

**First Parish in Concord**  
**Proposal to Commission a Commission on Institutional Change**  
**8/9/20**

We, the undersigned members of the First Parish in Concord (FPC) General Assembly 2020 delegation, urge the standing committee and senior minister of First Parish in Concord to establish a Commission on Institutional Change (FPC COIC).

We make this request after having attended GA 2020 and having heard the report and presentation from the UUA's Commission on Institutional Change. We came away inspired to listen deeper to the UUA COIC's findings and believe that FPC needs to act on these findings.

The purpose of the FPC COIC will be to assess congregational life, policies, and practices (formal and informal) at FPC for their alignment with our UU values of equity, inclusion, and diversity. The commission will engage church staff, members, and friends in identifying opportunities for systemic change that will help FPC realize itself as a place of radical welcome and anti-oppression work. The commission's work will be informed by the stories of the many communities within First Parish, as well as by the 2020 report from the UUA's Commission on Institutional Change, [\*Widening the Circle of Concern\*](#).

The commission will consist of a core group of not less than 5 and no more than 9 persons who are FPC members. Commission members will be individuals who are interested in bringing forth well-considered ideas and changes, widening the path for fuller inclusion and Beloved Community at FPC. We recommend that the commission be populated, as much as possible, with persons from marginalized groups within FPC.

The commission will receive a charge for a two-year term. After the initial two-year term, the standing committee will determine whether to renew the commission's charge for an additional year, should there be a need and desire for the commission to continue its work.

Once charged with members, the FPC COIC will develop a more detailed statement of work, guiding principles, and approach to the work to ensure that its own practices are in line with the values that it was created to promote at First Parish in Concord.

The commission will seek input, observations, knowledge, and suggestions from all FPC committees, groups, constituencies, and staff, making particular efforts to hear from representatives of marginalized groups.

The commission will share its findings and recommendations for change with the congregation on an ongoing basis.

Along with providing the standing committee and the senior minister with recommended changes for FPC, the commission will include suggestions for which FPC group(s)—existing or to be formed—would be well-positioned to implement the commission's recommended changes.

## Background: UUA Commission on Institutional Change

In 2017, the UUA established the Commission on Institutional Change (COIC), charged with long-term cultural and institutional change that redeems the essential promise and ideals of Unitarian Universalism by conducting an audit of the power structures and analyzing systemic racism and white supremacy culture within the UUA.

The COIC concluded its work with the publishing of its report, *Widening the Circle of Concern*, in June 2020. A summary of this report was presented at General Assembly 2020 by the members of the COIC. The COIC researched, analyzed, and recommended actions aimed at increasing equity, inclusion, and diversity in the UUA, applicable as well to individual congregations.

The COIC report provides a roadmap to building Beloved Community, where people of diverse racial, ethnic, ability, educational, social class, wealth, gender identity, sexual orientation, and all and any other diverse backgrounds and identities come together in an interdependent relationship of love, mutual respect, and care that seeks to realize justice within the community and the broader world.

Beloved Community represents not so much a set of programs as a journey, a set of interrelated commitments around which UUs may organize our many efforts to respond to racial injustice and grow a community of reconcilers, justice-makers, and healers.

The report is composed of ten focus areas of intervention, summarized below. First Parish in Concord may prioritize some of these areas ahead of others and may find that some are less relevant than others.

1. **Theology** – Engage with our theological legacy, as its use today will both ground our efforts to welcome all who are drawn to our faith and provide resources for resilience for UUs in these difficult times. Acknowledgment of anti-oppression work as a theological mandate is essential, and our faith traditions as Unitarians and Universalists require us to address equity, inclusion, and diversity issues.
2. **Governance** – We have an over-reliance on informal structures, which rely on social relationships and thus tend to privilege people in the dominant culture. Heavy use of unstructured and undocumented processes may create opportunities for hurt, discrimination, and selective institutional memory. Agility, flexibility, and innovation, along with a clear focus on mission, will be an important aspect if we hope to survive the rapidly changing religious landscape in the US.
3. **Congregations and Communities** – The culture of many congregations (covenant, governance, and participation) is not keeping pace with the expectations of new generations for anti-oppression work. We sometimes have the characteristics of elite social clubs rather than religious institutions. As a religious institution, we covenant to affirm a set of beliefs and aspirations. Congregations that choose to engage to increase equity, inclusion, and diversity are leading the way to the future.
4. **Hospitality and Inclusion** – Once equitable practices are introduced, we aspire to have people feel welcome quickly. Leadership education and amplification of best practices are

recommended. We should lead from the covenant of care that binds us. Many congregations need intention, education, and structural change to be hospitable to all.

5. Living our Values in the World – The work of becoming equitable, inclusive, and diverse within our congregation is justice work. Greater awareness of the practices within our own institutions is complementary work to our external work to be accountable to those most affected by injustice. Develop more theological resources and articulate the faith basis to center our justice work and make clear the interconnection between action in the world and spiritual development.
6. Religious Professionals – Employment within our UU congregations remains very difficult for people from oppressed groups who experience stress from ignorance, bias, tokenism, and racism.
7. Educating for Liberation – What is at stake is the heart and soul of Unitarian Universalism. People of all ages need positive and empowering conversations about race to overcome bias and internalized oppression.
8. Innovations and Risk Taking – The pace of change is now at an unprecedented level, accelerated by shifts in global economics and demographics, not to mention the pandemic. These shifts are requiring us to reexamine how we lead, staff, and organize our shared community life. We need new models of worship that integrate emotional intelligence, music, and other forms of knowing in a world in which people are often overwhelmed. We should curate the ideas of those innovative congregations working to become more inclusive, equitable, and diverse.
9. Restoration and Reparations – The complexities of harm left by hundreds of years of oppression cannot be overstated. This national reckoning, which would lead to spiritual renewal, must start with an understanding and acknowledgement of the oppression and exploitation of Black people, Indigenous people, and people of color pervasive in the worldwide Euro-dominant, racist, capitalist systems. Recommendations include establishing channels for identifying harm, making amends and financial reparations.
10. Accountability and Resources – Ongoing monitoring and continued assessment is needed to continue to track progress towards equity, inclusion, and diversity.

Signed by the following members of the First Parish in Concord General Assembly 2020 delegates and attendees:

Lillian Anderson  
Mary Ann Barton  
Lauren Evans  
Holli Jones-White  
Marilyn Lowitt  
Peter Lowitt  
Peter Nobile  
Jan Power

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