



# MISTAKES and MIRACLES

Congregations on the Road to Multiculturalism

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NANCY PALMER JONES AND KARIN LIN

# Mistakes and Miracles

CONGREGATIONS ON THE ROAD  
TO MULTICULTURALISM

Nancy Palmer Jones and Karin Lin

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# Foreword

Janice Marie Johnson

FROM TIME TO TIME, *I ask myself, how might I meet a longing for the kind of intentional engagement that will transform my faith, deepen my faith, and enrich my soul?*

How refreshing it is that Karin Lin and Nancy Palmer Jones have taken the time to write a book that addresses my questions with intention, love, and respect.

My life experience has afforded me an understanding of multiculturalism *writ large*. I have spent much time living in cultures other than my own. I move comfortably in the world as an internationalist, a Jamaican of the Caribbean Diaspora, and surprising to me, as a New Yorker.

As a culture builder, I fervently believe that that there is a force greater than our individual selves telling us that we *need* to act in spite of any discomfort.

This force beckons us into the brave space that author and activist Micky ScottBey Jones invites us into—this realistic place, as opposed to a privileged, safe space.

We know, instinctively, how to be of help to others. But we humans are very good at resisting our instincts, especially when they are telling us to do something that takes us out of our comfort zone.

This volume invites us into careful inquiry of the bumpy journey toward building Beloved Community. In addition to lifting up the mistakes *and* the miracles along the way, the authors offer us powerful, reflective questions to deepen our understanding of what is at stake. We get clear about what we give up—as well as what we gain—in the journey.

Lin and Jones have taken quality time to focus on five congregations being intentional about building the Beloved Community. They have carefully studied the identities, cultures, and ethos of these respective congregations. They have examined how they deal with race, racial equity, and racialized resistance.

THE STORIES IN THIS BOOK are made up of moments large and small that emerge in hindsight as defining moments. They are the moments that shape a community's identity, its history, and its vision for the future. I know from my own lived experience that the personal and historical impacts of such moments are intertwined. In 1962, I witnessed the birth of a nation exemplified by the Union Jack being lowered and *my* Jamaican flag being raised at the birth of a nation—*my* nation, Jamaica. This moment left an indelible mark on my heart. I had witnessed the power of self-determination that my ancestors, my parents, and their peers had strived for.

During my lifetime, I witnessed the first man and woman landing on the moon. I witnessed carbon copies give rise to laser copies and telephones give rise to cellphones. I witnessed the rise to stardom of Marian Anderson, Paul Robeson, Nina Simone, Prince, Luther Vandross, India.Arie, and Beyoncé.

I also witnessed the following:

On September 22, 1973, Billie Jean King beat Bobby Riggs during a tennis match dubbed the “Battle of the Sexes.” Riggs had boldly asserted that a woman could never beat a man at ten-

nis. King proved him wrong by defeating him as part of her fight for equal pay for women's tennis.

Back in the day, I took a strong political stand against injustice. For example, I vowed never to visit South Africa until it became free of the plague of apartheid. In 1990, after twenty-seven years in confinement, Comrade Nelson Mandela was released from prison. Four short years later, in 1994, he was inaugurated as South Africa's first black president, leading with an unfathomable spirit of forgiveness for those who had stolen those many years of his life from him.

I wryly note that some of my defining moments have been centered around presidents. In 2009, I could hardly believe that a black man became the forty-fourth president of the United States. During his inauguration speech, President Barack Obama said, "We, the people, declare today that the most evident of truths—that all of us are created equal—is the star that guides us still, just as it guided our forebears through Seneca Falls and Selma and Stonewall. . . ." That this First Family sustained this presidency without assassination is to me, indeed, a miracle.

I applaud Martha McSally, the first woman in the Air Force to fly in combat. After becoming a senator, she had the courage to testify in front of the Senate Armed Services Sub-Committee about being sexually assaulted in the military by a superior and officer. Following her compelling testimony, the Sexual Assault Accountability and Investigation Task Force was formed. This is reminiscent of the development of the Unitarian Universalist Association's Safe Congregations program.

During my Unitarian Universalist lifetime, I can't help but notice that presidents continue to factor into my picture. In 2001 I celebrated the election of the first minister of African descent to become president of the UUA, Rev. Bill Sinkford. In 2009, I celebrated the election of the first Latino minister to be elected as



president of the UUA, Rev. Peter Morales. Two years ago, in 2017, I celebrated the election of the first woman to be elected as president of the UUA, Rev. Dr. Susan Frederick-Gray.

