

Transgender Inclusion in Congregations
Transforming Hearts Collective

TRANSCRIPT: Session 6: Creating Culture Shift

- Hey, everyone.
- Hey, everyone.
- Welcome to Session 6. Let's get started with a chalice lighting.
- Alright.

Lovely. We are going to begin and share words from Naomi Nye, called "Red Brocade."

The Arabs used to say,
When a stranger appears at your door,
feed him for three days
before asking who he is,
where he's come from,
where he's headed.
That way, he'll have strength
enough to answer.
Or, by then you'll be
such good friends
you don't care.

Let's go back to that.
Rice? Pine nuts?
Here, take the red brocade pillow.
My child will serve water
to your horse.

No, I was not busy when you came!
I was not preparing to be busy.
That's the armor everyone put on
to pretend they had a purpose
in the world.

I refuse to be claimed.
Your plate is waiting.
We will snip fresh mint
into your tea.

(sighs)

Welcome back, everyone -- and --
- Yeah.

- Hey! We're suddenly older.
- And my hair's longer.

We're really excited to be back with you all. We decided to re-record Session 6.

Alex and I have done quite a bit of work over the last year or so, and have learned quite a bit out in the field, and have learned from other folks too so we're excited to share a little bit more and bring us up to date.

So, with that, Alex, I think we'll move into just briefly re-grounding ourselves and revisiting some things that we talked about in the very beginning, way back in Session 1. It's really important, as we start to think about shifting culture, to re-ground ourselves in why we are here, what our goal is as spiritual community. The goal we've oriented this course around is the goal of practicing and building toward Beloved Community.

We're talking about a vision of a world in which all life is in right relationship. It's not homogeneous, and it doesn't make assumptions about who each of us is or what each of our life experiences should be, has been, will be. It's not like-minded; it's actually like-hearted. The idea that we don't all show up needing to believe and understand all of the same things, but that we show up all with open hearts, ready to receive all of who we are and all that we bring. It's not easy, and it's not devoid of conflict.

It's really about building relationships that are strong enough to withstand disagreement and even hurt and pain, and that there will also be opportunities to work through those things and move through conflict, disagreement, hurt, or pain in ways that ultimately offer healing and wholeness for everyone. So, just some important pieces to revisit.

We also wanted to revisit some of the spiritual practices we talked about in Session 1, to re-ground ourselves in that as well. As we move into, in this session, talking about culture shift, it's more important than ever to be clear on why we're here, what we're doing, how we're oriented toward Beloved Community, and what are the resources that we have and the spiritual practices that we have that can help us do that in a faith-grounded way.

So the spiritual practices that we talked about in Session 1, that we wanted to remind you of, include compassionate communication, and that's the practice of pausing whenever we feel agitated or discomfort, or some sort of stimulus, and perhaps using that pause to reflect and make sure that what we offer next is going to be of service to the community and to our own values.

And one of the tools that we talked about for how to do that in Session 1 was utilizing THINK, that acronym that stands for, is what I'm about to offer thoughtful, is it honest, is it inspirational in that it's taking the community forward, is it necessary, and is it kind?

Another spiritual practice that we talked about was the actual act of pausing itself and breathing and slowing down, and breath as a way to invite in awareness. And sometimes

we can take a breath individually; we can even take a breath as a group -- as a group practice to help us stay grounded.

Another spiritual practice we talked about was being willing to take on discomfort and not being afraid of discomfort, not being afraid of conflict. The amazing anti-racism organizer and trainer Dr. Jamie Washington says that conflict provides the fuel for transformation. When we actually engage authentically with our differences, there's bound to be disagreement and there's bound to be conflict.

And if we see that as a bad thing, then we'll never take advantage of those opportunities for transformation. Because every time you feel discomfort, it's actually just information. It might be a moment in which you're being invited into transformation, if you allow yourself the space to pause and pay attention to the discomfort and see what it's trying to tell you.

And then we just wanted to name that each of us comes with other spiritual practices that we can depend on. What are the spiritual practices of yours that you can call on to help you remain in discomfort, check in with yourself, really engage across lines of difference compassionately. So give some thought to that and stay in touch with those spiritual practices, and see them as a resource as we move into this last session and beyond.

