

Glimmers of Hope

Paper for the Ohio River Group
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It was an amazingly quiet morning. There was a bit of haze in the air, the temperature not yet getting out of the 70s, but you could sense it was on its way up. Little traffic, a bit of car noise. There we stood, the 36 pilgrims and our 7 leaders, on the sidewalk outside of the historic St. James Hotel. Nearby, there' s a sign honoring the visit of Lafayette to Selma following the Revolutionary War. If you listened hard enough, though, you' d hear the voices emanating up from the sidewalk where we stood, murmurings, concern, wondering. Not only Lafayette, but warriors of all sizes, shapes, colors, but mostly a wide ranging spectrum of browns and tans and black mingled and blending together there, years before.

Slowly our murmurings ceased as we began to walk, two by two, the two blocks to the Edmund Pettus Bridge, where the murmurings of silence from forty-some years before grew louder. Amidst the bird song,

train whistle, car tires swooshing by, the silence, the fear, the anticipation, the worry, come up through our soles into our souls as we walk, slowly across the bridge. Even though we know that there will not be troopers waiting for us on the other side, even though we know that for most of us our skin tone keeps us safe, even though, even though, the tension, the amazement, the gratitude grows. We are in Selma. October, 2013.

Wade in the water, wade in the water, children

Wade in the water, God's gonna trouble the water.

Wade in the water, wade in the water, children

Wade in the water, God's gonna trouble the water.¹

Fast forward to summer 2014. As I write the first draft of this paper, the rebellion in Ferguson, Missouri, is unfolding. Unbelievable, and at the same time all too real and too familiar and too hard for words, still with glimmers of hope from those officials (like Eric Holder) who see to get it. But still—it continues even during my second and third drafts. Mid—

¹ *Wade in the Water*, Negro spiritual first published in *New Jubilee Songs as Sung by the Fisk Jubilee Singers* (1901) by John Wesley Work II and his brother, Frederick J. Work.

October, yes, there's a call for outsiders to come and stand in witness, and hopefully they will come.² What have we learned as a nation? How can we respond as UUs to yet another tragedy in yet another community in which we do not have direct roots. So much going on in the world, in places we are not, in places we've chosen not to be. Race, religion, class all mix in the death of Michael Brown, and the other thousands who die without us knowing their names. Hearing of the beheading of James Foley, and the detaining of reporters in Ferguson, and thinking of the lack of deployment of reporters and witnesses in so many places of violence in our country and the world. Although the news field is saturated (over saturated?) with 24/7 news coverage of every little thing deemed to be important (though many things deemed so are not), there is still precious little that is done about how we can carry on in the midst of oh so much that tears at the heart. Yet rarely in places near our homes where severe exploration of the situation might singe a little too much.

So I turn to reading Mark Morrison-Reed's book, *The Selma Awakening*. This, on one hand, is depressing. I found myself wondering how people who said they believed in brotherhood, and who were giants

²! Writing of this paper was completed by October 10, 2014. At least, I hope so!

in the world of social justice, could be so blind to the implications of their actions. Wanting to do a face palm, and shaking my head saying “what were they thinking?”

And then, I find myself wondering: where the heck am I blind to the implications of my actions and inactions? Where am I unable to see the impact, the lack of progress that I’ ve made? Why did it take our staff team several days to realize that we needed to reach out to the colleagues near Ferguson to ask how we could help? And what will people think of us and our UUA now, when they look back from 50 in the future? I find myself wondering what the heck I was doing saying yes to a paper on where we might find hope as we travel the road of living together across human constructed definitions of race (and class and religion and gender and . . .) that have kept us apart for millennia. Perhaps, I say to myself, I should end the paper here, give Dawn her response time, and then we rent our garments and sit Shiva for the world. Having grown my preaching teeth while also attending Friends Meeting, I ask myself, what do I have to say that will improve upon the silence?

Lift every voice and sing,

Till earth and heaven ring,

Ring with the harmonies of liberty;

Let our rejoicing rise

High as the listening skies,

Let it resound loud as the rolling sea.