I also celebrated the first trio to be appointed as interim co-presidents of the UUA: Rev. Bill Sinkford, Rev. Dr. Sofia Betancourt, and Dr. Leon Spencer. All three are black and one is also Latinx. Two are ministers and one is a lay leader. All of this, in *my* UUA lifetime!

We are in yet another moment in time that defies imagination: Unitarian Universalists are daring to “get right” with the fight against white supremacy culture. We have committed ourselves to a no-turning-back journey to build new ways to express, to live into, and to *be* our cherished faith. We are demanding for ourselves that we concretize our aspirations and ensure that they are centered in *our* story.

Today, we dare to invite equity and transparency to the fore. Demanding it of others has been easy. Demanding it of ourselves as religious professionals, UUA staff, lay leaders, and as congregations and communities has been hard for us. We are moving toward being the people whom we seek to be—*no matter what*.

Unitarian Universalists need to disrupt the workings of racism to transform, truly transform, how we relate across racial, ethnic, and cultural differences in our congregations and beyond.

We need to articulate and embrace individual and community practices vital for sustaining our living faith now and into the future.

Karin Lin and Nancy Palmer Jones have chosen to risk being vulnerable with their respective stories and with those of others who have entrusted their stories to these courageous authors. They have taken a keen look at tumultuous challenges and difficult choices. Thankfully, they have chosen to center *relationship* as core to their work and ministry. They invite us to listen deeply and listen deeper still. The stories that they lift up are real, raw,

and revealing. They invite us to face them without flinching and without denying the truth that we are invited to be privy to.

This volume invites us to notice when and how we lift up the voices of diverse populations of people and our partnerships with them as we, with intention, break down our congregational walls to create robust, vibrant community centers. And there's more. We need to make room among ourselves to step back, ensuring venues for our partners to speak to us, knowing that their voices must be heard by us.

Karin Lin and Nancy Palmer Jones are helping us to develop our antiracist, antioppressive, and multicultural habits and skills in order to prepare us to do our part to collectively nurture multiculturally competent, actively antiracist congregations into being. They are memorializing the kinds of moments that form our identity, our history, and our vision for the future. For this, I give thanks.



## Introduction: The Power of Stories at a Crucial Time

For transformation to occur, we all need stories of people who are working to dismantle this culture of white supremacy, stories that reveal what it takes to go against the grain. We need stories of people who are striving to create new ways of being together, ways that truly merit the name “Beloved Community.”

EARLY ON THE FIRST FULL DAY of the Unitarian Universalist Association’s Justice General Assembly in June 2017, the three interim co-presidents take their places, along with the conversation’s facilitator, in black overstuffed chairs set stage right on the convention center stage. For a gathering of thousands of Unitarian Universalists accustomed to prepared reports presented at a central podium, the tone and setting are striking.

Prompted by facilitator Jesse King, Rev. Sofia Betancourt, Rev. Bill Sinkford, and Dr. Leon Spencer engage in thirty-five minutes of informal reflection on their brief time in office. They speak from their hearts about what this moment means for the faith. And in a religion that is still predominantly white, it is also striking that—as they themselves point out—all four of the people onstage are people of color.

Everything about this break in business as usual at the religion’s annual assembly communicates that Unitarian Universal-

ism sits at a crucial juncture. It is not the first of such crossroads and no doubt not the last, but it is certainly a make-or-break moment. Three months earlier, in March 2017, the UUA's then-president, Rev. Peter Morales, had resigned amid charges that the Association's hiring practices for lead roles in the association favor white, male, cisgender, ordained Unitarian Universalist ministers—symptoms of the white supremacy culture that still holds the United States in its grip.<sup>1</sup>

The widely publicized charges of institutional racism, followed by Morales's resignation and that of other key leaders, have caused a disruption in this faith movement that shocks many Unitarian Universalists, especially some who are white. But as Rev. Sofia says at that General Assembly, “most UU people of color were not surprised—only surprised that it had been called out.” That difference—between those who are surprised and those who are not—points to the painful, healing work of truth telling, understanding, accountability, relationship building, and structural change that Unitarian Universalists need to do.

Onstage in the big black chairs at General Assembly, the interim co-presidents frame the disruptions in Unitarian Universalism as an opportunity—an opportunity, Rev. Bill says, to “chart a different, more inclusive, more grounded course forward.” If we “focus not on the *persons* but the *patterns*,” he urges, then we can discover ways to “embody this fabulous faith and make some changes so that we can live into a hopeful future.”

