

Notes from Beyond Categorical Thinking Workshop at UUAA 1/6/2018

Saturday, January 6, 9:30am-12:30pm

UUAA Phifer Sanctuary

Facilitator: Rev. Keith Kron, UUA Transitions Director

A UUA workshop to aid congregations in actively combating bias and discrimination in their ministerial search

General Presentation:

- It used to be that UUs were concerned with Black/white binary, but now we have many more ministers of color who don't identify as African-American
- Hearing loss is the most prevalent disability in UUism

Small groups: think about your life history and how would it have been different if you had had this one change in your identity:

Gender (almost everyone who does this exercise, does this *still* assuming gender polarity)

- Career
- Privileges negated
- Spouse
- Different expectations
- Where you are expected to be vis a vis family
- Boundaries honored
- Fear
- Asking for help
- Being heard/listened to
- Money
- Misfit

Race/ethnicity

- Social presence (isolation, shyness, introversion)
- Living area / educational access
- Culture shock
- Access to opportunity
- Being judged differently
- Fear
- Expectations
- Money
- Jail/Prison
- Ancestry - inheritance
- Housing and loans

- Transportation access
- Military conscription

Sexual Orientation

- Family & community rejection
- Fear
- Secrecy
- Possibly more driven to achieve
- Shame
- Isolation / Ostracization
- Married
- Children - complications!
- Violence
- Geography

Different ability

- Limited opportunity
 - Energy / TIME
 - Accessibility -- getting around
 - Stigmatizing
 - Career
 - Isolated
 - Institutionalized
 - self-esteem / drive
 - bullying
 - Money
 - Social limitations
 - lowered expectations
 - Healthcare
- (Evolution of access - ADA - progression)

Discussion after small groups:

- We WOULD LIKE to think that these identities don't matter - we had a period in which we just wanted to say "Let's not think about these things as differences"
- Gender - the FIRST thing we try to do is classify folks by gender - some people get *angry* when they can't assign the binary, as they feel they have a right to classify folks
- Race/Ethnicity - we also insist on classifying folks, but in this case if we can't classify folks, we make it up or strongly presume
- Sexual orientation - we assume opposite-sex orientation until we're told differently or unless stereotypical behavior or traits are exhibited and then we ALSO make assumptions
- Different abilities - we start from pity or move to relief that it's not us; if the disability is "invisible," we assume folks aren't working hard enough

Folks who have these identities not able to find work as UU ministers

"Our congregation is not ready for you yet"

Calling a minister of color: one part of the congregation is delirious, one part of the congregation thinks it proves we're not racist, one part of the congregation is petrified that they're only going to talk about race issues

Ministers talk to each other, including talking while they're looking at the same congregation

-- In talking about Salary & Housing package, a group offered a woman \$10,000 less than an equally qualified man [THIS IS WHY WE DO THE AGREEMENT AHEAD!]

References talk to the minister to tell them about their experiences with the search team and the questions they ask.

-- It's not about overt discrimination, it's about double-standards based on identity

Ministers fear immediate exclusion based on admitting an ability difference that they live with

-- Congregations believe they won't have the stamina to do the job; so, encouraging all ministers to assert how they have the stamina to do the work and ability to care well for themselves

-- Stereotypes limit to a single story based on one aspect of our identity

Aspects of our identities that influence our behavior and choices as much as these, above:

-- Child-order

-- Left-handed/right-handed

-- Region of origin & cultural rules: can they learn the rules, and do you tell them the rules?!

"Midwesterners more likely to smile and nod and then just not do what they told you!"

--- How can we be welcoming in this way?

Ministerial Pool

- 48 congregations looking for full or 3/4 ministry, we are the largest congregation looking for a settled minister

- We have more ministers "with experience" looking at us than any other congregation has

- Just over 80 ministers in search

-- 60% women, 38% men, 2% trans

-- 90% white, 10% African-American - largest subgroup mixed race or biracial

-- 5% living with disability

-- 35% non-hetero (leading category is "queer")

- Age range 25-70

-- Most successful settlement was those under 35, but worry about tension with expectations

-- Age discrimination starts to creep in after 55

- Why do we not cover theology in BCT?

-- Bigger than 3-hour workshop; that's the work of the interim ministry to work on this issue

-- Ministers are expected to be able to minister to all Unitarian Universalists, regardless of their own personal theologies

- What's the national trend regarding church governance? The search team website/ Congregational Record as submitted to the transition system address our specifics. Trends nationally towards an executive director working in close partnership with senior minister.

- Long-term ministries are going to end, 10-15 years is the long end of expectations

-- Average is now 7 years

"We want a whole lot of young families in here, especially if they act like our people who are in their 60s, 70s, and 80s!"

"We want a whole lot of X-identified folks here, as long as they act like the majority currently here!"

Results from survey taken at the beginning of the workshop:

Person of Color:

Concern: 22 concerns they wouldn't fit in, we have more prejudice than we think we do, our community is very white,

32 people said we'd learn something; 24 said we'd become more diverse (Keith says we'd become more diverse BY ONE); 7 people said this might make us more culturally competent

Disability: we still see this as a pity issue and not a justice issue

Concern: Stamina; accessible chancel; emotional disability; we have more prejudice than we think we do; we wouldn't be able to understand them; we would have to take care of them

Benefit: Learn something (about that disability); we would become more diverse; more empathy; good role model;

BGLTQ: Keith noticed and he thought it was telling

Concern: 21 people said we have too much queerness in the pulpit now; 14 say already known as gay church;

Benefit (Keith says we have the "most muted response to this question he's ever seen"):

Other concerns individuals brought up on their submitted forms:

- Too old
- Too young
- Conservative/Republican
- Anybody political at all
- Obesity (note: nobody concerned about someone who is too thin)
- Too Christian/too theist
- Just a Humanist
- Islamic background
- No sense of humor
- Male / Not Male
- Want someone with children

Workshop small discussions of Case Studies

Depression medication disclosure: why would we have a double standard for our minister that we don't have for the rest of the people in our lives?

Minister with Indigenous ancestry greeted with "*How!*" ... Because nobody ELSE in the group talked about it, the minister was powerless to bring it up EVER at risk of being labeled a "single-issue" minister

“If you want to end oppression, you have to talk about it. UUs don't like to talk about things we're not smart about. We would rather say nothing than to say the wrong thing.”

-- Rev. Kron

What's next?

- Find a way to talk to someone in the congregation who wasn't here today about something you thought about, something you learned, something that came up in conversation.
- This is the moment when Unitarian Universalism really needs to be making a difference in the world; the world desperately needs our multi-theological capacity and justice.