

F R O M

Mistakes and Miracles

CONGREGATIONS ON THE ROAD
TO MULTICULTURALISM

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CHAPTER SIX

To Answer the Call of Love

KARIN'S JOURNEY WITH FIRST PARISH
CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS

In covenant with one another
and all we hold sacred
we answer the call of love—
welcoming all people
into the celebration of life,
searching for truth and meaning,
and striving for justice and compassion,
to nourish and serve each other,
our community and our world.

—Covenant of First Parish in Cambridge,
adopted November 2003

WHEN I THINK BACK ON MY JOURNEY as a Unitarian Universalist over the past twelve years—a journey that is inextricably bound to my work toward an antiracist, multicultural future for our faith—I inevitably come away with a sense of bewilderment. Bewilderment that this work has become so central to my life, when I never went looking for it in the first place. It was never a conscious decision but was born of necessity. Perhaps none of us truly chooses to do this work; we are called to it. But in my case,

it arises from a place of deep pain, from a desperation to find healing, from a determination to make a place for myself within Unitarian Universalism. It is the journey of one person of color among the many who are trying to find their way in this faith, some of whom sadly never will. My journey takes me over large distances both literally and figuratively, as I move across the country, embark on the long process of discovering my identity as a Unitarian Universalist, and learn to claim my voice.

My story is also that of First Parish in Cambridge, where I have found my spiritual home. It is a community that has nurtured me, held me, challenged me, and, above all, loved me. Its journey toward multiculturalism begins long before I enter the picture, but from the moment I join the congregation, its vision becomes my vision. I will travel with it through painful stumbles and moments of grace, as we claim our mission and hold it through the loss of our ministers and more.

MY ENTRY INTO UNITARIAN UNIVERSALISM

In the days after September 11, 2001, my husband Cade and I make the decision to walk into our first Unitarian Universalist congregation. In a northern California suburb, one of the most ethnically diverse areas in the nation, this congregation—like so many in our denomination—is nearly completely white. Until I see an older Japanese couple (who, I later discover, rarely attend themselves), I'm not sure I will return.

But I do. As a lifelong atheist, a Unitarian Universalist church is the only kind of church I'm willing to set foot in. I'm still apprehensive about the whole religion thing (although I am married to a liberal United Methodist), but this church can hardly be called a church. It meets in a day-care center where congregants arrive early to set up folding chairs and a lectern. The minister speaks of

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God. We get involved in church life. The congregation is there for us during the birth of our daughters in 2003 and 2005. In 2006, I am elected to the Board.

With the congregation having shown some confidence in my leadership and judgment, I decide it's time to examine a question I've pondered for some time: Why, in such a diverse community, is our congregation so overwhelmingly white? I am unaware of the conversation that has been unfolding for decades in the larger movement; my experience of Unitarian Universalism is still limited to my congregation. Little do I know that asking this question will cause me to face the deepest questions of identity and belonging; challenge some of my closest relationships; and change forever the direction of my faith journey.

At a Board meeting, I express my desire to see my congregation reflect the diversity of its surroundings. In my naïveté, I still think this is a matter of outreach, and I'm eager to apply my skills of organization and execution. To my great surprise, a white gentleman, one of the patriarchs of the church, challenges me with “How are you going to get buy-in from everyone?” I'm confused. Isn't this what it means to be a Unitarian Universalist, to create a community where everyone feels welcomed? I feel uneasy, but I am so new to these conversations that I do not detect the layers underneath his seemingly reasonable question, and I am unable to articulate all that this vision represents for me.

I continue to encourage conversations, and while some members are supportive, murmurs begin to stir. Gradually, it becomes clear to me that some individuals actively oppose any effort to make the congregation more diverse. I hear comments like “I'm the last white person in my neighborhood,” or “I like coming to a place where most of the people are white.” Later, I will hear of someone who states that they go to church to escape diversity.

There is a misconception, I think, that being a person of color

articulately and with complete self-awareness on matters of race. But nothing in my life so far has prepared me for the onslaught of emotion that arises in these conversations. After all, I am trained as a scientist and engineer! I am a complete novice, unable to hear the fear that undergirds these statements that seem to disrespect my identity. I take each one of them personally, absorbing them like blows to my stomach.

My minister, a white man in his sixties, is unwilling or unable to facilitate conversations that might help us all bridge our differences, name our fears, and find redemption in vulnerability. He addresses my pain with urgency, but treats it as a personal pastoral matter. He encourages me to cut others some slack. “A lot of people find it difficult to be around those who are different than they are.”

I react first with confusion. Sure, it’s difficult, but isn’t that what Unitarian Universalism is all about? The goal of world community? Justice and equity in human relations? “Well,” he answers, “you can believe that everyone should get along but still prefer to be with people who are like you.” I’m confused, because he seems to be describing a Unitarian Universalism that is different from what I have always imagined it to be. And yet—he’s twice my age, and he has “Rev.” in front of his name. I tell myself that he’s got to know more about these things than I do. Maybe I *am* being oversensitive.

But my pain persists, and I begin looking elsewhere for understanding. I find allies in other congregations. I start reading books on antiracism, a term previously unknown to me. Through Beverly Tatum’s book *“Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?”* I learn of psychologist William Cross’s theory of racial identity development, involving the stages of pre-encounter, encounter, immersion/emersion, internalization, and internalization-commitment. And I realize that I’ve been in the pre-encounter stage for most of my life, feeling that I was simply

a flawed white person. My world turns upside down as I begin to grasp the depth of my internalized oppression. I am ready for liberation.

My transformation is rapid and life-changing. By this time, I am president of my congregation, but I can’t help feeling like I’m leaving them behind as I grow into new understandings of myself and my faith. I demand more of my minister than he can give. At one point he tells me that it can cause more problems to call attention to racist remarks than to simply let them go. I tell him, “I don’t want you to defuse my anger, I want you to share it!” Our conversations grow more heated. My congregation, once such a source of joy and validation, is no longer a haven.

And so I resign from my once beloved congregation, believing that my dream of a multicultural community will never be realized there. I fall into a deep depression; my performance at work suffers, and my job becomes one of the many casualties of the 2008 recession. I try other congregations farther from home, but nothing feels like a place where I can land. I ask myself the question that far too many Unitarian Universalists of color have considered: Is there really a place for me in this faith?

It is around this time that I become involved with DRUUM—Diverse and Revolutionary Unitarian Universalist Multicultural Ministries, a national organization for Unitarian Universalists of color. I attend my first DRUUM gathering at Starr King School for the Ministry, where I am warmly welcomed. Upon hearing my story, Rev. Danielle Di Bona tells me, “You know, every single person in this room has a story like yours. And what I tell myself is that I’m not going to let anyone else define my faith for me.”

These words remain with me as I explore what it means to be a Unitarian Universalist without a congregation. I help to establish the Pacific Central District’s Racial and Cultural Diversity Exploratory Task Force, along with Nancy and others. I end up

on the Steering Committee of the Asian/Pacific Islander Caucus of DRUUM.