The work of dismantling white supremacy culture and creating a faith that lives up to its promise of Beloved Community “is an inside job,” Dr. Spencer emphasizes. This moment, then, is an “opportunity for us to do the inside work in our fellowships and congregations. There is *lots* of inside work to be done, and it's

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<sup>1</sup> Please read “Some Words about Language,” which follows this introduction, to learn about our language choices.

*rich.*” His smile at the prospect adds a few hundred watts to the powerful stage lights.

Rev. Sofia reminds us that what makes it possible to view this moment as one of “*incredible* opportunity” are the many Unitarian Universalist groups who have come together to respond in new and different ways. Religious educators Aisha Hauser, Christina Rivera, and Kenny Wiley have created curricula and webinars so that more than seven hundred congregations could hold “UU White Supremacy Teach-ins” that spring. Equally important, the decades-long struggles and gifts of Unitarian Universalists of color, as well as those of white allies and accomplices, provide a foundation that makes this moment one of opportunity rather than discouragement and despair.

*A moment of opportunity built on a history of engagement. A new turning point in a long journey.* When we co-authors arrive at General Assembly 2017, we have been wrestling with such images for months. By this time, we are already three years into the research for and writing of this book. We have examined history, visited congregations, and mined our own experiences of struggle and growth on the road to creating multicultural, anti-racist Beloved Community. The disruptions of the spring have shaken us; will our perspectives still be relevant?

The interim co-presidents’ words affirm our approach and renew our determination. The events of the spring have laid bare the raw pain that white supremacy culture causes so many people of color in our congregations and our movement. In truth, white supremacy culture diminishes and dehumanizes white lives too, even though (and maybe because) being part of any “dominant” group can make these losses harder to see.

For transformation to occur, we all need stories of people who are working to dismantle this culture, stories that reveal what it takes to go against the grain. We need stories of people who are striving to create new ways of being together, ways that truly

merit the name “Beloved Community.” These stories of works in progress won’t go out of date, at least not any time soon.

The road to building multicultural, antiracist Beloved Community is long, and the work never ends. A brief look at Unitarian Universalism’s history in this area over the past two decades illustrates these core truths.

## THE ROAD IS LONG

Twenty-five years before the interim co-presidents come onto the convention center stage for that informal conversation, Unitarian Universalists at the 1992 General Assembly call on the UUA’s then-president, along with the moderator, Board of Trustees, staff, and all the congregations, to turn the “vision of a racially diverse and multicultural Unitarian Universalism” into a “substantive reality” (Responsive Resolution, 1992). In 1997, this call becomes a Business Resolution, “Toward an Antiracist Unitarian Universalist Association,” which includes specific suggestions for next steps on the journey.

Unitarian Universalism has wrestled, off and on, with issues of race and culture, implicit bias, and sometimes life-destroying exclusion since the establishment of its parent religions in the United States more than two hundred years ago. With these votes in the 1990s, the movement for antiracism and multiculturalism in the institution of the UUA and in our congregations gains intentionality and renewed focus.

Over the next two decades, the UUA creates teams, including the Journey Toward Wholeness Transformation Committee, to assess its progress. The UUA and other Unitarian Universalists develop an ever-evolving series of antiracism and multicultural-competency trainings. Some congregations dive in, examining systemic racism in themselves and their surroundings and setting up their own Transformation Teams to help keep them on the

road. Unitarian Universalists of color form powerful organizations of support, including the Diverse Revolutionary Unitarian Universalist Multicultural Ministries (DRUUMM), the Latino/a Unitarian Universalists Networking Association (LUUNA), the Asian/Pacific Islander Caucus (A/PIC) of DRUUMM, and in 2015, Black Lives of Unitarian Universalism (BLUU). White Unitarian Universalists create Allies for Racial Equity (ARE), a group that holds itself accountable to these communities of color.

These are crucial stages in a much longer journey. Those who plunge in at this point, or who have already been engaged for years, experience the joys and the frustrations of striving to reverse centuries-long habits around multiculturalism and white supremacy. They note the slow pace of progress, and they celebrate the gains. They lay down a strong foundation on which Unitarian Universalism can build.

Still, it's hard to estimate what percentage of Unitarian Universalists participate in the trainings, the caucuses, the support groups, and the intentional changes of those two decades. As the disruptions of the spring of 2017 make clear, these changes haven't yet been thoroughly institutionalized. They haven't yet created the deep structural changes that Bill Sinkford refers to when he mentions the need to focus "not on the *persons* but the *patterns*." Both on the national level and at the grassroots, in the majority of congregations themselves, there is still so much work to be done.

