 'horror stories,' even among the well intentioned. It's really important to also focus on the successes of people with mental illness as well as what they have 'endured' or 'survived.'"*
- *"We need some kind of 'welcoming congregation' style program for education surrounding mental health/mental illness/psychiatric challenges. Maybe call it 'understanding congregation'?"*
- *"I would love to see better inclusion for people with mental health disabilities. My anxiety and depression make it difficult to communicate and often to stay in a full service. If there was a safe way for me to leave a service but come back when I can and still participate that would be life changing!"*
- *"More mental health visibility, awareness, workshops and training for ALL people, not just ones with psychiatric challenges. Mental wellness is for everyone, not just people with psychiatric challenges."*

Although much work needs to be done in this area, thankfully, it appears some progress is being made.

"The UUA affiliated EqUUal Access group is in good hands and making great progress right now. We need to support them in any way we can. I'm a member of the hearing and mental health caucuses of EqUUal Access. The mental health caucus is doing wonderful things and has the potential to do even more."



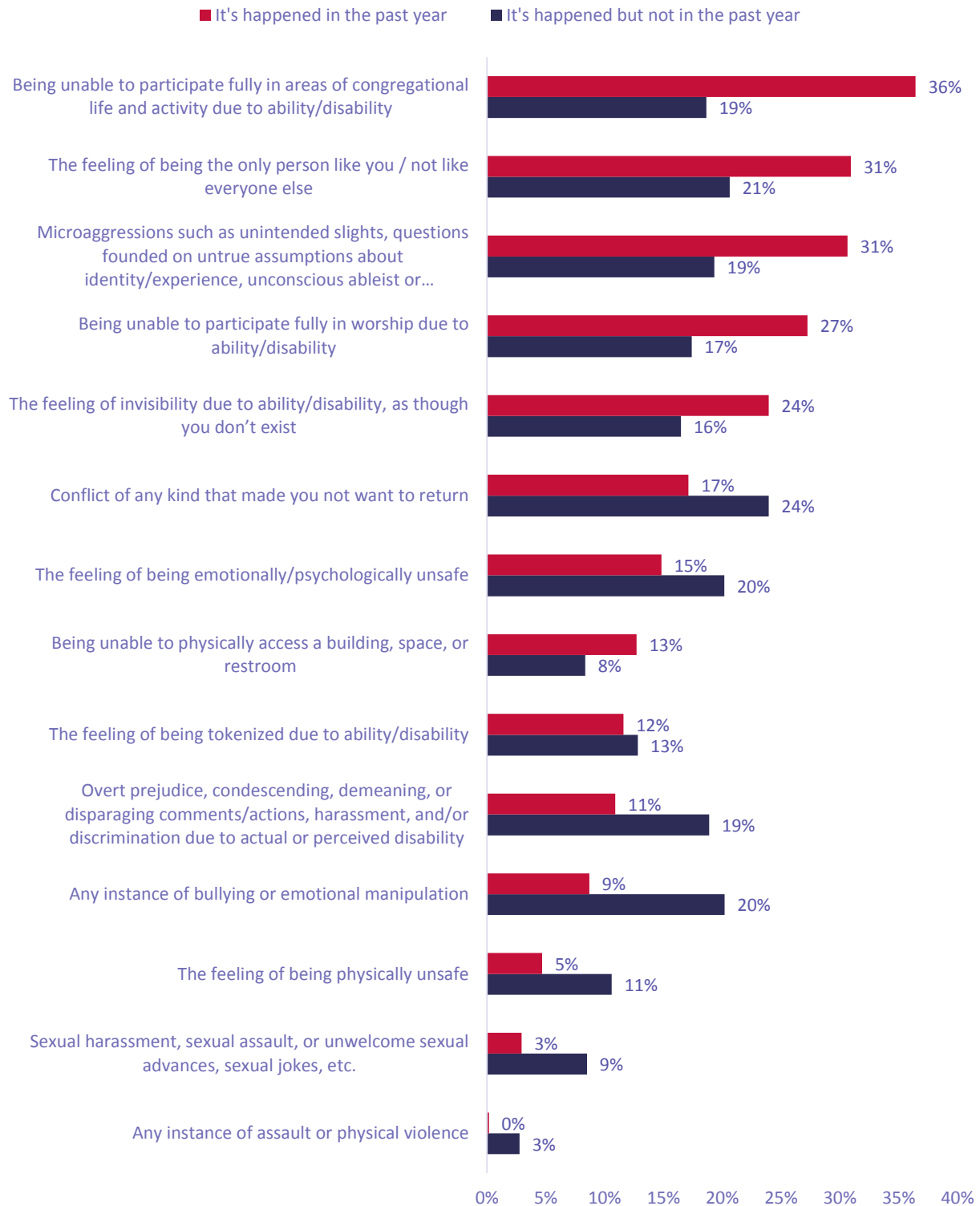
The Experience of People with Disabilities in Congregations