Yet I long for a community where I can go week after week. Without a congregation, I am uncertain of my future in Unitarian Universalism.

HISTORY AT FIRST PARISH IN CAMBRIDGE

On the other side of the country, unbeknownst to me, First Parish in Cambridge has been considering the issue of diversity as well. Established in 1636, the congregation has been a bastion of the elite, having hosted great thinkers for centuries. It is among the churches that created the Cambridge Platform in 1648, a document that defined congregational polity. Ralph Waldo Emerson delivered his “American Scholar” oration at the meetinghouse in 1837. Harvard commencement ceremonies are held in the church until 1873.

Yet First Parish in Cambridge is also located in one of the most progressive areas of the nation. Cambridge, Massachusetts, has been a Sanctuary city since 1985. It is the first city in the United States to issue marriage licenses for same-sex couples and the first city to have an openly lesbian African-American mayor. In this vibrant urban community, the congregation’s desire to reflect the richness of its surroundings makes sense.

In October 2008, newly called minister Rev. Fred Small preaches a sermon entitled “Building the Beloved Community” in which he articulates the congregation’s desire for greater diversity. “I invite you to join me in a vision of First Parish in Cambridge as a multiracial, multicultural, justice-making congregation,” he says. “All we have to do is look around us at the faces in the pews and the pulpit to know we’ve got work to do. But it can be done. ¡Sí se puede!”

Fred is well aware of the magnitude of this endeavor.⁶ His sermon goes on, “[O]f more than a thousand UU congregations, you know how many are multiracial? Five. Not 5 percent. Five churches . . . Five multiracial UU congregations in the entire country. We can be the sixth!” Applause breaks out.

For Fred too, this journey has deep personal meaning. “I really found my vocation to antiracism at First Parish,” he explains. “Which is not to say that it didn’t exist before, but in many ways it had lain latent—not entirely dormant, but latent—for many years. And looking back, I think there was this terrible hunger that I felt for racial justice and racial healing, but like many of us I had despaired of it. . . . It was a beautiful match between [First Parish’s] need and my need.”

After embarking on what he calls “a crash course on how to do this”—including workshops at General Assembly led by the UUAs Taquiena Boston and Rev. Alicia Forde—Fred lays out some specific steps for First Parish to fulfill this vision. As a white, male, heterosexual minister, he encourages the congregation to consider calling a minister of color, citing one of the core principles of building multiracial Beloved Community: diversity in leadership. In December 2008, the Transition Team—previously established to identify staffing needs after the departure of Rev. Jory Agate, minister of religious education—recommends that First Parish hire a three-quarter-time director of religious education, a part-time youth coordinator, and a full-time minister who is of color, Latino/a, or multiracial. (The gender-inclusive form “Latinx” is not commonly used at this time.)

Funding, however, is a concern. Having previously employed only two ministers, can the congregation really afford to add the equivalent of another nearly full-time employee? Eileen Sullivan,

⁶ In this chapter we follow First Parish’s custom of referring to ministers by their first names, without titles.

then vice-chair of the Standing Committee—First Parish’s governing board—notes, “One of our biggest fears, I think, was getting over the financial aspects of it—that we could afford to do this. But hidden behind that, I think, were fears of, was this something we really wanted to do? Were we just saying we wanted to do it because it was the right thing to do, or was it really what was in our hearts? And as we went through the discussions, it became clear this was who we really wanted to be.”

With the support of the Standing Committee, Fred and stewardship chair Gina LaRoche launch a special campaign to raise funds for the new ministry. Within months, the congregation has pledged \$175,000, providing the Finance Committee and Standing Committee the assurance needed to endorse the new staffing. In February 2009, First Parish votes to call a minister of color through the Unitarian Universalist Association’s Diversity of Ministry Initiative, the same program through which John Crestwell was called to the Unitarian Universalist Church of Annapolis.

FINDING MY WAY TO CAMBRIDGE

With this decision to call a minister of color, it is time for First Parish to become serious about the work of congregational transformation. In April 2009, Fred leads a team of five congregants to the UUAs “Now Is the Time” conference on multicultural congregations in Tulsa, Oklahoma. It is by far the largest delegation at the conference. I am there too, representing no congregation but hoping to find the support I so desperately need. During a moment of sharing, I describe in general terms the pain I have felt trying to be a member of this faith.

At the conference’s finish, I share a car back to the Tulsa airport with five other people. One of them is Fred. As I say goodbye to him, he looks at me straight in the eye and asks, “Are you okay?” I answer that I’m going through a rough time, but I’ll be

all right. He responds, “Well, our flights don’t leave for three hours, so if you’d like to talk to a minister. . . .” I’m surprised by the offer—I’m not this man’s congregant, I don’t help pay his salary—but I decide to take him up on it.

And so in a quiet corner of the Tulsa airport, I tell Fred about all that has happened in the past year and a half with me, my former minister, and my former congregation. He tells me that he’s sorry. He says, “You are infinitely good. And—your minister is infinitely good.” With this utterly Universalist sentiment, he goes on to add that my minister missed an opportunity to learn from a mistake but that I did not. In Fred’s words, I find hope, forgiveness, and the beginning of what feels like healing. I know I will remember this conversation for the rest of my life.

Meeting Fred and other members of First Parish at the conference prompts me to visit the congregation’s website when I return home. Its commitment to becoming a multiracial, multicultural community is evident. I listen to sermons, read the newsletter, and learn about the congregation’s intent to call an associate minister of color. This sounds like the community I am looking for. Alas, I think, if only I lived in Cambridge.

As if hearing my lament, the universe responds. I have now been job hunting in California for months without results—and then, out of the blue, I am recruited for a position in the greater Boston area. The prospect of joining First Parish in Cambridge is now no longer a dream; it is a real possibility. I fly out a few days before my interview to worship there and talk to Fred, and the experience convinces me that First Parish could be my spiritual home. Cade and I, both graduates of MIT, discuss the idea of returning to the East Coast and decide it makes sense. Perhaps, I tell myself hopefully, the future of my Unitarian Universalism lies there.

I don’t get the job I interviewed for, but the seed has been sown. I tell my career counselor that I’m moving my job search to

Boston. Within two months, I land a position as an aerospace scientist at MIT Lincoln Laboratory. Gade and our daughters will remain in California for a few more months to sell the house and wrap up existing commitments. In September 2009, I board a one-way flight from San Francisco to Boston, free and ready for a fresh start.

HEALING THROUGH SERVICE

I have landed in fertile soil for growing multicultural community, yet deep wounds accompany my excitement. I face the conundrum of desperately wanting connection while knowing that my depression and disillusionment can lead me to extreme emotions that may be difficult for others to deal with. Over the next several years, the congregation's unfailing ability to hold me in my pain while giving me the chance to serve will be crucial in helping me find my path again.