## WHY THE FOCUS ON CONGREGATIONS NOW?

In the first two decades of the twenty-first century, many brick-and-mortar religious communities have seen membership and attendance drop. People have lots of choices now for how they spend their weekends, and many demands on their time.



They have some new choices too, for how and where they go to strengthen their values, make meaning of their lives, and build community—the gifts that faith communities have traditionally offered. Opportunities to build relationships across differences show up in many areas of twenty-first-century life. Identity-based groups, entrepreneurial ministries, online and virtual gatherings, social justice coalitions, and interfaith work offer exciting possibilities for multiracial, multicultural interaction and relationship building.

Even so, physically gathering together in a congregation remains a primary method of engagement, growth, and learning for many faithful people. This is perhaps especially true for Unitarian Universalists, whose congregational polity identifies the source of each community's authority as the local congregation itself. Christina Rivera, in an April 2017 episode of *The VUU*, the Church of the Larger Fellowship's weekly podcast, reminds listeners that the Unitarian Universalist Association is in fact an "association of congregations."

"So the congregations and the communities are really where the structure and a lot of the power of the UUA lies," Christina goes on. "Power—I say that both in the framework of strength and also of change." This is why Christina, Aisha Hauser, and Kenny Wiley choose to hold the "UU White Supremacy Teach-ins" in congregational settings.

Rev. Susan Frederick-Gray, elected president of the UUA at Justice General Assembly 2017, underscores the importance of congregations in her President's Report a year later. She begins, "What a time this is! A time when we are all being called into a deeper practice of our theology—living into the call at the heart of Unitarian Universalism for Beloved Community—a community that practices a radically inclusive and compassionate, antiracist, antioppressive, multicultural, multigenerational faith within, and acts powerfully in partnership and solidarity for

justice and liberation beyond.” The work to create such Beloved Community, she goes on, “takes deepest root within our congregations—where we live into the fullness of the calling.”

We co-authors believe in the power and potential of congregations and of communities like them. Our own experiences show us that when a diverse group of people hang in there together—mindfully, humbly trying to embody their faith in all they say and do, while learning how to be in right relationship with each other—miracles of transformation take place both in the congregation’s individual members and in the institution itself.

Congregations are living, breathing human organisms. They are messy, constantly in flux, and prone to make mistakes. Yet they also can be sources of inspiration, comfort, action, and joy. They are not where the fastest change happens on an issue, but they can be where some of the most important and enduring change happens.

“We are a covenantal faith where we call each other into the work,” Christina Rivera reminds us. On the one hand, when congregations and their congregants fail to live up to this covenant, they can harm the people who have trusted them. Too often those harmed come from traditionally marginalized groups. Too often these people are barred from the center of our congregations or pushed out entirely.

On the other hand, when we Unitarian Universalists live up to our covenant—when we build radically inclusive, compassionate, antiracist, antioppressive, multicultural, multigenerational communities that act in partnership and solidarity for justice and liberation, as Rev. Susan describes—then we revitalize the whole project of congregational life. Then our congregational stories can serve as inspiration points, cautionary tales, and launching pads for both traditional brick-and-mortar congregations and newer, twenty-first-century forms of community building.

## THE CONGREGATIONS WE STUDY

By the time we begin this project, quite a few Unitarian Universalist congregations are participating in the work of creating multicultural, antiracist Beloved Community. How do we choose just a few of them to study?

We start with these criteria: We want to pluck out a handful of congregations that sit in different parts of the country, serve different demographics, are different sizes, and are at different stages of their journey toward multiculturalism. We want to lift up the famous and the not-so-famous.

We also want to honor the work of congregations that take part in the Unitarian Universalist Association's Mosaic Makers consultation, convened by the UUA's Office of Multicultural Growth and Witness, led by Taquiena Boston. Mosaic Makers: Leading Vital Multicultural Congregations is a group of about twenty congregations whose leaders gather every two or three years to share their challenges and successes and to deepen their multicultural skills through workshops and training sessions.

In 2012, for a book tentatively titled *Mosaic*, some of the Mosaic Makers produce draft chapters about a portion of their journey. Each chapter is written by a multiracial team. The full manuscript is never completed, but the draft chapters become a crucial source for our own work and discernment.

