

**“Decolonizing Our Bodies, Minds and Spirits:
Resiliency and Spiritual Practices Among
Unitarian Universalist Religious Professionals of Color”**

Public Presentation of A Project Paper Submitted to the Faculty of Wesley Theological Seminary In Candidacy
for the Degree of Doctor of Ministry
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Abstract

This project focuses on the resilience of Unitarian Universalist religious professionals of color and indigenous people through spiritual practices as a way towards liberation and intersectional justice. The author recruited thirty-six UU religious professionals for a six-week structured program of learning and reflection that helped identify spiritual disconnects between religious and spiritual beliefs and everyday lived experience. As evidenced by beginning and post-project surveys and periodic narrative prompts, the participants affirmed the positive results of the program which led to a deeper spiritual integration and wholeness.

**“I am living a life I don’t regret
A life that will resonate with my ancestors,
And with as many generations forward as I can imagine.
I am attending to the crises of my time with my best self.
I am of communities that are doing our collective best
To honor our ancestors and all humans to come.”
~adrienne maree brown, Emergent Strategy**

The Crisis of Our Time

The foundation of this project acknowledges the reality that the way humans are living is destroying our planet, while maintaining systemic injustice and white supremacy culture and domination in our communities and around the world. While the crisis is overwhelming and the impact on our lives is truly so entrenched we hardly can begin to tease it out, the focus of this exploration is upon our individual choices and ability to perceive the ways in which we participate in perpetuating suffering, injustice and harm to ourselves, others and the planet. The space between observing our calamitous reality and our own way of being and choices in the world is a spiritual one. My intent is to explore and deepen our perception of that spiritual space in order to invest in our own resiliency, reduce our participation in suffering and serve as prophetic witnesses to a more holistic way of living. The specific focus therefore is on consumption: what we consume, how and from what sources as a spiritual practice aligned with our Unitarian Universalist principles and call to help heal the world. A parallel motivation for me is to invest in my community, specifically my fellow Unitarian Universalist ministers of color who are called to lead and serve in these tumultuous waters, while healing our spirits to continue on in the work. Therefore, my project has a narrow focus on consumption of suffering, with an invitation to my POCI colleagues to survey, reflect and adjust their consumption as a spiritual practice, towards a greater resiliency.

36 POCI Religious Professionals:

- 60% Ordained UU ministers,
- 15% Religious educators,
- 10% Religious professionals (non-parish)
- 10% Ordained with a DMIN
- 5% Seminarians/interns.

➤ The participants listed their POCI identity and gender as:

- Indigenous/Two-Spirit/Latinx
- Mixed/Multi-racial/ethnic, He/her pronouns
- African American Cis-female
- Cisgender Latina
- Chilena/Indigenous/Latinx
- Black (no gender identifier)
- Arab/Black

The Project Experience:

Week 1: Noticing

- Notice who and what is showing up in your space and notice what feels like it deeply connects to where your heart is right now.
- Where do you hold struggle? Where do you hold challenge?
- Where do you hold grief? Where do you hold memory?

Week 2: Survey

Week 3: “EVERY PURCHASE, EVERY BITE, EVERY CHOICE IS A VOTE AND INVESTMENT FOR OR AGAINST A SYSTEM THAT MAY BE CAUSING SUFFERING AND/OR WHITE SUPREMACY CULTURE AND NORMS”

- What did you consume? Where did your food/products come from?
- Who is benefitting from your \$\$ and who is adversely impacted?
- What spiritual beliefs and UU principles inform your theology?
- Where are your spiritual values and daily living practices matching?
- Where are there opportunities for growth?

Week 4: THEOLOGY OF SUFFERING

- What is your theology of Suffering? Where is God/the God of your understanding/the sacred in Suffering?
- Who or what do you remember or call upon in the midst of Suffering?
- Linking last week's pondering of linking white supremacy culture and consumption choices - where is suffering held?
- What is NOT yours to carry any longer?

Week 5: One Insight

Week 6: NARRATIVE RESPONSES OF SPIRITUAL INTEGRATION

- Where do you feel stronger, more integrated?
- Where is there energy for more reflection?
- What is your understanding of the intersection of white supremacy culture and norms, climate justice and racial justice?
- What does liberation mean to you?

Post-Project Survey:

| | Beginning Survey: “Agree Strongly” and “Agree”: | Post Survey: “Agree Strongly” and “Agree”: |
|--|---|--|
| I am mindful of the impact my consumption and food choices have upon climate and racial justice. | 69% | 73% |
| I believe that climate justice is linked to consumption and food choices. | 100% | 100% |
| I believe that dismantling white supremacy is linked to climate justice. | 92% | 100% |
| I am mindful of the quality of the lives of those who produce my food. | 61% | 91% |
| I believe that my food choices are a spiritual practice. | 61% | 100% |
| Where/how I shop for food reflects my faith. | 46% | 91% |
| I feel connected to my ancestors through my food and consumption choices. | 39% | 91% |

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