So, in Session 5, we talked all about culture. So now that we know what that is, we're going to move into culture shift. And so, as part of that, we wanted to lift up this really great model by Rev. Canon Stephanie Spellers, an Episcopal priest. She wrote this really incredible book on radical welcome, and we have been utilizing that model and believe it is a really great way to think about where your congregation or your faith community may be.

The model that she uses incorporates three types of welcome. One is invitation, that is really about the open door. Everyone's welcome; come on in. The second type of welcome is inclusion and the desire for diversity, but without real culture shift. And the third is radical welcome. That's what happens when folks have come, the space begins to shift because the people in the space are different.

So those are the three different types, and I believe Alex has some really incredible worksheets to show us to help us think through those three types more deeply.

So, as Mykal just shared, these are three types of congregations that really want to practice welcome. And the first type, being inviting, is sometimes where congregations feel like: Great, we're doing our work! The door's open, we've put on our marquee at the road: "All are welcome." We're friendly when people come in; that's all there is to it, basically.

So, as you can see from the slide, the message of the inviting congregation is "Come, join our community and share in our cultural values and heritage." "Be like us." The goal of inviting congregations is assimilation. It's an invitation to new people to enter and to adopt the dominant identity and the culture of that congregation. The effort is about systems and programs that invite and incorporate newcomers into the existing structures and identity of the congregation, and folks who can't assimilate are rejected.

And the result is that there's healthy numbers, perhaps with some members who have an identity that's marginalized in some way. But the institution itself and its membership is overwhelmingly monocultural.

- Great, right.

- And this is all Stephanie Spellers's words. You want to talk a little bit more in depth about inclusion, Mykal?

Sure, a faith community that is inclusive is one where there's desire for diversity without real culture shift. Efforts are made to include folks on the margins, and they might even incorporate new projects, like an LGBTQ youth prom or a yearly gospel service. But the larger structures of the community and its norms and expectations remain relatively unchanged. So there might be some programmatic shifts. But how folks understand and think about leadership, how folks think and understand about so many different aspects of the community at large don't really change as much.

So, sometimes, ultimately, what that means, is that you might see a revolving door of people with marginalized identities, like folks will sort of come in because of what they've learned about the community before they arrive, but they usually don't experience true belonging, and, in those instances, the emphasis is on individual efforts rather than the structure and the larger culture of the congregation.

Right. And then the final type of welcoming congregation is what we are inviting folks to think about as the goal here, is the radically welcoming congregation, and the radically welcoming congregation is-- to use a Christian term-- the goal is incarnation. What we're talking about with radical welcome is mutual relationship and the ability to be transformed by those relationships. So there are systems and programs in place that ensure that marginalized perspectives, values, and gifts influence the very core of who we are, that all people who are part of our community see themselves fully reflected, not only in the community itself, but also in leadership and in the culture we co-create together.

So the culture is co-created, always with new perspectives and voices and visions being brought in as opposed to a culture that other people have to just sort of fit themselves into, regardless of how well that culture fits them. And everyone helps shape the identity, the mission, the leadership, the worship, and the ministries of the congregation.

It's the difference between worship that is handed to me that I get to experience versus worship that is developed with me in mind.

- Yes -- and that I helped develop as well.

- Right! That's right.

- So we wanted to start with this model in terms of talking about culture shift because it's really important to be clear on where the goal posts are.

- That's right.

One of the most common things that comes up in terms of resistance is people in congregations saying, "We don't need to do that; we're already welcoming."

- Right.

And usually when people say that, it's because they're thinking of invitation. They're not even thinking of inclusion, much less radical welcome. I've heard people say, "We're welcoming to everybody; the door is open," and there's stairs that lead up to that door. Sure, the door is open, but not everyone can actually even get in the door if they're using a wheelchair or a walker.

And so we want to talk a little more deeply about how invitation and inclusion don't work for the vast majority of trans people, in particular.

- That's right.

Inviting feeds into like-mindedness, instead of like-heartedness. It also maintains the existing culture and the status quo. It maintains the comfort of those who are at the center of the culture, and it stifles the spiritual growth of the entire community when we don't allow ourselves to be changed and transformed by new experiences and new perspectives and new people.

Invitation and inclusion don't allow for the full complexity of identity to really shine. Those two forms of welcome don't allow all of us, no matter what our identities and experiences are, to bring all of ourselves forward and allow all of ourselves to be held in community and seen and be able to inform the gifts that we can bring forward.