We finally settle on five congregations that meet our criteria and that greet us with remarkable openness and generosity as we dive into our research:

- Unitarian Universalist Church of Annapolis, Maryland
- Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Phoenix, Arizona
- All Souls Unitarian Church, Tulsa, Oklahoma
- First Parish in Cambridge, Massachusetts
- First Unitarian Church of San José, California

Supported by two grants from the Fund for Unitarian Universalism, we visit each of these congregations over the course of several years. We drive around the cities where they are located, because a congregation's specific context makes a difference in how it approaches the work. We read congregational histories to catch a glimpse of what's in each congregation's DNA. We absorb mission and vision statements. We look at how these congregations structure their work on multicultural competencies and antiracism. We worship with each congregation, and we pay attention to what moves us. We notice whether one of us feels more comfortable or welcome than the other.

Most of all, we speak by phone and in person with laypeople and clergy members, passionate champions of the work alongside some doubters and a few naysayers. We call all of these folks our "conversation partners," and we focus on building accountable, trustworthy relationships with them so that a full range of truths can be told.

## THE STRUCTURE OF THIS BOOK

The first chapter of this book takes up a key question: Since Unitarian Universalism is a noncreedal faith, what in our theology demands that we do the work of building multicultural, anti-racist Beloved Community? Chapter 1, "The Call of Our Faith," invites a range of voices to help us express the core message of Unitarian Universalism that makes this work essential to who we are.

Chapter 2, "Common Threads," looks at themes that run through every congregational story. In this chapter, we draw on the wisdom of beloved colleagues and other researchers to suggest habits that can help create a new way of being together.

In describing our Common Threads, we are inspired by, but not limited to, the core principles that earlier researchers have

discovered, most of them studying Christian communities. Our Common Threads, though, are not a roadmap or a to-do list. That approach would just reinscribe the either/or, “expert”-driven practices of the culture we want to change. Rather, these Common Threads offer multiple points of entry for congregations that want to launch or deepen their journey toward multicultural, antiracist Beloved Community.

Chapters 3 through 7—the congregational chapters—offer the complex stories of our five chosen communities. These are human stories of conflict and redemption, of setbacks and transformations, of mistakes, misgivings, and the hard-won miracles that make this work worthwhile.

Because we each participate wholeheartedly in our own congregations’ journey toward multiculturalism, we risk telling the stories of our two communities in the first person—Karin for First Parish in Cambridge and Nancy for the First Unitarian Church of San José. We offer a glimpse of what it feels like to be us in our roles as lay leader and senior minister. What does it feel like to be this particular person of color, Karin, and this particular white minister, Nancy, in congregations striving to create multicultural, antiracist Beloved Community? In chapters 6 and 7, we tell you our stories of longing, love, discouragement, hope, and transformation.

Finally, chapter 8, “The Journey Continues,” sums up our own experiences in writing this book and describes how the project has changed us.

At the end of the book, we include a list of additional resources—books, videos, podcasts, websites, and more that we find helpful. We refer to many of these resources throughout our chapters. We hope our readers will develop an ongoing practice of searching for emerging, contemporary resources, as well as timeless ones, to fuel their journey toward building Beloved Community.

## RELATIONAL, ACCOUNTABLE, AND INEVITABLY PARTIAL

This book has come to life *in relationship*. Rather than asking people to describe their experiences in their own essays, we have invited them into conversation and asked them to trust us with their stories. In our interviews, we have asked questions and listened deeply, but we have chimed in too. We haven't pretended to be neutral observers or set ourselves up as trained sociologists or scholars. Our conversation partners have gotten to know us, at least a little, just as we have gotten to know them. We have met them as colleagues and potential friends, all of us caring deeply about our faith.

As each chapter neared completion, we sent it for review to everyone mentioned. We then worked with our partners' requests for revisions, returned to dialogue with them when we had questions about how a story should be framed, and tried to be transparent about why and how we reached our decisions.

We honor everyone who has contributed to this project, and we are profoundly grateful for their generosity and trust. We are responsible for the final versions of each chapter and thus for any mistakes we have made. Our commitment to the relationships created in this process will outlast the years we have given to this particular book.

We also know how *partial* our work is, in many senses of that word. In the first place, every congregation featured here deserves a whole book of its own. Even our meaty chapters can capture only a fraction of their stories.

Second, although deep institutional change can take a long time in congregational life, which makes some of our themes timeless, still there's a constant ebb and flow in community. Ministers change locations or retire. Some of our conversation partners move, and some die over the course of our writing. What's more,

because each of these five congregations is deeply committed to the journey toward multicultural, antiracist Beloved Community, they keep trying new ways of moving forward, and they keep reaching new stages of the journey.

We have had to focus on just a few aspects of each congregation's story, simplifying some details and limiting ourselves to a relatively narrow time frame. The nuances we include are rich and telling, but the stories are partial, indeed.