Fred knows I'm hungry to do the work of multicultural transformation, and within two weeks of my arrival he invites me to join the nascent Transformation Team. The Standing Committee has chartered this team to coordinate the congregation's efforts toward a multiracial, multicultural, justice-making future. Despite my very limited experience with the congregation thus far, the invitation doesn't feel like tokenism. Over the years I've amassed a multitude of resources on multiculturalism; I know I can help the team. The congregation's commitment to this journey is the entire reason I'm here. Serving on, and later chairing, this Transformation Team becomes a significant part of my healing process.

When I join the Transformation Team, it is led by Chris McElroy, a white woman in her fifties, a professional psychologist, and vice-chair of the Standing Committee. We become fast friends and close colleagues. Over the course of its first year, the

Transformation Team will hold a multitude of events to stimulate conversations on race. We screen PBS's three-part documentary *Race: The Power of an Illusion* and follow it with facilitated discussion. We explore *The Princess and the Frog*, Disney's first movie to feature a Black princess. As I witness and participate in dialogue after dialogue, hear others' stories and share my own, my mind and heart open wide to possibility. I grow stronger in my faith and more confident of my place here in this congregation and in the larger movement.

On the Transformation Team, I can use my organizational skills as I meet my need for healing. As an Asian-American woman, I've been socialized to serve, taught that my worth as a person is directly proportional to what I do for others. I cannot feel at home in a place where I am only receiving; I must give as well. The Transformation Team is my vehicle, and my fellow members become some of my closest friends in the congregation.

Creating opportunities for the congregation to engage with issues of race is rewarding, to be sure. But even more valuable to me is having this multicultural group of strong white allies and people of color whom I trust so completely. Whatever I encounter in the world or in the congregation at large, I know this is a safe place where I can share both my pain and my joy. This knowledge gives me the courage to make myself vulnerable and to speak my truth. Gradually, I discover the power of telling my story.

The members of the Transformation Team bond deeply through heartfelt sharing at our meetings and through attending workshops and events together. One of these is the Leading Edge Conference, an annual gathering focused on multicultural justice making hosted by Middle Collegiate Church in New York City. At the closing of one of the conference sessions, Rev. Jacqui Lewis, senior minister of Middle Collegiate, sings from *Sweeney Todd*: "Nothing's gonna harm you, not while I'm around. . . ." Tears

stream down my face as I remember how alone I once felt, and how safe I feel now.

Later, sharing my reflections on the conference from the pulpit, I describe the burden of representation:

As an only child with no extended family in the United States, as an Asian American growing up in Kansas, as a woman with three physics degrees, and as a Unitarian Universalist person of color, my life has been characterized by solitude. As anyone who's ever been in an extreme minority knows, that solitude is accompanied by the responsibility, often unwanted, of defining the stereotype. . . . For my entire life, nearly every action I've taken, every major decision I've made, has been influenced by the feeling that the world is watching, ready to form their beliefs about an entire group by who I am and what I do.

I describe what it feels like, in the multiracial environment of the conference, to be relieved of that burden, and my desire to find that same relief within Unitarian Universalism. I speak of the internal conflict between my love for this faith and my constant questioning whether there really is a place for me in it. After the service, many congregants thank me for sharing my story, and I realize once again how important feeling heard is for the healing process.

ELEMENTS OF TRUST

One of my earliest encounters with the congregation is at a meeting led by Mandy Neff, First Parish's director of religious education (RE). The meeting is designed for parents and caregivers of children who will be participating in RE, and I decide to attend, even though my daughters—then four and six—have not yet moved to Cambridge. As the subject turns to welcome, one of the

other parents gushes about how warmly she has been received by the congregation. My experience has not been the same.

The truth is that in my first few weeks at First Parish, I haven't felt that welcomed at coffee hour and elsewhere. It isn't terrible, because I have the connections I've made before arriving at First Parish, but I've felt mostly ignored by the larger congregation. I want to share my experience too. I take a breath and say to the otherwise all-white group, "I actually haven't had that experience. I haven't felt very welcomed. And . . . I don't look like the rest of you."

It is a terrifying moment for me, bringing up the subject of race so early in my interactions with the congregation. Yet nothing bad happens. The room listens; some wonder with me whether race has been a factor, others claim that the congregation isn't all that good at welcoming in general, the other parent's experience notwithstanding. I hear no defensiveness or accusations of "playing the race card."

I will never really know whether it was race, or something else about me personally, or just the luck of the draw that caused me to be less warmly welcomed at first than the other woman. But that's not the point. The point is that we Unitarian Universalists have to be able to ask the question "Is this about race?" Sometimes it's not, but we must have these honest discussions. The next day, Mandy emails me to thank me for my courage in raising the topic. I feel heard, validated, and ever more convinced that everything will be okay.

This is not to say that First Parish is perfect or that micro-aggressions never happen. There is a white gentleman who tells me, "We're really enjoying our Asian granddaughters"—what am I supposed to say to that?—and who regularly greets any Asian newcomer with "ni hao!" ("hello" in Mandarin) even when they've explicitly said they're from a country other than China. I later have a bad experience in a covenant group when I propose

alternate methods of facilitation to help ensure that everyone's voice will be heard.

But the difference between these experiences and those in my previous congregation lies in the *leadership*. The (mostly white) professional staff and lay leaders I meet all seem to “get it,” so I can immediately find allies when I do experience something unpleasant. The active participation and education of such leaders is essential for a congregation to progress on the journey toward multiculturalism.

Conversations about multiculturalism in Unitarian Universalist settings frequently focus on worship style, particularly music. For me, however, the most salient issue has always been a difference in “power distance,” the manner in which a culture distributes power and the degree to which people accept unequal distribution of power.⁷ Asian cultures tend to be “High Power Distance” cultures, in which hierarchy is natural and expected. By contrast, the United States is a “Low Power Distance” culture, where power is distributed (or at least expected to be distributed) more equally. The dominant culture of Unitarian Universalism is also Low Power Distance, as manifested in our extreme individualism and distrust of authority. These two traits, along with exceptionalism, constitute the faith’s “Trinity of Errors,” as Rev. Fred Muir puts it in his essay in *Turning Point: Essays on a New Unitarian Universalism*.

For me, the consequence of being raised in a High Power Distance culture is that I place immense trust in authority. While this might seem foreign or distasteful to many Unitarian Universalists, I thrive in a well-defined hierarchy. I look to my elders to take care of me, and in return I offer respect and the presumption of correctness. I believe that my experience with my former

⁷ In chapter 7, Nancy offers a more complete explanation of Rev. Dr. Eric Law’s use of the concept of power distance.

minister was exacerbated by my utter trust in him, so that when I felt he was no longer on my side, it was a betrayal beyond understanding.

It is perhaps a mistake—albeit one I cannot help making—as well as a symptom of internalized racism and sexism, to grant so much power to an older, white, male minister. But at First Parish, it seems to work. With Fred at the helm, enthusiastically championing antiracism and multiculturalism, I feel protected and empowered. Much of what I am able to achieve is a direct result of the feeling of safety that his ministry provides.