Right, absolutely. Yeah, there's so often a single-issue approach to this work, and there's work to be done to ensure that congregations are radically welcoming to trans folks, to queer folks. And if that work is happening, that's wonderful, great. And also, if you're not talking about income and you're not talking about ability, and you're not talking about race, then there are folks who are going to be shut out of that sense of welcome.

Which takes us exactly to our next point, which is, we wanted to talk a little bit about why specifically, for trans people, this inviting or inclusion approach doesn't serve, and actually fails trans people.

In January 2019, TRUUsT, the trans religious professional UU organization, brought out a report on the experiences of trans Unitarian Universalists. So if you're not a Unitarian Universalist, that's cool. This is information that comes out of Unitarian Universalism that's probably pretty applicable in other contexts as well, and we really encourage you to seek out those experiences within your own tradition if this one isn't yours.

But within Unitarian Universalism, there was a survey that was done of almost 300 trans Unitarian Universalists. And what the survey found was that the majority of trans Unitarian Universalists are non-binary. The majority, in terms of sexuality, are queer, pansexual, or bisexual. The majority have one or more disabilities. That trans Unitarian Universalists are all ages. The majority are young adults, but the spread is very wide. That trans Unitarian

Universalists are more racially diverse and far more low-income than the UU population at large. Almost half of all folks who took the survey said they did not have enough income to meet their personal needs.

So, if you start to look at some of this, you might start to get a sense for why the kind of single-issue approach-- that Mykal was just talking about-- to welcome doesn't work, because trans people aren't just trans. So you can't just create welcome that's based on gender and expect that that's going to actually be enough to create a sense of welcome and belonging for the majority of trans UUs, when the majority of us are also holding so many other marginalized identities.

So how this plays out, just to look at three particular questions that were asked in this survey, only 28% of trans Unitarian Universalists feel that their congregation is fully inclusive of them as trans people. Forty-four percent regularly experience trans-related marginalization in UU spaces, and only 15% feel strongly spiritually connected and nourished at their UU congregation.

I know these numbers have been kind of shocking for a lot of folks, particularly straight folks, particularly cisgender folks, who feel like, you know, for 30 years, Unitarian Universalism has been publicly committed to being a home for LGBTQ people. And we have been a home for a lot of folks, but these numbers make it really clear that, when it comes to trans folk, we're failing at really being that home that we want to be.

And so when we start to put these numbers together this is where it gets really interesting and really illuminates what we're talking about in terms of why radical welcome is necessary. When you start to look at the other identities that folks have, it really affects whether folks are feeling as though their UU congregation is fully inclusive of them as trans people.

You can see that only 18% of non-binary trans UUs feel as though their UU congregation is fully inclusive of them; if you're disabled and trans, only 20%, as opposed to 39% of non-disabled trans UUs; only 15% of trans UUs of color compared with 30% of White trans UUs; 19% of trans UUs who were raised UU versus 32% of trans UUs who came from a different religion; and trans UUs who are most insecure financially, only 11% of them feel fully included as compared to 46% of folks who are the most secure financially.

- Which is a staggering difference!
- Really big difference.

Probably, this isn't hugely surprising now that we've talked in the last session about culture and about the under-the-surface stuff that is present in your congregation. This is just illustrating that all over again, right?

-That's right.

We're talking about the ways in which certain types of things are valued or assumed and how that creates a sense of belonging for certain folks and a lack of belonging for other

folks. And it just-- it gets very compounded when you start to have multiple marginalized identities.

Now that we've taken a look at some of the data that helps us understand the fullness of trans people's experiences in UU congregations, it might actually be a really good idea to go back to Stephanie Spellers's model and look at invitation, inclusion, and radical welcome specifically with respect to trans people.

So, lucky for you, we did. So as you can with inviting, the message is "We welcome all, regardless of gender identity and expression." The goal is to assimilate trans people into a like-minded community. And efforts are made, such as generic welcoming statements and messages, assigning the job of welcome to particular people, and people who don't seem "like us" are ignored or welcomed less warmly. And the result is that the congregation remains overwhelmingly monocultural. Sometimes there's one or two trans members whose other identities, such as race and class, reflect those of the wider congregation, who come and stay.