This work is partial in other senses too. We have chosen to focus this project on race and ethnicity, but we are deeply aware of the pressing need for attention to other areas of oppression, such as ableism, heterosexism, sexism, and transphobia, to name just a few. We know that our readers bring an intersection of complex identities to their encounter with this book, just as we do, and that they will want to see their own struggles represented.

But we also know that trying to focus on all oppressions at once dilutes our work on any one of them. At Justice General Assembly 2017, Rev. Sofia Betancourt says about the interim co-presidents' work, "We have an intersectional approach and it centers on race, and this is how we become more whole."

Earlier that week, speaking to members of the Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association about intersectionality, she stresses that "there's no getting away from the importance of race in establishing systems of dominance. There's an interconnected narrative of systems of dominance. We chip away at our humanity," she exclaims, when we ignore either the centrality of the social construct of race in white supremacy culture or the way that the racial system of dominance influences all others.

We co-authors are partial to this view. Our life experiences and our experiences in Unitarian Universalism teach us that Rev. Sofia's words hold truth.

We are partial in another way too. Our experiences as Unitarian Universalists have brought us into community with just a portion of the great interconnected web of people working to build multicultural, antiracist Beloved Community. We call on our longtime mentors and friends for this project; at the same time, we have strived to expand our own web of connections.

For instance, reading *Centering: Navigating Race, Authenticity, and Power in Ministry*, edited by Rev. Mitra Rahnema, adds crucial voices to our own learning. And, of course, our visits to our five chosen congregations introduce us to whole villages of folks we wouldn't have known otherwise. We hope that this partialness both reassures our readers and inspires them to honor their current relationships, to deepen them, and to stretch to connect with more people.

Finally, we bring our own lives and identities to this work. Although we include the voices of many other people in this book, we use our own voices to string theirs together. In the sheer act of writing down others' words, in our descriptions of people, events, and contexts, we inevitably interpret and shape these stories under the influence of who we are, all that we have learned and been taught, where we are now on our own journeys toward multiculturalism, and how much of our own biases, our own partiality, we are able to perceive and address right now.

Throughout this book, we strive for transparency and mindfulness about our interpretations. But our own particular stories create the lenses through which we tell the stories of others. So, before we move further along, we want to share parts of our stories too.

## WHO ARE WE?

KARIN LIN: I grow up in the late 1970s and '80s in Manhattan, Kansas, as the only child of Taiwanese immigrants. I do not remember a time when I did not know I was different: I look



different, my parents speak a different language, I bring food for lunch that is unfamiliar to my peers. In sixth grade, a girl I consider a friend tells me that I “don’t really belong here,” and I nod in agreement. That is, after all, the message I have heard throughout my eleven years of life.

Studious and academically ambitious, I know that my race affects how people see me, but I assimilate to the best of my ability. In college, when my white boyfriend tells his mother about me, she grumbles, “Well, at least she’s not Black.” My only response is relief—relief that, yes, I am close enough to “white” to be acceptable.

As a physics major at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in the early nineties, I notice the multitude of Asian religious and cultural groups around campus, but I have no use for them and am somewhat baffled by their existence. Throughout my college years and during my doctoral program at the University of California, Berkeley, sexism is a far more salient issue for me than racism.

Shortly after 9/11, my white husband and I step into our first Unitarian Universalist congregation. The intellectual sermons and our highly educated fellow congregants make us comfortable, and we rise quickly into leadership. We feel like part of a family and appreciate the community even more after the birth of our two daughters. In 2006, I am elected to the Board of Directors.

As president-elect, I begin to focus on a question that has always puzzled me: Why, at the gateway to Silicon Valley in one of the most diverse areas of the nation, is our congregation, which has so much to offer, still over 90 percent white? I am completely unaware of the conversation that has been happening elsewhere in our religion for over a decade. I have never heard the terms *white privilege* or *institutionalized racism*. In my naïveté, I think this is simply a matter of outreach,

a project that needs a leader. I have no idea that this will begin a process of deep awakening, tremendous pain, and all-encompassing love that will completely transform my life and my understanding of my faith.

Over the next two years, I begin to understand what it means to claim my racial identity and ethnic heritage. Conversations on race begin; the energy grows, but so does the resistance. “I’m the last white person in my neighborhood,” says a white congregant. “I like coming to a place where I can just be with other white people.” I am confused and hurt, particularly by anti-Asian comments spoken directly to my face by people I have happily worked with for years. Do they not realize I’m Asian? Do they want me to agree with them?