MINISTERS OF COLOR

First Parish in Cambridge recognizes the importance of diversity in leadership—one of the Common Threads we describe in chapter 2. Over the next several years, we will call and hire a number of ministers and ministerial interns of color. Though the work of transformation belongs to us, we know these ministers will both challenge us and bring many gifts to help guide us on this journey.

In March 2010, the congregation votes to call Rev. Lilia Cuervo, a native of Colombia and former extension minister for the Spanish-Speaking Ministries (SSM) at the First Unitarian Church of San José, California. Her selection as the first Latin-American minister ever settled in the nearly four centuries of First Parish’s history makes headlines in Boston newspapers.

I am elated. From my own experiences attending SSM as a resident of the San Francisco Bay Area, I know Lilia to be a deeply competent, warm, kind individual. I am excited to see what she will bring to her ministry at First Parish. And as a language lover and fluent Spanish speaker, I’m eager to explore multilingual congregational life.

When Lilia arrives in the fall, she is joined by new First Parish intern Elizabeth Nguyen, a queer Vietnamese American and

lifelong Unitarian Universalist in her second year at Harvard Divinity School. The experience of having such a diverse ministry team is delicious. Seeing these different faces in the pulpit, tasting the multiplicity of cultural elements in worship—here is a multicultural Unitarian Universalism that I never could have imagined. It touches my soul in ways I have not expected.

Lilia brings to First Parish in Cambridge her warmth, scholarship, and passion for Unitarian Universalism, along with a culture different from that of most congregants. She leads the congregation in a celebration of the Mexican tradition of Día de los Muertos (Day of the Dead), where we transform our altar into an explosion of colorful *papel picado* and paper flowers surrounding photographs of loved ones who have passed. Congregant after congregant comes forward to share their memories and deliver tributes.

Spanish becomes a significant part of worship. Fred or Lilia greets newcomers with a bilingual welcome, and congregants sing the children to their classes in both English and Spanish. One hymn in every worship service is taken from *Las voces del camino*, the Spanish-language hymnal based on the work of Lilia and members of San José’s Spanish-Speaking Ministries years ago. The congregation begins reciting the words of our congregational covenant in Spanish—translated by Lilia—as well as in English, every Sunday morning:

In covenant with one another
and all we hold sacred
we answer the call of love—
welcoming all people
into the celebration of life,
searching for truth and meaning,
and striving for justice and compassion,
to nourish and serve each other,
our community and our world.

En convenio mutuo
y con todo lo que consideramos sagrado
respondiendo al llamado del amor—
invitamos a todos a la celebración de la vida,
buscamos la verdad y el sentido del ser,
y nos esforzamos para alcanzar la justicia y la compasión,
para apoyarnos y servirnos mutuamente,
a nuestra comunidad y a nuestro mundo.

While not everyone embraces these changes, for the most part people are willing to try and to learn.

The experience of hearing stories from the pulpit that resonate with my own, from people whose background recalls my own, is new and deeply meaningful. I have never worshiped in a congregation with a ministerial intern, never imagined seeing an Asian American in the pulpit. Elizabeth’s presence at First Parish shatters my assumptions about ministry and the identities of people who enter it.

Asian Americans often struggle with not feeling “Asian enough,” but being both Unitarian Universalist and Asian means I must navigate this insecurity in my church, as well as in the wider world. Because there are so few of us, I have felt like I have to be some archetype who speaks Mandarin, knows about Buddhism, and celebrates the Lunar New Year. In fact, I know very little about any established religion, and my best language other than English is Spanish. Yet sometimes I have felt that I will be accepted as a nonwhite person only if I conform to the Asian stereotype—only if I can provide European-American Unitarian Universalists with the “cultural experience” that lets them feel they are embracing diversity.

In 2010 at First Parish, Elizabeth begins her sermon on Lunar New Year by teaching us how to say “Happy New Year” in Vietnamese: “Chúc mừng nam moi!” she begins, and then she goes on, “Now here’s the tricky bit: That’s all the Vietnamese I know. Those

four words. . . . And this is what is hard: that even to say Happy New Year requires a confession of assimilation on my part.”

Hearing Elizabeth express the same sentiment I’ve struggled with my whole life brings tears to my eyes. With my less-than-perfect Taiwanese and Mandarin and my fragmentary knowledge of my heritage, I, too, wonder what I have lost through my efforts to fit in. I have never dreamed of hearing this experience articulated so clearly from a Unitarian Universalist pulpit.

There are challenges, too, that come with calling a minister of color. Some congregants find Lilia’s accent difficult to understand, and race and culture complicate criticism of ministers who must already meet the demands of many. Carol Lewis, First Parish’s congregational administrator, recalls, “The most uncomfortable things for me were some of the comments around ‘I can’t understand her when she preaches. She doesn’t do this, she doesn’t do that.’ The comments were, as I perceived them, culturally or racially motivated.”

Lilia and I also clash on the language that is used to describe the ongoing work of the congregation. While she is enthusiastic about multiculturalism, she is less keen on the word *antiracism*. For her, the word carries memories of conflict, of good white people being called racists and becoming alienated. Yet for me the word carries strength and connotes active resistance to injustice. I am unwilling to lose it, fearful that *multiculturalism* is not enough, that without a focus on antiracism the celebrations of different cultures will remain superficial. In one of my less faithful moments, I accuse Lilia of throwing people of color under the bus, to which she retorts that “some people” say I play the victim. I struggle with wanting to support my minister of color and yet needing her to understand the language I speak. We remain in covenant, but sometimes the chasm between us feels wide indeed.

Toward the end of Lilia’s ministry at First Parish in December 2014, I ask her what she wishes she had known in 2010. She

does not hesitate. “People expected me to be much more perfect than was realistic. Regardless of how long I’ve been doing this, how much I thought I understood about interactions, it’s different when you are a congregant versus when you are a minister. As a minister, I didn’t have as much room to make mistakes, make comments, share my own pain.”

CHANGES IN WORSHIP

Gloria Korsman, former chair of the Standing Committee, describes a key principle that the congregation learned during the tenure of Rev. Anita Farber-Robertson, First Parish’s interim minister before Fred’s arrival. “We can’t just keep doing the same worship service the way we always did. We had to be more willing to share cultural space and let the people who come participate in shaping what that looks like.” If congregations seek more diversity in the pews, they must also examine whom their style of worship serves and whom it does not serve.

For Unitarian Universalist congregations, inclusive worship usually means moving away from our traditional Protestant-based liturgy to more embodied celebration, including music and arts from different cultures and new modes of expression. Gordon Dragt, former minister of Middle Collegiate, urges us to “transform the worship service into a worship celebration.”

Fred and Lilia are up to the task. As a folk singer-songwriter, Fred brings song-leading skills to his ministry, and it quickly becomes a regular practice at First Parish to sing one song from outside our hymnal, often accompanied by clapping. Lilia introduces the practice of body prayer and encourages dancing in the aisles. Our worship leaders encourage us to hold hands during the benediction.