Sing a song full of the faith that the dark past has taught us,

Sing a song full of the hope that the present has brought us;

Facing the rising sun of our new day begun,

*Let us march on till victory is won.*³

Since its founding, the UUA has passed at least 65 resolutions (business, immediate witness, statements of conscience, etc., though there are 66 on the site as one is translated into Spanish) about race.⁴ That' s an average of 1.25 resolutions a year, and they span everything from immigration, slavery, right relationship, commitment to anti-racism, anti-oppression, multiculturalism, grape boycott, and voting rights. If nothing else, we are a people who know how to talk our talk.

³! *Lift Every Voice and Sing*, James Weldon Johnson 1871-1938; *Singing the Living Tradition*, UUA, #149.

⁴! UUA website search, Social Justice Statements, Racial Justice. Search made on August 21, 2014. http://www.uua.org/statements/results.php?ftst=advanced&search_in_body=1&search_in_title=1&search_text=&topic=Racial%20Justice&subtopic=&type=&from_year=&Submit=Submit&pg_pager=3&pg_pager=2&pg_page_r=1&pg_pager=3&pg_pager=1 ; the Doctrine of Discovery Responsive Resolution from 2012 is the one translated into Spanish.

And we are people who try to walk that talk, too—in my ministry years, we’ ve had Journey Toward Wholeness, Jubilee World, JUUST Change, Diversity of Ministry Initiative, Mosaic Makers Conferences, Examining Whiteness Curriculum, Building the World We Dream About, Weaving the Fabric of Diversity, How Open the Door?, A Chorus of Faiths, and Beyond Categorical Thinking, plus UU Common Reads, and much engagement with the CrossRoads Anti–Racism training, the Lombard Mennonite Peace Center, and now the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity. Lord knows how many hours we’ ve spent in these pursuits, looking to find a magic key that will unlock the door to our dream of multicultural congregations.

Yet, as Morrison–Reed points out, we want that at a cost: that the “other” (as defined by the majority of our European–American white congregation members) must adjust and adapt to the mono–culture world in which we live and breathe and find our meaning and way through life. I can’ t help but be reminded of the hymn *Bring Many Names*, and wonder why our people can’ t be as bold as the “Young, growing God, eager still to know, willing to be changed by what you’ ve started.”⁵ We

⁵! *Bring Many Names*, words by Brian Wren, music by Carlton R. Young, *Singing the Living Tradition*, #23.

want, too often, to start, but are not so willing in the change ourselves department. And, too often, we try to make these changes as individuals, when what's really needed is a community that helps move transformation forward.⁶

Case in point. Go back to the mid 1980s. I'm contemplating going into our ministry and I'm wondering: will there be a place in our congregations for me, an out lesbian? At that point, I could count on two hands, with fingers left over, the number of out gay and lesbian (don't even think about bisexual or transgender) ministers in our movement—one of whom is in this room with us today (Mark Belletini). My pondering wasn't just idle musing; it was soul searching whether I dared risk the cost (financial and otherwise) to put myself out there. By the time I graduated in 1991, it was still dicey to try to get a job. One search

⁶ Since the initial writing of this paper, I've been in correspondence with Mark Morrison-Reed. He provided me with a couple of his writings: his Sophia Lyon Fahs Lecture, and an unpublished chapter, "Unexpected Lessons." In the Fahs lecture, Morrison-Reed talks about the apparent blindness in the Unitarian (and sometimes Universalist) religious education materials to the issue of race—that in the various series, there are few examples of persons of color, and when they are there, they are usually non-American. It is telling how many missed opportunities there were, and how easy it was to not address what was happening locally. In the Unexpected Lessons, Morrison-Reed talks about the impact of World War II in changing the expectations of a generation of African American men—serving for freedom abroad, they ended up realizing that they could also ask for freedom at home. He also speaks about the difficulty for those who were transformed by their presence in Selma in March 1965 in bringing that transformation back, one by one, into congregations that were not ready for this "awakening." I didn't know how to add all this material to this paper without a major rewrite that time would not allow.

committee chair told me, point blank, that the reason they were not offering me the candidacy was because I was a lesbian.