Utterly inexperienced, unsettled by my own transformation, I am unable to hear these comments as anything other than personal. I feel alone, confused, and no longer at home in my congregation. After completing my term as Board president, I resign my membership from the only faith community I have ever known.

For many months I float around, trying different congregations, doubting more and more that there is a place for me in Unitarian Universalism. In the spring of 2009, I learn of First Parish in Cambridge, Massachusetts, their strong desire to create a congregation that reflects the diversity of their community, and their commitment to hiring an associate minister of color. Two months later, by luck or divine intervention, I am recruited for a job in Boston, and in the fall I move back to the East Coast.

At First Parish, I find fertile soil for the antiracism and multiculturalism work that has become my calling. I find a congregation that embraces me in my entirety, honoring my gifts and loving me in my brokenness. Within two weeks, I am recruited to the newly created Transformation Team,

which I will later chair for more than three years. Pain, loss, and despair give way to joy, healing, and hope. I have found a home, yes, but I have also found myself.

This journey, on which I never intended to embark but to which I am irrevocably committed, has led me to cross borders both literal and figurative, to challenge myself to see the world differently, to find strength and courage I never knew I had. For this richness in my life, for a faith that shows me how love can triumph over fear, I am eternally grateful.

NANCY PALMER JONES: I grow up white European American in the 1950s and '60s, first in the multicultural city of San Antonio, Texas, and then in the segregated suburbs of Dallas. My early awakenings to the impact of race and racism are unforgettable and painful. When I am eight years old, for example, my mother, also white, tells me that I can't develop a friendship with the only African-American boy in my class because, she says, "we just can't let this get started."

That day in 1960, my mother speaks out of her own embeddedness in white supremacy culture. She wouldn't have used that name for it, and its demands don't chime with her heart, but they are all she knows. I already sense that there's something terribly wrong about her perspective, but in third grade, I feel powerless to change it.

My first understanding of my whiteness, then, is one of loss: I'm not supposed to build relationships across the barriers of race, ethnicity, and class; my beloved mom holds a view that I'm not sure I can trust; and I have hurt my longed-for friend. A journey of broken-openheartedness begins.

It makes some sense, then, that my first vocations as a professional actress and freelance book editor focus on telling and embodying complex human stories. These vocations expand my circles of friendship and connection, bridging differences

not just in race, class, and ethnicity but also in sexual orientation and gender identity. They show me how to make art as part of a team. I experience the abundance of life that comes from creating multicultural community. And I still have almost everything to learn about my own identities. I am only just beginning to awaken from the trance of whiteness, though I wouldn't have dared to call it that at the time.

In 1997, I am living in New York City. The flame of my acting career has gone out, and I am heartbroken again. Distanced from organized religion since high school—the theater has been my church and source of spiritual growth—I am hungry for new kinds of meaning making, spiritual depth, and ways to give back. A friend suggests that I visit the Unitarian Universalist congregation just blocks away from my apartment.

From my first Sunday in that sanctuary, the core messages of Unitarian Universalism give me a sense of homecoming, direction, and hope. I start volunteering at the after-school program run by our partner church in East Harlem. There I am trained and supervised by adults of color; I become part of a team with African-American and white volunteers, and I bond with children from the neighborhood who give me glimpses into their varied lives. At the Booker T. Washington Learning Center, I get a sense of what embodying my new faith means.

The next year, I find myself sitting in another sanctuary crowded with hundreds of people, all of us there to celebrate Rev. Marjorie Bowens-Wheatley's installation as associate minister at the Community Church of New York City. I have been taking adult religious education classes with Marjorie; in conversations after class about our lives and my emerging call to ministry, our friendship is born.

At Rev. Marjorie's installation, Rev. Bill Sinkford calls for "more white people in our antiracism movement." His words

ring a loud, resounding gong that echoes through my head and heart. That's the moment when my real re-education as a white person begins.

My teachers on this journey—both white and of color, teachers in the flesh and on the page—help guide me. Rev. Josh Pawelek, a white ally and accomplice, suggests that every paper I write in divinity school can explore its subject through an antioppressive lens, and I strive to meet this challenge. I work for a year as a field-education student in the Unitarian Universalist Association's Faith in Action Department, where I read and summarize the literature on whiteness. I'm astonished by how explicit and longstanding this body of work is, going back decades. It is little known among Unitarian Universalists at the time. It transforms me.

In 2001, Rev. Marjorie asks me to co-edit what will become *Soul Work: Anti-Racist Theologies in Dialogue* (published in 2003). Witnessing, recording, and working with the essays and conversations that grow out of the Soul Work consultation mark a significant stage on my journey. During my internship in Massachusetts, I lead an adult religious education class in studying *Soul Work*. I get a sense of what it's like to try to meet everyone just where they are on this journey.