Right, that's right. With inclusion, the overall message is "We are welcoming and inclusive of LGBTQ folks." So specifically naming folks with those identities. The congregation makes some surface-level changes so that trans people-- particularly, trans women and men-- aren't actively excluded. There are attempts to institute all-gender restrooms and/or pronouns on name badges. There are no major changes to worship, religious education, pastoral care, stewardship, etc. And the result is that the congregation is overwhelmingly monocultural with pockets of difference, such as the youth group, for example, and trans people regularly visit once or twice, but ultimately don't stay.

And then in terms of radical welcome, the message in a radically welcoming congregation is "We are people of many genders and sexualities; gender diversity is sacred" -- which you can tell is a very different kind of message.

The inclusive message is very sort of "us and them." Right? "We welcome LGBTQ folks." Whereas this message is, "we are all people of many genders and sexualities." It's such a different message.

And the goal in terms of trans folks is to embody the belief that each of us is enriched when all of us can express ourselves fully and learn from one another. The effort is that everyone takes responsibility for fostering belonging, not just certain folks; and community members of all ages are supported in rejecting harmful gender norms; attention is given to all the ways people can show up as leaders so that folks can bring forward their gifts in whatever ways work for them. And the result is that people of many genders are reflected in membership and leadership, and all members grow deeper in their faith through relationship with one another, constantly reshaping the ministries of the congregation with all people in mind.

So I think we wanted to just move into some personal examples so that folks can have a sense of how this really impacts folks on a real personal level.

Yeah, absolutely. I'm happy to share first, Alex. One of the very first times that I was serving in a leadership role, I was participating in a service at a UU congregation-- at the end of our time, someone came up to me to chat about the service. This person asked me about my experience, particularly relative to something I'd shared in the service, and I shared with her that I was a UU Christian and that that was something that was feeling really meaningful to me.

And this person looked at me and shook her head in disbelief, and giggled a little as if it were a joke, and just kind of waved it off. And, you know, I sometimes have some expectation that I won't be received as well as a Black person in UU spaces because they're predominantly white. I always wonder the extent to which folks will understand my queerness or are willing to be open to what it means for me to be a trans person in the world.

But one of the things that really drew me to Unitarian Universalism was the theological diversity that is written about, (chuckles) right? But the moment I shared that I was a UU Christian, this person basically laughed and walked away from me. That was deeply harmful-- that and many other experiences relative to that. It's had a real impact on being willing to show up as my whole self in UU spaces.

The first thing that always comes to mind when I think of times in which Unitarian Universalism has let me down in terms of welcome was actually when I was 16 years old, and like many UU congregations, my home congregation had a practice of having a youth-led service once a year. And so, I was really excited.

What we asked for was to be able to put the chairs in a circle because that was how we always worshiped in youth group. And we were told no. In no uncertain terms. We were not allowed to move the chairs. And it was imminently possible for the chairs to be moved, but someone wasn't willing to change things in service of our ability to offer our gifts in that way.

And it was never more clear to me that I couldn't see myself reflected in the adult church. And like so many youth, I did leave Unitarian Universalism when I left home, and it took me a very long time to come back. But I still don't see my authentic form of worship honored or reflected in any way in the average UU worship service.

Mm. What would radical welcome have looked like or been like for you, Alex?

Invitation, in that context, was just saying you're welcome to come to service as youth. Inclusion was actually, like, taking the time out to create space specifically for youth to lead worship service. But the expectation was that we would do it in a way that was most comfortable and stuck to the cultural norms of the church.

Radical welcome would have been-- first of all, we would have been allowed to lead worship in a way that was most authentic to us, and then there would have been an

understanding that there is a major difference here, a cultural difference, between the way in which the adults in the church were experiencing worship and the way in which the youth in the church were experiencing worship. And there would have been a process of inquiry around how do we bridge that and how do we learn from each other, and how do we co-create worship that actually does something different than either before?

How about you, Mykal? What would've radical welcome looked like for your situation?

You know, if I'm thinking about invitation, the words that are put forth out in public, is a way to help folks believe that the doors are wide open, right? So I had read about, known about, those seven principles and those six sources for a while, and so I felt like the invitation was there for me to be in those spaces.

Inclusion looks like folks being really intentional about inviting someone like me who does carry many identities, including a Christian identity that I feel deeply connected to. It's great that they're including me in this service in a participatory role; that felt really good.