These changes are challenging for some, on both a personal and an institutional level. Some people will leave the church

because of them. For me, singing without instrumental accompaniment and with bodily expression brings back memories of being ridiculed as a child. Moreover, I am a classically trained musician with admittedly narrow musical tastes. But I know that multiculturalism means embracing forms of worship that may be uncomfortable for me but deeply meaningful to another person. It is my job to stretch too. In time, having practiced Sunday after Sunday for years, I have built confidence in my singing and clapping to the point that I no longer feel self-conscious about it—and this is a great gift.

Even as these changes become part of First Parish's new worship style, the ministers and Transformation Team are aware of the danger of cultural misappropriation: using the traditions of minority cultures without their consent, poorly, or disrespectfully. Fred tries different ways to avoid such misappropriation. When leading songs from the African-American spiritual tradition, for instance, he is always careful to contextualize them with an explanation of their history and meaning.

When the Music Committee plans to bring in Linda Brown-San Martin, a renowned gospel choir leader, to lead the choir and other interested participants in what has now become an annual Gospel Sunday, Charlene Galarnecau—a white woman—raises the question of what it means for a largely white congregation to sing gospel music. The Transformation Team invites her into a conversation with members of the Music Committee to share her concerns. "For the most part, people were open, but there was one person there who, I felt, was fairly condescending, making fun of language I used. I used the language of cultural misappropriation and he said he didn't buy it. But Fred responded. He was really affirming. There is commitment, even if we stumble along the way." Charlene sings on Gospel Sunday and will later join the Transformation Team herself.

Peggy Kraft, a white woman in her mid-forties who loves Gospel Sunday, describes some of the challenges. "Some of it is that humanists don't want to hear 'Jesus' and 'God.' And some of it has the high potential of being caged in white New England: 'We don't clap, we don't move, this is not how we do church,' and therefore is a value judgment about the way other people do church. And it makes some people very uncomfortable. It bums me out, actually. . . . I'm proud of Gospel Sunday. I love Gospel Sunday. I like to feel the music inside. I'm glad we do it anyways."

Music and the arts are not the only elements of worship that change. The staff commits to diversity in all its worship leaders, both ministers and worship associates. Fred explains, "Mainly, I think that worshipers need to see consistent leadership of color, Latino/a, in worship. It could be, if you had a diverse team of worship associates. . . . And when I was in Cambridge we did our best to do that. . . . Hey, look, I'm a white guy, but my hunch is that if you're a person of color and you walk into the church and all you see is white folks up front, that's a very different experience from seeing people of color in leadership."

To that end, Fred, in consultation with Standing Committee chair Susan Shepherd, makes an explicit decision to hire only ministerial interns of color. After Elizabeth Nguyen's departure, First Parish will hire Kenny Wiley, who becomes a leader in Black Lives of Unitarian Universalism, and then Seanan Fong, a Chinese American. Rev. Mykal Slack, an African American, will also join the staff as worship leader and community life coordinator. The worship team makes an effort to recruit worship associates from a variety of backgrounds.

Seanan recalls his realization that all the interns at First Parish are people of color. "It did bother me at first. . . . I'm not really bothered by it now, because I kind of understand the mission and

understand the importance of having ministers of color—that having ministers of color in the pulpit is really central to exemplifying [our mission]. It’s hard to do that with a monocultural pulpit.”

I have both committed and been a victim of tokenism. For those of us engaged in this work, sometimes our good intentions get ahead of us. Sometimes our desire to appear nonracist overshadows our knowledge that there are no shortcuts to the goal of Beloved Community. It is an easy trap to fall into, all the more because people’s perceptions of any given situation can differ so widely.

For me, relationship and mission—two of our Common Threads—are the key to authentic invitation. When I’m asked by a worship leader to take a place in the pulpit, I know that together we are part of a larger goal, and I’m happy to bring what I can to the table. If seeing me in leadership can help others feel more welcome—as the Japanese couple did for me in my first congregation years ago—then it is a role I play with gratitude. I know that my identity is one aspect of who I am that provides value to my congregation.

MOVING FROM MINISTER-CENTERED TO MISSION-CENTERED

At the beginning of 2011, the Transformation Team turns to another important aspect of our journey, a revision of our mission statement. As in many congregations, our mission statement has stood for years without examination; few people even know what it is. And despite First Parish’s long-stated desire for diversity and its visible steps in that direction, the congregation has never formally voted to make this goal a part of our identity. This is an opportunity to articulate our purpose within and outside our walls.

The Transformation Team convenes a series of workshops titled “Mission Matters.” Participants look at dozens of photographs of congregational life and are asked to choose the ones most significant to them and explain why. The conversations are heartfelt, and sometimes unexpectedly emotional. Using these expressed priorities as a guide, the Transformation Team authors a draft that is then presented to the congregation for further input.

At our semiannual meeting in June 2011, First Parish votes to approve its new mission statement:

Awakened by worship,
nourished by tradition,
and united by love,
we strive to create
a multicultural, spirit-filled community
that works for justice,
fosters spiritual curiosity and faith formation,
shares joy, heals brokenness,
and celebrates the sacred in all.

We welcome people of all beliefs, ages, classes,
colors, ethnicities, abilities, sexual orientations,
and gender identities and expressions.

In this process I came across a picture of some congregants and me sitting behind a table for our Social Justice Council. While I have always been an activist on some level, landing at First Parish in Cambridge inspires me to focus on the issues most important to me, sharing energy, wisdom, and passion with others. Nowhere is this more evident than in my work with immigration, where I am a founding member of the Immigration Task Force. This group later changes its name to Beyond Borders—Sin Fronteras to avoid the militaristic overtones of the term *task force*.

The most valuable thing I have learned about social justice as a Unitarian Universalist is the need to be accountable to stakeholders—to follow the leadership of those most affected by the policies we seek to change. At First Parish, this manifests in a number of partnerships with community organizations like Centro Presente, an immigrant advocacy organization operated and led primarily by Central Americans. With them and with other First Parish congregants, I find myself demonstrating at the Massachusetts State House and calling legislators, reaching a level of commitment and empowerment I have not previously experienced.

While conversations about race and culture are commonplace when discussing immigration, my congregation makes a commitment to pay attention to these issues in other areas of its justice work too. Our Environmental Justice Task Force works with organizations such as Alternatives for Community and Environment (ACE), whose mission statement says that it “builds the power of communities of color and low-income communities in Massachusetts to eradicate environmental racism and classism, create healthy, sustainable communities, and achieve environmental justice.” First Parish in Cambridge becomes a reliable presence at the Mother’s Day March of the Louis D. Brown Peace Institute, which exists to support and heal families affected by homicide. Later, we join the Greater Boston Interfaith Organization, comprising dozens of congregations of diverse religions and cultures working together to promote the public good.