Now look at us—at least 10% of our ministry, but I assume at least 20% or more, is gay or lesbian. That's an amazing transformation in 20 years that we've been working the issue. There are open bisexual ministers, and we have ministers who are transgender openly serving our congregations. Women abound, as our ministry is becoming mostly female, to mixed reaction. We've come a long way, baby, and it's hard for the folks coming in today to understand and give thanks and homage to the pioneers like Mark Belletini, Bob Schaibly, Barbara Pescan, Anne Tyndale, charlie kast, Lucy Hitchcock, and Mark DeWolfe. [And I know I'm missing one or two, I believe, but it was still less than 10. Thanks to Mark Morrison-Reed for helping me fill in the gaps.]

Great progress, until you consider this. At that time, there were an equal number of African American UU ministers—we didn't think of People of Color back then. Mark Morrison-Reed, Yvonne Seon, Thomas Payne, David Eaton, and I'm forgetting some as I didn't know these good folks then. But I remember being told: we have the same number of African American ministers. For a few years before this, the gay/lesbian

ministers had been taking it upon themselves to do workshops with congregations considering calling a gay or lesbian minister to help them understand the situation. As the question of how to support African Americans in our ministry was discussed, it was decided to offer similar support to them, and the Beyond Categorical Thinking (BCT) workshops were begun.

But look at us today. Despite the terrific success of BCT workshops for ministers who are female, gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender, the “success” for African American ministers is much less, proportionately. Yes, we have many more ministers who are people of color as we have learned to recognize the vast array of cultural, ethnic and racial backgrounds, but gosh, we’ re nowhere near the success that we’ ve had with LGBT folks, especially when you look in the pews. All in all, we now have about 96 ministers of color—all colors, all races (African America, Asian, Native American, Latino/Latina/Hispanic, Romani, Persian, multiple races/ethnicities/cultures, and probably more I don’ t yet know), some active service, some retired. That’ s 96 out of our approximately 1700 ministers. That’ s about five percent of our overall ministry. The numbers are a tad better with our current seminarians, with

about 60 seminarians defining themselves as persons of color (half define themselves as multiracial/ethnic, one-quarter as African American/Black, one-eighth as Latino/a/Hispanic/Puerto Rican/Mexican, and then a small group of Asian/Pacific Islanders/Indian, and only two each of Arabic and Native American). It's a step forward, and yet, it's not enough. The explosion of LGBT within 20 years puts to shame our decades' long dream of having more African Americans in both pulpit and pew.⁷

I appreciate the widening diversity, and yet, I fear that too often we point to the ministers of color to make ourselves feel better about, or “whitewash,” our lack of openness to African Americans. How are we dissimilar from those who in the religious education curriculum development included persons of color from other continents, but not from ours? When I've served as parish minister, most of the diversity I saw was in the young people, many adopted from other countries and cultures into European-American families, rather than a true opening of our doors because we were willing to be changed by what we've started.

⁷! Mark Morrison-Reed (private email) let me know that this past year, he has been invited to, or has known about, a much greater number of installations/ordinations of African American clergy, so it is changing. But not as quickly as has happened with our LGBT colleagues and parishioners.

*Stony the road we trod,
 Bitter the chastening rod,
 Felt in the days when hope unborn had died;
 Yet with a steady beat,
 Have not our weary feet
 Come to the place for which our fathers sighed?
 We have come over a way that with tears has been watered.
 We have come, treading our path thru the blood of the
 slaughtered,
 Out from the gloomy past,
 Till now we stand at last
 Where the white gleam of our bright star is cast.*⁸

It's hard for me to write this paper—not just because it's a hard topic, and a hard history I'm telling, but for me, my journey with race is not the “typical” American journey. Like Mark Morrison-Reed (who has spent more than half his life outside the US), I wasn't here for key parts of the American journey (I was gone for 1/3 of my lifetime).

⁸! *Lift Every Voice and Sing*, James Weldon Johnson 1871–1938; *Singing the Living Tradition*, UUA, #149.

I grew up in the Detroit suburbs. My first one-on-one experience with a person of color was with Vinnie, the African American woman who came to clean our house every couple of weeks. An older somewhat stout woman, what fascinated me most was not the darkness of her skin, but the blueness of her hair—as was the fashion in some parts of the world, blue hair was “in” during the late 1950s/early 1960s. I don’t remember much else about her, but I do recall my mother swearing over the forms she had to fill out in order to make sure that Vinnie had Social Security benefits, with the employer portion paid. I remember knowing that as much as my mother hated doing this forms, she was fully behind the need to do it for Vinnie’s sake—to allow her the dignity she demanded and deserved.