The radically welcoming piece would have been, for that person, to have said, "Oh, can you talk to me about your spiritual journey? What does that mean to you that you're a UU Christian? How would you define that for yourself?" The radically welcoming piece of that would have been the opening to the building of a relationship. Yes. So, I no longer participated in services at that congregation...

- Right.

...because I didn't want to have that experience anymore.

I'm so glad you just said that because that's the number one thing that hurts my heart when I think about the number of other people within this particular religious movement who have had these experiences, because they know these are not unique.

- That's right.

- And, Mykal, you and I are still here. We had to do a lot of work to come back--

- That's right.

- and to say, "No, we won't be pushed out." But to so many people, all it takes is one experience like that to feel like this is not a place where I can be. This is not a place where I can bring all of who I am forward.

- That's right.

And something to point out about these examples, I think it's really telling that this is what felt most present to both of us when we were thinking about this question, and neither of these stories explicitly has to do with being trans.

- Exactly.

- But, on the other hand, it has everything to do with being trans.

- Right. Because these things represent all of who we are.

- Right.

- The fullness of our experiences as human beings, and all of those things have to be taken into account.

- Yeah. (sighs)

- So, are we ready to move into how to shift culture?
- Let's do it.

Now that we know where the goal posts are, hopefully, let's go back to thinking about the iceberg model of culture for a second and talk about how we can apply that to the concept of shifting culture. What's above the level of the water in the cultural iceberg is the things you can see and touch and taste and feel. It's the cultural artifacts. And then the stuff that's underneath the water is the values and the norms and the assumptions and the "way we do things here" and "who we are," and stuff like that.

Rev. Dr. James Cone wrote a book called *God of the Oppressed*, and in that book, talked about the social context of theology. And when we talk about theology in the Christian context, we're talking about how people talk about God. And so, in Unitarian Universalism, when we say theology, we mean how people understand and talk about Unitarian Universalism. What does it mean for you to be UU? What kind of language do you use to talk about Unitarian Universalism?

And so, what Cone says in that book is that theology is definitely interested language about whatever faith we're talking about, it's not universal language. We're not all saying the same things, we all don't have the same understandings of Unitarian Universalism, and that all of that language cannot be divorced from the social context that we bring to it. And so, if a congregation is predominantly white, cisgender, higher income, temporarily able-bodied, then that makes a difference. That impacts how you think about and talk about your Unitarian Universalism.

And so if folks show up who are trans, queer, non-binary, folks show up who are Black, Indigenous, other people of color, folks show up who are disabled, that *should* change how you understand Unitarian Universalism. The vast majority of the time is not what happens. (chuckles) And so, if we're gonna shift culture, it also means understanding how you think about and understand and talk about your Unitarian Universalism. So if we want to shift culture, we have to know all of these things in order to change them.

Yes. So, I'm willing to bet that a lot of the folks who are listening to us right now came into this course hoping that by the end of this course you would have a checklist. (laughter)

- No shade, no shade.
- People love checklists.
- I like checklists!
- So do I.
- I'm a big fan of checklists.
- Huge, yep.

So it's really important for us to name that checklists of, like, "10 ways to make your church more welcoming to trans people" is about above-the-surface stuff. It's always going to be above the surface. Bathrooms, pronouns, welcoming language in worship services-- this is

all stuff that's important, and you can't do what we're all here to try to learn how to do together without addressing the stuff that's really obvious and really above the surface.

And, in order to get at radical welcome and culture shift, you've got to address what's under the surface as well. It's really, really important. So, the under-the-surface stuff is, like Mykal was just saying, it's like how we are together, how we understand our community and our faith itself, regardless of our relationship to that word and whether or not we're UU. It's how we respond to conflict, how we understand and value leadership, all the assumptions and norms and expectations that we have-- that's the stuff that we're here to talk about how to shift, just to be super clear.

- That's great.

So, in order to shift culture, we've got to shift from, for example, "how can I avoid offense?" to "how can I truly offer care to each person I interact with?"

- Yes.

Do you feel the difference between those two things? We have to shift from "how can I intellectually master something, like language or pronouns?" to "how can I release the need that I feel for intellectual mastery in favor of heart-based connection?"

- That's right.