Laura Heath-Stout, a white young adult at First Parish who has also been active in Beyond Borders—Sin Fronteras and the Transformation Team, describes the value of having a community dedicated to antiracism and social justice: “I really feel that the relationships I’ve built with people in these groups strengthen me to do this work elsewhere. . . . I have this congregation to come to, people to ask for advice and support.” I too find that

being grounded at First Parish both inspires me and enables me to take greater risks in challenging myself and the world around me.

On July 29, 2010, I join four other members of First Parish, along with Unitarian Universalists across the country—including co-author Nancy—in traveling to Phoenix to protest SB 1070, the racist anti-immigrant bill. As we march in the streets, provide support to those arrested, and sing outside the Fourth Avenue jail, I feel a deepening of my faith, a more profound experience of what being a Unitarian Universalist calls me to do. The following year, I embark on an eye-opening, life-changing weeklong trip to the Arizona-Sonora border, where I walk through the desert and speak to migrants and Border Patrol officers. Through these transformative experiences, my home community of First Parish in Cambridge is there supporting me, thinking of me, and waiting to hear what I bring home. In 2012, our congregation sends a record number of people to Justice General Assembly in Phoenix.

Our mission of creating a spirit-filled, multicultural community that works for justice is realized both outside and within our walls. In 2011, the Transformation Team brings to the congregation the UUA antiracism curriculum “Building the World We Dream About,” written by Dr. Mark Hicks. We invite as initial participants the ministers, the Standing Committee, the Social Justice Council, and members of the Transformation Team. When a whopping nineteen out of twenty-three busy leaders accept the invitation to participate in this yearlong, twice-monthly program, I realize with surprise and delight how widely this commitment to antiracism and multiculturalism is shared.

Mandy Neff, director of religious education, explains her role in working to realize First Parish’s mission. In examining children’s programming, she says, “one of the things I tried hard to do is make sure we have a diversity of voices in who tells the story and who the story is about. . . . The opportunity to tell the stories I want to tell is always coming up at First Parish, and so it’s a

wonderful place to be able to do this work—because it's not just me or some little team of teachers talking about it, it's the whole congregation thinking about how we constantly refresh this for ourselves.”

Being an antiracist and multicultural congregation involves more than the racial makeup of the people in its pews, more than offering educational programming. At First Parish, we must also examine our congregational norms and expectations, recognizing that *process* can be as important as *task*. Two evolutions in congregational committee work signify this understanding: For years, I have had the Transformation Team do an extended, guided check-in—sometimes taking up as much as a third of the meeting. We pose such questions as “Which of your identities has felt particularly alive in the past month?” or “What is something for which you are particularly grateful today?” This practice of deep sharing and vulnerability engenders the trust that is absolutely necessary for the work of transformation. Over time, other committees, including the Standing Committee and Social Justice Council, adopt the practice as well.

Rev. Dr. Eric H. F. Law, an Episcopal priest and founder of the Kaleidoscope Institute, has written extensively on multiculturalism and spirituality. In his book *The Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb*, he describes a process called Mutual Invitation. In this process, the conversation facilitator invites someone to share first and then to invite by name another person to speak. That person may choose to speak or pass, but in either case, they will invite the next person to share. This process continues until everyone has been invited. The Kaleidoscope Institute’s website explains,

Because there will be participants with different perceptions of power, facilitation that exclusively uses the “volunteer style” of interaction that favors those from individualist cultures excludes those whose interactions favor a collectivistic cul-

ture. . . . It is important to remember that in some cultural settings, group members will not speak up in a discussion unless they have been invited. The reasons for this may be gender- or age-related or other traditions embedded deeply in one’s culture.

There may be those who are uncomfortable singling a person out to share. For them it may feel like when they were a child and were being selected (or not selected) to play on a team. There are two safeguards built into the process that can assuage people’s fears. One: each person invited has three options: share, pass for now (which means “I am not ready, please come back to me”), or pass (which means “I do not choose to share on this topic”). However, no matter which option is selected, the one invited has the privilege of inviting another person in the group by *name*. Two: Throughout the process, the invitation to speak passes back and forth, and no one is left out of the process.

First Parish uses Mutual Invitation from time to time, and I find it deeply empowering. I have grown up in a collectivistic culture where I have been taught to look out for others’ wishes before my own and not to speak out for myself but rather to wait for others to invite my contributions. As a result, I often find myself silent in large groups when I am not in a designated leadership role. When I do speak, I am anxious about talking up too much time or space. While some find it challenging, Mutual Invitation gives me the permission I am always waiting for and often do not explicitly receive in other facilitation processes.

Under the sponsorship of the Transformation Team, in 2011 I began a twice-monthly Spanish conversation group at First Parish. Both beginning speakers and native speakers attend. For non-native speakers like myself, it is an opportunity to hone our language skills, but I quickly realize that it is a spiritual practice as well. The ability to express oneself eloquently and effortlessly

is a privilege that many take for granted. The struggle to articulate exactly what I mean in another language is an important reminder of the challenges that many immigrants face daily.

At the 2013 General Assembly in Louisville, members of the Spanish Conversation group, as well as Fred and Lilia, present an all-Spanish workshop entitled “Comunidades sin Fronteras.” Toward the end of the workshop, a Latina comes to the microphone and explains, her voice choked with emotion, that although she has been attracted to Unitarian Universalism for its work on social justice, she has never experienced its spirituality until today. I am immensely proud to belong to a congregation that pushes the boundaries of what is possible in our faith.

In the summer of 2013, the acquittal of George Zimmerman for the murder of Trayvon Martin stuns the nation. The Transformation Team and Social Justice Council hold a healing session for congregants to share what is in their hearts. Since the subject is so sensitive, Marcia Hams, chair of the Social Justice Council, and I begin with Taizé music as people enter and then light a chalice and remind the congregation of our Covenant of Right Relations, adopted in 2010:

In the spirit of right relations, we covenant to:

- acknowledge and celebrate our differences
- listen compassionately, speak respectfully, and take responsibility for our actions and feelings
- speak from personal experience, use “I” statements, and avoid judgment, generalizations, and offering unsolicited advice
- deal directly with others to resolve conflict
- strive to stay in relationship through conflict
- fulfill our commitments, complete our tasks, admit our mistakes, praise each other’s successes, and say “thank you”
- ask for help when needed and give help as able
- assume the good intentions of others

We remind the group that everyone’s experiences are different and deserve to be heard and to refrain from judgment, debate, or blame. At the conclusion of the conversation, we reiterate our commitment to justice and to each other. I believe that our abilities to listen deeply, to create and hold space for a range of emotions, and to recognize how events affect different groups of people differently mark important moves toward the transformation we seek.

TRANSITIONING OUT OF LEADERSHIP

By the end of 2013, I have chaired or co-chaired the Transformation Team for over three years. It has been a remarkable experience, though not without its challenges. With this work such a visible priority for the congregation, and our ministers and director of religious education so deeply involved in it, some congregants murmur that the Transformation Team is “too powerful.” During the writing of this book, I discover that this sentiment is more common than I have realized. LeLaina Romero, a queer multiracial Latina who also serves on the team, points out that the Transformation Team is also the only committee of the congregation that is half people of color. Is this relevant to the accusations of being too powerful?