In 2005, I am called as senior minister to the First Unitarian Church of San José (FUCSJ). The city of San José's extraordinary diversity reminds me of my early years in San Antonio. FUCSJ's clear commitment to multiculturalism chimes with the longings of my heart. In many ways, this is my real homecoming; it's when my real work begins.

In the years since, my understanding of my own identities continues to shift, expand, and grow clearer. After the end of my second marriage, for instance, having experienced heteronormative privilege all my life, I finally begin to claim my true sexual orientation, first as bisexual, then in less binary

language. When Karin and I model naming our identities for our conversation partners in this book, my list grows into something like this: I am a white, cisgender woman in her sixties, temporarily able-bodied, middle class with an upper-middle-class background, an artist, a Unitarian Universalist minister, and queer, all-gender loving. This exploration of my own identity and of all the ways in which centering and marginalizing have affected and do affect my sense of wholeness forms a crucial part of my journey.

With each stage of awakening and of developing my anti-racist and multicultural skills, I have experienced the full range of feelings: fear, inadequacy, heartbreak, anger, and impatience with myself and others, as well as joy, compassion, curiosity, delight, and love. My world is infinitely more complex, more beautiful, more real, and more satisfying than when I began.

IN SUM: Our complementary identities—lay leader and settled minister, Asian American and white European American, younger and older, scientist-engineer and artist-writer—encourage us to name our different perspectives and notice how they affect every aspect of writing this book together. As we will share in the concluding chapter, we too are on a journey of deepening love and trust as we build our cross-cultural friendship.

## OUR HOPES FOR THIS BOOK

This book invites you into the stories of people and congregations that are on the road to creating multicultural, antiracist Beloved Community. We have included mistakes and failures as well as breakthroughs and successes because these stories, to be useful, must be *real*. At the end of every chapter, you will find a section

titled “Questions for You and Your Congregation” to help you apply these stories to your own journey and discern your own next moves.

Although the solo reader will find here food for thought and ideas for individual action and change, we recommend reading this book in community. Whether you choose just one other person or you form a circle of companions within your congregation, ministerial chapter, or interfaith community, reading and discussing this book with others models a fundamental truth about multicultural work: At its heart, it is always about the relationships we create and the care that we bring to these relationships. Taking the time to build these relationships is part of the work we’re describing.

Storytelling, too, takes time, and in that sense, it is an act of resistance in a culture like ours, which values the quick and efficient. Stories take longer to unfold and ask more of the reader or listener than does a list of to-dos. The interweaving strands of the stories we tell—their loop-de-loops and muddy patches, their forests of details and their bright shining moments—all help to paint a fully human picture of what’s at work in each congregation.

In *The Power of Stories: A Guide for Leading Multiracial and Multicultural Congregations*, Rev. Dr. Jacqui Lewis uses “story” as a verb. She urges congregational leaders to “story” a new vision of spiritual community that embraces differences across race, ethnicity, culture, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, physical and mental abilities, and more.

Such stories transform us—readers, hearers, and tellers alike—into participants in the act of creating something new. We experience joys, sorrows, anticipation, disappointment, hope, frustration, and wonder together. We come away from these stories with lessons learned to guide our actions and with a new vocabulary to name the meanings we discover along the way.

The complex stories we share here show that it takes intentional work and persistent commitment to build multicultural, antiracist Beloved Community. Mistakes and misgivings abound and are inevitable. But unexpected miracles of joy and transformation are abundant too. The journey itself; the companions who join in; the sometimes fleeting, often sacred sense of completeness that emerges in the midst of the journey; the satisfaction that we are living our faith—these elements make all the hard work meaningful and worthwhile.

We co-authors, too, have a sense of mission and vision. We want this book to make some small contribution to the process of re-storying Unitarian Universalism. We want to help move this faith that we love farther along on its path toward a multicultural reality. We want these stories of transformation—both individual and institutional—to inspire our readers to take the risks, make the mistakes, discover the creativity, and be enriched by the joys of multicultural work. Because the need for multicultural Beloved Communities in these United States is so urgent, we want to light a fire under us all.

## OUR THANKS

Readers will find a long list of our acknowledgments at the end of this book. Here we want simply to thank *you*. Whoever you are, wherever you are, by reading this book you become partners with us on this journey. By entering into these stories together, we draw the circle of connections wider still, and we take another step closer to multicultural Beloved Community. Thank you!

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