We have to shift from social justice being something that we do out in the world to being attentive to what justice means within our congregation itself. We have to do both of those things. These are some really key things to just create, sort of, mindset shifts around why are we motivated and how are we practicing this together in ways that are aligned with culture shift, instead of just above-the-surface changes.

Yeah, that's good. Let's just talk a little bit about a meaningful example. Pronouns on name tags, one of those very above-the-surface kinds of things. Culture shift means that we give everyone an opportunity to show up in the ways that have the most meaning for them, and in ways that are not harmful.

If suddenly everyone has to put a pronoun on a name tag-- for the folks for whom that doesn't feel safe, that actually feels like harm. If someone puts "they/them" on a name badge, what if suddenly they begin getting treated differently as a result of that, or someone's confused by that and will approach them about it? We have to really be mindful about how we approach welcome.

The thing that feels really important about this example is the fact that if we treat pronouns on name badges or pronouns in meetings as a checklist item, and we say, "Okay, in order to be welcoming we have to do this thing"-- if that's the motivation, then we're never going to get below the surface. It's not grounded in relationship, and it's not grounded in care. So how you do it is what matters-- not whether you do it, but how you do it.

Because if you're doing it in relationship and if you're doing it in a way that's responsive to what's under the surface, then you're asking questions like, "Is this going to be helpful to

the trans people in our congregation?" "Do we have folks in our congregation who aren't really ready yet to say that they want a particular pronoun to be used for them?" "Do we have folks in our congregation who don't use pronouns at all and would rather people would just use their name? And does this then feel weirdly pressuring?"

"How's this going to be experienced by people who are coming into the church for the first time? Do we have a process set up at the greeter table for people to explain this is why this is a value in this congregation. This is what pronouns are, this is what it means. And, no pressure, you don't have to do this."

Finally, is it something that people are actually paying attention to in the first place? Because a lot of times, we put pronouns on name badges and then we ignore them for the rest of our lives. As a non-binary person, if I go in and I put "ze, per" on my name badge, is anyone going to actually look at my name badge and read that and then refer to me that way?

So this example just shows that there are a lot of under-the-surface cultural things that need to be attended to if something like pronouns on name badges is going to be of service and a caring thing for trans community and for all of us.
- That's good.

So, just to close out this particular section, we want to just name that when the most marginalized among us feel truly welcomed and a sense of real belonging, everyone will feel welcome and belonging. We just wanted to make space to really name that traditional approaches to welcome in UU spaces, at least, have usually focused on incremental steps, which usually mostly meets the needs of people who are most aligned with the cultural norms already, as opposed to folks who are most on the margins, and that radical welcome requires people who are at the center of the congregation's culture to give up some power and comfort.

This doesn't mean giving up welcome and belonging, and we really wanted to be clear about this, that often when we start talking about culture shift and change and transformation, there's a sense of loss that comes up for folks who are used to being comfortable and are used to being at the center of the culture. And there's a sense that people feel like we can't shift things up or I will lose my home, I will lose my sense of welcome.

But that's not how radical welcome works. It's not a zero-sum game. We all benefit. This isn't about creating spaces where everyone is equally comfortable. It's not about comfort at all, actually. It's about the fact that we're trying to be in a relationship and make space for each other in new ways. And that's really different.

We wanted to move into the how, the how of culture shift, and wanted to introduce the bull's-eye model for how to facilitate change. Each of us has a different role in culture shift, and those roles almost always relate to who has power and privilege. Power is the ability to achieve purpose. Power is the ability to effect change. Privilege is the ability to move

through the world-- in this case, move through the congregation-- wholly unaware of culture. Because how you're showing up in that space is what's considered the norm in that space.

So the bull's-eye model is a real sort of assessment of who is at the center, meaning, who has ultimately the most power and privilege, and who is at the margins in the congregation's culture.

So, this model isn't something we made up. This is something that a lot of folks talk about in the context of culture shift. You might have actually started doing a little of this in the last session when you were mapping out your own congregation's culture using the iceberg, so some of these themes might have started to bubble up. But this is a way of really locating the people themselves that are centered in that culture.

So, when we're talking about culture shift and we're connecting that to radical welcome, the how of radical welcome is to shift culture so that we're constantly thinking about and moving the margins to the center and starting to disrupt this idea that there is this sort of static center that will always stay the same, will always have the most power and always have the most privilege, and that's "the way things are."