By 2013, I also start to feel that I need to rebalance my life. Since moving to Cambridge, I have dedicated so much of my time and energy to church and justice work, often at the expense of family and career. It has felt necessary as part of my healing process, but perhaps that is no longer true. While I am lucky to have a stay-at-home husband who ably cares for our young daughters, I feel that I’ve missed too much of their childhood. My career has taken a number of turns, including another layoff, but I’ve finally landed in the natural language processing field, a longtime desire of mine as it blends my technical and linguistic

skills. Perhaps it's time to consider pulling back from congregational work.

I declare my intent to step down from all leadership roles by the spring of 2014. However, an incident occurs that causes me to leave earlier. Occasionally in the past several years, congregants both inside and outside the Transformation Team have raised the issue of other oppressions. What about LGBTQIA concerns? What about access and inclusion? Why doesn't the Transformation Team become an agent for education and change in these areas too?

At a meeting near the end of 2013, this conversation intensifies, and I handle it badly. The truth is that I am afraid. I'm afraid of losing our focus on antiracism. We are, after all, only a handful of people, and I fear we don't have the time to take on education in these other areas as well, especially since not all of us have expertise in them. I'm more afraid, though, of losing this group of tight-knit, trusted allies and people of color. Unintentionally, I have led this team to become not only a working committee but also a sort of covenant group, where deep sharing and listening have led to the kind of mutual trust so necessary for tackling issues as charged as race. I'm fearful of losing the one place where I feel totally safe to express my greatest joys and disappointments.

But it has never been all about me. One member says she feels silenced by our unwillingness to expand our scope. I'm panicked and defensive as the discussion heats up. By the end of the evening, raised voices and hurt feelings have dashed any hope of coming to agreement. Over the next several days, as I contemplate what appears to be a sea change in the Transformation Team's direction, I feel I can no longer be the one to lead it. I contact each of the members, apologize, and announce my intention to step down from the team.

My relationship with each individual is preserved, but I regret my handling of the situation and my inability to stay at the table. After a period of dormancy and several more conversations, the Transformation Team chooses not to expand its scope but to name the existence of other oppressions and acknowledge the need for intersectional analysis. Its new charter reads,

First Parish has adopted in its mission the challenge of transforming into a multiracial, multicultural, justice-making congregation. Because we recognize the unique role and impact of racism in the histories and present situations of our country, of Cambridge, and of Unitarian Universalism, our Standing Committee has charged the Transformation Team with the role of facilitating this process.

To that end, the Transformation Team creates space to challenge racism and to educate ourselves and our congregation about racism and multiculturalism. While this is our focus, we also recognize that racism intersects with other forms of oppression that many of us experience. . . .

The work of transformation is bold, joyful, and deeply enriching. We acknowledge that all of us at First Parish are imperfect and often wounded. Yet we commit ourselves to this work, to continue to heal ourselves, each other, and our world. Although pain and discomfort may come up in the course of transformation, we maintain hope and joy in the process.

As these changes unfold, I realize that the mistake I made wasn't my point of view in itself but rather my failure to hear and validate others' opinions. I, too, have much to learn in this work. A few weeks later, Nancy invites me into partnership to write this book, and it is here that I continue my learning and contribute to the work of multiculturalism.

DEPARTURE OF OUR MINISTERS

The church year of 2014–15 sends First Parish into a time of enormous transition. In the fall, Rev. Lilia Cuervo announces her resignation as associate minister. Lilia's departure comes as a surprise and disappointment to me. Despite our conflicts, we have always loved each other, and she has brought so much to the congregation. Already involved in writing this book, I ask for an interview before we must begin the period of noncontact required when a minister leaves a congregation. She seems at peace: "I'm happy. Mistakes were made on both sides. But I think we ended up in a good place. I hope the next person is what you need to get to the next level."

Yet First Parish's finances suggest that there will be no next person. We have hoped that calling a minister of color would help us to grow enough that we could support the position with our regular operating budget after the special funding ran out. But while our congregation has grown substantially in some ways—maturing as an organization, deepening in mission—numerical growth and a corresponding increase in pledges are not among them. For now, First Parish will not be replacing its associate minister.

While this news is a disappointment, congregational life forges on. Under the leadership of Standing Committee chair Susan Shepherd, First Parish engages in a discernment process for a proposal by Harvard's Phillips Brooks House to transform our basement—at that time rented by a local theater group—into a youth homeless shelter. After two years of laying the groundwork, the vote passes in the spring of 2015. First Parish has, once again, taken another large step toward living its mission.

Then, in mid-June, Rev. Fred Small abruptly announces his decision to resign at the end of September in order to pursue climate justice full time. I am shocked and devastated beyond

words. For nearly six years, Fred has been one of the most significant figures in my life, serving as both pastor and colleague. I cannot imagine doing the work of congregational transformation without him; in fact, I can hardly contemplate being a Unitarian Universalist without him as my minister.

With my husband and daughters gone for most of the summer, I depend extensively on my relationships with other congregants to process my grief and disbelief. In fact, all of us depend on each other, gathering to process our feelings, doing the work that needs to be done for the congregational transition, reminding each other that the congregation is strong and that our identity does not depend on any individual minister. We rally around new Standing Committee chair Peggy Kraft, whose job is now very different from what she has imagined it would be. We are there with each other and for each other. By the time September arrives, I have achieved some measure of calm and optimism.

FORGING AHEAD

The Standing Committee hires as interim minister Rev. Clyde Grubbs, a highly experienced minister and founding member of DRUUMM with decades of experience in antiracism, multiculturalism, and antioppression. I have known Clyde for years, and I feel great relief at this news. Having Clyde as our minister gives me confidence that our work will continue even in the absence of Fred and Lilia. I feel I can finally relax into his leadership. Clyde, who identifies as Texas Cherokee, will be joined in his second year by Rev. Danielle Di Bona, of Wampanoag and Italian descent.

And the work continues. Clyde leads us in learning about the Doctrine of Discovery, by which Christian European nations justified the colonization of indigenous lands. The Doctrine of Discovery was repudiated by the UUA General Assembly in 2014.

Under the leadership of Marcia Hams, a white lesbian in her sixties, and Rashid Shaikh, who identifies as an Indian Muslim, the Transformation Team continues to provide opportunities for discussions about race, including screening the film *Cracking the Codes* and hosting a conversation with Black Lives Matter leaders as well as white allies. Attendance at these events is higher than ever.

I recall the words of a stewardship consultant who once said that leadership in congregations consists of groups in concentric circles, and that the more permeable the boundaries between the circles, the healthier the congregation. As I decide it's time to have a less visible role in the congregation's work toward antiracism and multiculturalism, I'm grateful that our mission has been so fully integrated into our identity that living it out depends on neither individual ministers nor individual laypeople.