We didn’t go to church for some of those years—there was a falling out over the minister at our congregation, and so we stopped. But in the mid 1960s, I “rebelled” and started attending First UU in Detroit, in the heart of the Cultural Center. There, and through my participation in LRY⁹, I knew a handful of (then called) Black people. The main lesson I learned that we were all the same, really, under the skin, and that humanity was

⁹! LRY: Liberal Religious Youth, the youth group predecessor to our current YRUU, Young Religious Unitarian Universalists

on an onward and upward journey toward perfection. So we' d get there some day, because of our similarity in dreams, desires, and beings. My Mom worked in the Highland Park school system, an almost totally black city surrounded by Detroit, and she told me that when she got coffee for her colleague Tom, he would always say "make mine this color," pointing to his mocha colored wrist.¹⁰

I remember reading, and trying to memorize, Martin Luther King, Jr.' s, "I Have a Dream Speech." Mom and I were out of town during the Detroit riots, my Dad away for work, and I remember my Mom' s worry as she dealt with my brothers being home alone during that time, fretting that she would receive a call that they were in jail or injured by joining in. My parents both got arrested in a memorial march for King when our mayor refused to grant a permit under the martial law that had been declared in Michigan. I remember marching in Detroit for civil rights a bit, but much more for the ending of the Vietnam War. Black Power was on the rise, and partnership and collaboration was decidedly not the thing that could

¹⁰! My mother, realizing the bias of the testing she was doing as a school diagnostician, wrote a paper in the early 1960s denouncing the bias, and then went back to school to get her teaching credentials. She then worked in the free school movement for the rest of her professional career.

happen across the color barrier in Detroit, or in my lily white suburb. We were in a sundown town, I' ve learned recently, and the only dark face in my high school with a population of 1,000 plus was the exchange student from Africa. Heck, I only knew he was from Africa, not which country, and never had the opportunity to even talk with him as he was a couple classes ahead of me. One in 4 years, of the folks who cycled through during my tenure.

And then I left. I moved to Canada, where the “complexion” of race relations is so very different. The vast majority of Black people in Canada are from the Islands, not directly from Africa; there' s not the same history of slavery that slants the relationship in the States. Rather, the derogatory jokes were about “Pakis” and the worst racism was against the First Nations people. In my class on racism in Canada, I learned that historically discrimination was been primarily centered against Japanese, Chinese, Indians, and First Peoples. Very different history and heritage, even as my Unitarian church connections were still about us being all the same, truly, and that we would succeed on our dreams of perfectibility of human relations.

I remember that Pierre Elliot Trudeau “invented” Canadian multiculturalism during the early 1970s to downplay the struggle between the French and English parts of Canada. I arrived in Canada 18 months after the separatist crisis of 1970 where the Front de Lib é ration du Qu é bec (FLQ) kidnapped British Trade Commissioner James Cross, and then kidnapped and killed Qu é bec Minister of Labour Pierre Laporte. The War Measures Act was invoked to try to control and contain the uprising of the FLQ. It took two months, but “order” was “restored.” It was after that event the Trudeau came up with the language of multiculturalism to “celebrate” the diversity that was in Canada. During the early 1970s, 47 “heritage languages” were taught in the Toronto public schools, clarifying just how diverse that apparently mostly–white community actually was.

Canada interned Japanese during the Second World War, despite information from the RCMP that they posed no risk; young Native Canadians were removed from their homes and sent to boarding schools where they were forced to give up their language and cultures, and often met abuse; citizens of the Commonwealth were denied admittance despite laws making immigration open to all Commonwealth citizens;

Canada turned away Jews seeking asylum there before and during the Second World War, with the dismissive comment “none is too many.” Not a pretty record in the land to the north, but something pretty much hidden.

When I returned to the States in 1993, I was racially adrift. I had no idea what had transpired during my 20 year sojourn abroad, and I had become somewhat Canadianized. I came expecting some nationalistic self-determination response of the Black Power movement, but wasn't sure if that was real, or only in my head. Living as a minority White person in Detroit was total immersion, but working in a suburban congregation with only 2-3 African Americans, I couldn't make sense of their desire to be multiracial and their lack of success. The most “multicultural” thing that they did was to volunteer at a Detroit soup kitchen four times a year. The Great White Hope coming to try to make connections, but none that lasted beyond those lunch time encounters.