And we're trying to change things so that it is a value and a practice of our congregation that we're aware of who is centered and who is marginalized, and that we are constantly seeking to move the margins to the center.

Right, right. And so, what we're going to invite folks to do is to really think about, from your own particular context, who has the most power and privilege within the congregation's culture, who is at the center now, and who has the least amount of power and privilege within the congregational culture.

So, we're going to invite you to pause your video and use a blank sheet and really create a power map of your congregation-- which identities and experiences, like race, class, gender, etc., are at the center and which identities or experiences are at the margins of the congregation's culture, Which roles or groups, like staff or committees or social groups, are at the center and which ones are at the margins.

One of the things about the bull's-eye model that is really interesting is that as you think about this center circle here, the folks who have the most power and privilege, the circle that's right next to it, are the folks who may not have quite as much, but they also have the most access to the folks who are at the center. And then the circle beyond that may have a little bit less power and privilege, but they are also closer to the folks at the center than the folks who are all the way on the outside circle.

It isn't just who's at the center and who's on the margins, but also who has the most access to the folks with the most power-- that's an important piece of this. Make space for differing opinions and the possibility that some folks or groups actually occupy multiple spaces all at once.

There aren't just privileged people and marginalized people. You notice that what we're asking you to do is think about race, class, ability, age-- we all have multiple of those locations within us. So we're actually not talking necessarily about specific people, but more about attributes and groups of folks, and same thing with roles and other kinds of groups within the congregation.

So please don't think that what we're trying to say here is that you have to put yourself in one place in this circle. If you were to figure out where you are in this bull's-eye of your congregation, you probably would be in multiple places.

- That's right. That's good.
- So go ahead and pause and give this a try.

[PAUSE VIDEO]

So what do we mean when we say, "Move the margins to the center"? It's really easy to think that that literally just means taking a person who's on the margins and putting them in the center, (laughs) which is perfectly reasonable. It is absolutely a mark of at least inclusion to at least have opened up leadership opportunities for folks who you've mapped as being on the margins of your congregational culture.

And that's not actually the fullness of what moving the margins to the center really looks like. Because we're not talking about literally moving bodies; we're talking about what it means to center different ways of understanding Unitarian Universalism, different perspectives on spirituality, and of being able to allow these multiplicity of perspectives and values and gifts to transform everything about how we gather, how we create community together, how we worship, how we do everything.

And what that requires is relationship. Everything comes down to relationship and how we're creating opportunities for people within each of these sections of the bull's-eye to actually build deep relationships with one another across these sort of strata of our congregation's culture.

Because folks who have always been in the center hang out with people who are in the center, and the folks who are at the margins either hang out with other people at the margins or fall off the margins and don't come back. And that's usually how we maintain the kind of cultural norms that we currently have, and we maintain the status quo, instead of asking, how are we constantly creating opportunities for folks to gain new perspectives and build deep relationships across these lines.

It really resonated, what you said earlier, about, it's not just about having your first Black gay minister in your congregation. There probably have been very few congregations in the context of Unitarian Universalism where there has been a Black gay minister. That's magic. Yay you, if that's you.

And at the same time-- I'm just going to get really, really real here-- so many Black, Indigenous, people of color, who have ended up in a ministerial role, whatever their other identities were, have often left because they were wildly mistreated.

- Yes.

And treated in a way that a white cis minister would never have been treated. And so it's not really culture shift to have that person in that role if you're also not prepared to do deep work. And some of that is really about under-the-surface stuff in the iceberg model that we're talking about here. This is often about folks having particular beliefs about who is ultimately really most capable.

And what does a minister look like, and what does a minister sound like, and what does a minister do? How all of that is tied up with what's under the surface in our culture.

Right, right. It matters that you have an awareness of what those under-the-surface pieces are if having someone who is Latinx and non-binary, for example, not just be a body because of whom you can check off certain boxes, but a person who you could really be in relationship with.

And so some of this is about understanding what leadership means and how to pave the way for everyone to show up in all of the ways that they are excited about being leaders. This is what moving the margins to the center looks like. It's about recognizing those barriers to access, to power, and how to remove those barriers.

This is about analysis, like a deep analysis of who we are, and why are the folks on the margins on the margins, what conditions have been created to make that happen? Again, this is all the under-the-surface stuff, which is why it's so important to understand who you are as a congregation in order to shift.