A major concern raised by people with disabilities of all types is that they can't participate fully in congregational life. Sometimes this means that can't get to services for lack of transportation, sometimes they don't feel well-enough to attend, and sometimes the facility (no ramp or elevator) or services, (no sign-language interpreter or assistive listening devices), makes it difficult or impossible for them to be in the room, or take in what's going on once they get there. Awareness of this possibility can make a huge difference in the list of person with disabilities. Arranging transportation, using a microphone, asking people what they need to fully participate to the level they would like can be life-changing to a person with disabilities.



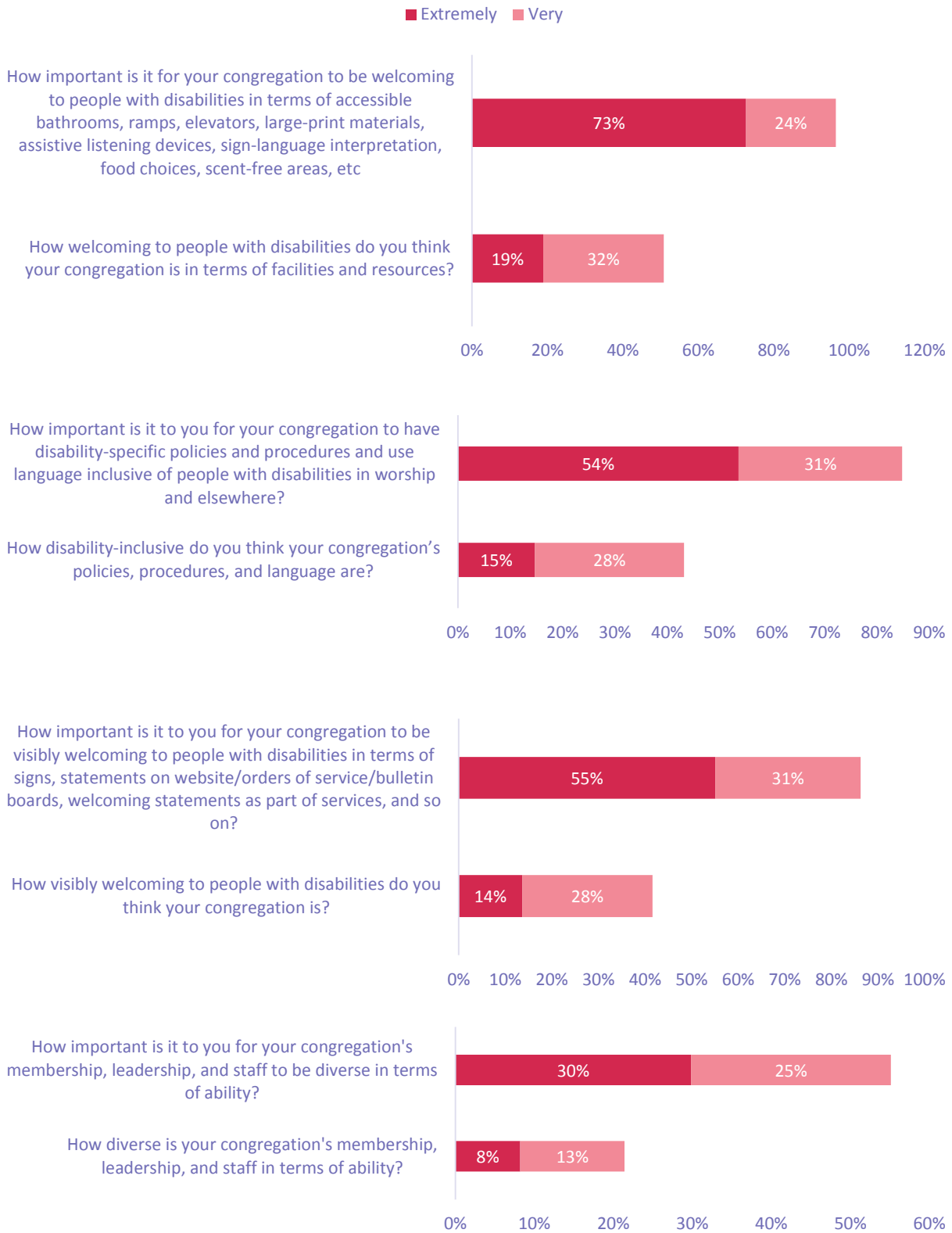
People with Disabilities Experience of Discrimination within Unitarian Universalism

