

FAITHFUL to Our Aspirations

At the end of their twelve-week interim co-presidency, Rev. Sofia Betancourt, Rev. William Sinkford, and Dr. Leon Spencer sat down with the gathered community at General Assembly in New Orleans for a conversation. They spoke about their time as co-presidents, the challenges Unitarian Universalism now faces, and their hopes for the future.

Rev. Sinkford: We were asked to answer the call to hold up our faith.

Dr. Spencer: We answered that call because we felt needed, to not only set the table for all members of our faith, but to create a new table where the values of our faith were both promised and practiced without reservation.

Rev. Sinkford: We saw this as an opportunity to come home. It is critical we understand this time in the life of Unitarian Universalism not just as a time of problems, but as a time of opportunity where we can chart a different, more inclusive, more grounded, course forward.

We use the language of opportunity, yet we recognize there are problems. It is important we shift our focus not on the persons, but on the patterns, so we can begin inspecting how it is we embody this fabulous faith and make some changes so we can live into a hopeful future.

Dr. Spencer: The opportunity I see is that we have such a history of pain, and a history of success. We can grow from our pain, but we run from success. We have the opportunity to look at who owns the table we're inviting people to, to know how we come together. This is the opportunity in our pain and in our healing.

Rev. Betancourt: This spring some 700 congregations participated in the White Supremacy Teach-In, and countless people took this invitation to learn, participate, and grow. This kind of grassroots response and profound leadership feeds a moment of opportunity.

Rev. Sinkford: We hope that Unitarian Universalists can listen and take in the truth that Unitarian Universalism as it has been lived has been a struggle for some of us to commit to, not because of the promise of Unitarianism and Universalism, but because



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— Rev. Sofia Betancourt



of the practice of our faith. Because it is about the practice of our faith we have the chance to change it.

We remember the core of our faith. We remember that there's nothing in Universalism that insists on sameness. The highpoints in our history have dealt with honoring individual identities, such as our work for marriage equality, which fueled our faith and work for decades. We have theological strength when we remember that how we practice faith defines who can take part in it.

Rev. Betancourt: There are questions of scarcity, fears that there's only so much energy to invest in the work of justice and if we will be whole at the supposed end of this work. Instead, we believe we all become more whole when we lean into the full humanity of all people while remembering that anti-black racism, and oppression against our indigenous family, is the foundation of white supremacy.



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But white supremacy extends and spreads to a culture of domination that impacts everyone—it is the many ways we're made insignificant so a group of people



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can advance above everyone else. Is it all about black people? No. But will it ever be addressed if we don't dig into the foundations of anti-black racism and intentional attempts at genocide for our native kin? No. We have an intersectional approach, and this is how we become more whole.

Dr. Spencer: We have to do more than sing *I'm Gonna Sit at the Welcome Table*— we have to restructure the table. We need to carry our leadership back to the pews. We need to name it and claim it. We've never seen so many congregations ready to tackle such a problem. It is an inside job, one of contemplation and self-questioning, in our fellowships and congregations. And it is rich when you do the inside work.

Rev. Sinkford: We've focused our time in working with the UUA, providing pastoral care and working on making the changes that need to occur there. But the real task needs to happen in our congregational settings.

Rev. Betancourt: It's time to be on the forward-moving edge of racial justice again. This moment is an invitation to ourselves and our broader communities to do this long-needed work of justice and redemption driven by our values and supported by our faith. As our time as co-Presidents comes to a close, we ask you to take this invitation home with you to do the work.

As there are more and more invitations as to how to do this work, to remember that it allows us to do this work together, we are a community of faith and we're going to do this together. When you get an invitation say yes, show up, participate, be faithful.

Hold our faith. We believe in you.

These excerpts from a longer conversation between the co-presidents were compiled by Mason Bolton, a staff member in the Stewardship and Development office. His work has been published in Epiphany Magazine, Kelsey Review, The Black Napkin, and is forthcoming in the Lambda Literary Poetry Spotlight.