Yeah, and it's also really-- it can be a really wonderful tool to use this model, particularly when you're looking at how you mapped the different types of roles. So, where's the youth group? Where's the staff, the religious education committee, or the committee on ministry, or the buildings and grounds committee,

- or the men's group?

- social justice committee--

All these different groups within the congregation, whether they're formal or informal, you can start to see how do those groups play out in terms of the margins in the center and what would it be like to start to create connections or to create relationship between some of these groups in new ways, that starts to get under the "way things are" in a way that is moving us in a positive direction. Because not all disruption is helpful disruption.

- (chuckles) That's right, that's really true.

- We have to stay grounded in the goal posts that we're going for and the spiritual practices associated with Beloved Community.

And what ultimately might happen, as a result of all of that, is if folks are really doing that work in a meaningful way, it will ultimately work to remove some of those circles, like folks are really working together more deeply, understanding each other more deeply. And that really shifts-- that shifts how power operates.

- (sighs) So, it's not a small task.
- Not at all.

We've been clear all along that we were inviting you into some real deep work, and we're really hoping that this course has given you some tools that you can now work to apply in your congregation and continue to build. So we've got some suggestions for how to do that and what your next steps could look like.

One of the things that we suggest is to take that power map that you worked on and talk about it with other people or other groups in the congregation. Someone else may have a completely different idea about what's true and what's real. So, it might be really interesting to share that power map with other groups, maybe with the board, maybe with the congregation at large in various ways, just to get a sense of whether or not other folks are experiencing power and access and privilege and analyzing it in similar ways or very differently.

Another suggestion and invitation is to make a plan for how to create opportunities for folks on the margins and at the center, to have deeper conversations and to build deeper relationships as groups, not as individuals. And that could happen in a number of different ways. You can offer some listening circles. Incorporating these conversations into small group ministry is another really great way to think about this. Having a quarterly dinner program where folks from all aspects of congregational life can come together and really talk about what shared power can actually mean in your particular context.

There are all sorts of ways to engage community, and our hope is that you really do that. Culture shift really happens when folks are really working and doing it together.

That's right. And keep in mind that there is no small group within a congregation who has all the answers or can even make this map. So one of the things that's central to practicing radical welcome is ever seeking the perspectives of those who are not at the table, and incorporating that and valuing that, and never thinking, "I have all the answers. I know exactly what to do next."

- This is full community work.
- Full community work.

In my opinion, it is what we are most called to as a spiritual community, that this is the heart of what we are called to is to practice this together. So it is worth doing.

It's really worth doing. So that marks the end of our time together. We've had six, hopefully really worthwhile sessions with you. We hope that they have been meaningful. We hope that you'll take what you've learned and actually build upon it in your own context.

There is a really handy bibliography that has all sorts of different things that we have incorporated or that we use in this work, so we're inviting all of you to definitely take a look at that. And also, we have an evaluation for you to fill out, a Google form, just to let us know the extent to which the course was helpful. So definitely fill that out and let us know what you thought.

It has been a real pleasure to be with all of you. Thank you for taking the time. And, with that, I think we will close with a poem by Marge Piercy, called "The Low Road."

"What can they do
to you? Whatever they want.
They can set you up, they can
bust you, they can break
your fingers, they can
burn your brain with electricity,
blur you with drugs till you
can't walk, can't remember, they can
take your child, wall up
your lover. They can do anything
you can't stop them
from doing. How can you stop
them? Alone, you can fight,
you can refuse, you can
take what revenge you can
but they roll over you.

But two people fighting
back to back can cut through
a mob, a snake-dancing file
can break a cordon, an army
can meet an army.

Two people can keep each other
sane, can give support, conviction,
love, massage, hope, sex.
Three people are a delegation,
a committee, a wedge. With four
you can play bridge and start
an organization. With six
you can rent a whole house,
eat pie for dinner with no
seconds, and hold a fund-raising party.
A dozen make a demonstration.
A hundred fill a hall.
A thousand have solidarity and your own newsletter;

ten thousand, power and your own paper;
a hundred thousand, your own media;
ten million, your own country.

It goes on one at a time,
it starts when you care
to act, it starts when you do
it again after they said no,
it starts when you say We
and know who you mean, and each
day you mean one more.”

- Ashe, friends.
- Amen. Thank you for being with us.
- Take care.