This chart shows several instances where occurrences in the past year appear more frequent than in other years. Because being a person with a disability (or disabilities) is not always a life-long situation and might worsen over time, many people with disabilities might experience something for the first time that they have never experienced before.





People with disabilities were asked how important a particular issue is to them and how they thought their congregation was doing in that area. Reported here are some of the findings in this area.





REFLECTIONS ABOUT SHARING CIRCLES

Although it would have been much easier to produce a quantitative survey and leave it at that, the voices of the people who chose to participate have too often been silenced, so we didn't limit ourselves to checkboxes. In the survey, we asked thirteen open-ended questions and received thousands of comments. The reported comments themselves comprise a 350 page document. Excerpts from those comments appear in these pages and more appear in the full report online. But even written comments are limiting. Without allowing people to respond in person, something is lost. That's why we decided to incorporate an opportunity to connect directly with people, to give them the opportunity to share whatever was in their hearts.



At the conclusion of the survey, 578 people (38% of responders) indicated an interest in participating in a Sharing Circle. With a participation goal of 10% of the 578, we randomly selected 125 (21%) to invite to participate in a 90-minute telephone or video group experience. Almost 100 people accepted the invitation. Due to scheduling and other issues, sixty-one (11%) ultimately participated in one of fourteen circles we offered. We were touched with how hard people tried to make it fit their schedules. From several people, we heard, "Although I know it was random, I am so honored to have been invited."

We gave everyone a choice as to whether to participate by phone or video and whether to participate in a caucus or in an open circle. We offered seven telephone and seven video circles and five caucuses (one each with people of color, LGBQ people, transgender people, and two with people with disabilities).

In each circle, we asked five questions:

1. Please introduce yourself, what congregation you're from, including city and state/province, and what historically marginalized identities or experiences related to sexual orientation, gender identity, race or ethnicity you claim. Also, if you're comfortable, please name any physical, mental or emotional challenges that affect your participation in your congregation.
2. What steps has your congregation [or other UU community] taken to be inclusive of people with your identity(ies) that have been helpful in making you feel more connected?
3. How has your congregation [or other UU community] fallen short of making you feel welcomed and included?
4. Is there something you've been made aware of here in this session that you'd like to reflect on and/or is there something else you think it's important for to know?
5. In a word or a sentence, what is your dream for the future of Unitarian Universalism?

Over and over again, we heard validation from people about the experience. One said, "I loved hearing perceptions of other UUs." Another shared that she was new to Unitarian Universalism and had never talked with other UUs like herself (a transgender person) outside her congregation. "This made all the difference," she said.

The richness of that experience for the facilitators, and hopefully, for the participants too, cannot be overstated. People were gracious, attentive, open, trusting, and interested in what others had to say. A summary of the comments from the Sharing Circle participants are available as part of the full report online. Some have also been incorporated into this report.

It's only been 90 minutes! I can't believe that I have never felt more validated as a woman of color than by being in this group!



REFERENCES

ⁱ “Report and Recommendations: Common Vision Planning Committee to the Board of Trustees of the Unitarian Universalist Association,” January 1989. http://www.uua.org/documents/commonvision/1989_report_to_bot.pdf

ⁱⁱ 1992 Resolution of Immediate Witness: Racial and Cultural Diversity in Unitarian Universalism

ⁱⁱⁱ 1997 Business Resolution: Toward an Anti-Racist Unitarian Universalist Association

<http://www.uua.org/statements/statements/14244.shtml>

^{iv} 1997 Business Resolution: Accessibility for Persons with Disabilities

<http://www.uua.org/statements/statements/14236.shtml>