Clyde leads First Parish through a number of organizational and governance changes that enable us to move forward more effectively. "For me, multicultural transformation is about becoming a democratic community that is inclusive. I had the impression that First Parish was not owning its democracy and empowering the leaders that it chose to be its leaders to help them make decisions," he explains. Our move toward new models of governance enables both the Board and staff to better act in service of our mission. When the Standing Committee wants to hang a large Black Lives Matter banner on the front of the church, it is empowered to make the decision after inviting congregational input rather than needing to call an entire meeting for a congregational vote.

Our understanding of congregational transformation has evolved too. We talk less about being more diverse (which is sometimes called "browning the pews") and more about being antiracist and antioppressive. Rashid describes his own evolution: "Some of what I have realized is that for a while I had a very naïve notion of transformation—that transformation would reflect itself

with how many brown bodies we had in the pews. I have now appreciated, I hope very deeply, that that's not the way to think about transformation. What we mean by transformation is something much much broader . . . a lot more active engagement with the communities around us, working with the communities, working with ourselves, which is working *within* ourselves." Diversity may be a byproduct of our progress, but it should not be the end goal in itself.

We also continue expanding our understanding of multiculturalism and antioppression beyond race and ethnicity to include gender, sexual orientation, and ability. It is now common to share gender pronouns during introductions in groups, and there are more conversations on welcoming those living with mental illness and physical disabilities. Though we have further to go in some of these areas, we are now better able to recognize and speak about intersectionality.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Throughout the course of our interviews with other congregations, Nancy and I have often asked the question, "Is your multicultural mission minister-led or congregation-led? If your minister left tomorrow, would the work continue?" At First Parish in Cambridge, we are living our answer to these questions.

In the spring of 2016, we co-authors ask a few members at First Parish to describe where the congregation is now. Gloria Korsman responds, "It's like we're climbing a mountain. We hit a bit of a plateau for a while, and I think this next settled ministry will be really important for going forward. I really do think that we've had some disappointment and some setbacks, but we're still on the path."

Peggy Kraft, after serving as chair of the Standing Committee through Fred's departure and the arrival of Clyde, says,

I think I would have said something different a year ago than now. I would have been a lot more concerned. . . . Certainly going into the interim, it was a question of whether First Parish would own the mission. In the work I've done so far, the people I'm talking to, there's no hesitation. There's no "Why are we still doing this? It was Fred's thing." It's "Who do we need next?" There are a lot of unanswered questions about what we need in a minister, but the sense that the new minister will help us continue in this mission seems to be solid. We haven't had to call a meeting to say, "What is our mission?"

I co-chair the Search Committee for our next called minister. In the packet of information that our congregation puts together for candidates to review, Clyde includes a letter that offers this affirmation:

I have served 12 Unitarian Universalist congregations in a professional capacity. First Parish is the most mission-centered congregation I have worked with as a minister. . . . The mission guides the work of the Standing Committee, and has empowered its ongoing longtime work of antiracist, anti-oppressive, and multicultural transformation over several years.

Throughout the fall and winter of 2016, the Search Committee hosts several conversations with groups within the congregation, as well as with the congregation at large, asking what we congregants are seeking in our new minister. Members articulate a desire for someone who will help us build community, preach inspirational sermons, provide pastoral care, lead our organization effectively, and help us fulfill our mission to become a multicultural, justice-making congregation.

We find our candidate in Adam Lawrence Dyer, originally of nearby Framingham and currently living in California. A Black gay man, Adam has vast experience teaching about and working

for equity, particularly around issues of race, class, and culture. He is a poet, singer, and blogger. His 2016 book of meditations, *Love Beyond God*, is published as part of Skinner House Books' inSpirit series. We are impressed by his warmth, talent, pastoral nature, and ability to communicate with a wide range of people.

The final stages of the search process, in the spring of 2017, occur amid the unfolding conversation in Unitarian Universalism around hiring practices and white supremacy culture. Religious educators, including Christina Rivera, Aisha Hauser, and our former intern Kenny Wiley, call for congregations to participate in a "UU White Supremacy Teach-in" in late April or early May. The two suggested Sundays overlap Candidating Week at First Parish, when the full congregation first gets to meet Adam, and he rises to the opportunity. His sermon on April 30, "We Are Jazz," speaks frankly about his own experiences around race and the role of discomfort in collective liberation. At the end, he receives a standing ovation. The following Sunday, First Parish in Cambridge votes unanimously to call Adam as our next settled minister. He responds,

It is an incredibly humbling honor to have the opportunity to serve as the next Lead Minister at First Parish, Cambridge. I am truly inspired by this loving congregation and its mission to cultivate a multicultural and diverse community. I look forward to being a part of what promises to be a bright future for the church as we continue to be deeply engaged in social justice, excited about conserving and promoting the rich history of the community, and invested in creating a uniquely spiritual space where all are truly welcome.

Over the next year, we continue to deepen our understanding and our commitment through Adam's sermons, a workshop series on resisting white supremacy, and a caucus for people of color. A new chapter in the long history of this congregation begins.

THE JOY OF THE JOURNEY

As I look back on how far First Parish and I have come in the past nine years, I recall a conversation with Fred very soon after my arrival. In it, he describes the journey toward multicultural community as “fun.” I challenge him on the use of that word, saying, “I think for something to be fun, it has to be optional. This isn’t optional for me.”

Some years later, I share this conversation with Victor Lee Lewis, a nationally recognized African-American social justice educator well known for his work in the groundbreaking 1994 race-relations documentary *The Color of Fear*. Victor agrees, “‘Fun’ is too glib. But this work, it can be described as—joyful.”

As Nancy and I complete our work on this book, we decide that our original title, *The Joy of the Journey*, is far too simplistic to describe what we are learning. Still, *joyful* is a word that resonates with me. Through both the tears I have shed and the laughter I’ve shared with my many companions on the journey, there has been great joy as we all seek to build the Beloved Community, to live fully into our humanity, and—above all—to answer the call of love. Even as I know there is no final destination, no paved path to follow, it is in the striving that I have come to know myself and others so deeply and to understand that living my faith brings both great challenges and great rewards. It is a privilege to do this work.

QUESTIONS FOR YOU AND YOUR CONGREGATION

1. Does your congregation have a formal commitment to antiracism and/or multiculturalism in the form of a mission or vision statement? How does the presence or absence of this formal commitment affect your work?
2. To what extent does the journey toward multiculturalism depend on the efforts of specific individuals, either ministers or laypeople? How can you approach a “tipping point” of engaged participants in this work and avoid burnout of those who have been its primary leaders?
3. What support systems, either formal or informal, exist for people of color in your congregation?
4. How do you approach issues of intersectionality? Do your efforts toward greater inclusion include consideration of age, ability, class, sexual orientation, and gender identity and expression, as well as race and ethnicity?