To be discouraged was, is, almost expected. And yet, and yet we keep on trying.

God of our weary years,

God of our silent tears,

Thou who hast brought us thus far on the way;
Thou who hast by Thy might,
Led us into the light,
Keep us forever in the path, we pray.
Lest our feet stray from the places, our God, where we met
Thee,
Lest our hearts, drunk with the wine of the world, we forget
Thee;
Shadowed beneath Thy hand,
May we forever stand,
True to our God,
True to our native land.¹¹

We keep on trying. We pass resolution after resolution, but without much action or change in our congregations, yet we keep coming back. We create and try program after program, without much action or change in our congregations, yet we keep coming back. We follow dream after dream, without much action or change in our congregations, yet we keep coming back.

¹¹ *Lift Every Voice and Sing*, James Weldon Johnson 1871–1938; *Singing the Living Tradition*, UUA, #149.

There is something so amazingly compelling in the work we struggle to do, without much action or change in our congregations, yet we keep coming back. Because deep down, in our souls and spirits, I believe we know that we are crippled in and by our isolation, and yet we don't know what to do about it. So like the Energizer Bunny or the Whack-A-Mole games, we keep on popping up our heads to see if it can be done any better. And here, here is where we begin to get the glimmerings of hope.

First and most important glimmer that I see and want to shout out now is the amazing courage, generosity of spirit, and sheer determination of all of the people of color, the ministers of color, the children and youth of color, who keep on coming back, keep on stepping up to the line, keep on excusing the feeble and fumbling steps of those of us who are in the dominant culture, the Euro-centric, White-based, privileged culture in our congregations and the majority of our ministry. Sure, with the increasing influx of LGBT folks, and the increasing influx of women, there is some more basic understanding of what that discrimination feels like. But that still doesn't explain to me the daunting generosity of spirit and love that the UUs of color show every day. No matter how hard, they keep faith not only with Unitarian Universalism, but with our movement that at times

seem oh so flawed. If anything brings me hope, it is their fidelity that often seems beyond comprehension. Perhaps, as someone who grew up in this movement, I take it too much for granted and don't understand its power for those who have grown up elsewhere. To me, it's just the water. So perhaps the stick-to-itiveness of people of color surprises me more than those who also have found UUism as a homecoming.

Another thing that brings me hope are our youth and young adults. Watching those who are at General Assembly, or who participate in the Con culture, I see young people who are navigating a world much more diverse and multicultural than any I knew existed when I was their age. Growing up in a liberal culture, they take for granted the belief of the equality of all, and they see the world as so much more interconnected that I ever could. I volunteered in Detroit, helping out, but for me there was little way to be truly connected. But for today's young people, they show us the way to be connected, to walk the talk.

Where else do I find hope? In the way we have begun to complexify the world, not simplify it. We've opened Pandora's box wide—and through doing so we understand not only the capacity to fool ourselves about how we relate with and to others who are different, but we also see

more in depth the ties that bind us to old ways of doing things. By seeing the Gordian knots of our history of slavery, imprisonment and dehumanizing people who don't have white skin color, we can begin to figure out how to loosen the strands that bind. Slowly, slowly, we realize how wrong we have been, those from whom I'm descended. We may never be able to erase, eradicate, or change everything—or at least not within my life time—but even knowing that the strictures are there changes the way we conceive the world, and what is possible. We begin to see glimmers of hope in knowing more deeply how we are bound in unhelpful patterns, and through seeing them, we can begin that unloosening.

In opening Pandora's box, we also are stepping in to more nuanced way of working with issues of race. For many years, our UUA approached issues on a "one size fits all" model to address issues of race. Most of these models required people to be able to do systemic analysis, and to place themselves within that model in ways that helped them move forward. But for many within our UU world, this model was one that was too challenging, too shaming, too rigid to allow them to explore the issues in ways less daunting and academic. To be "healed"

of racism, one must admit that they were a “racist” —or what we would probably today call more someone who benefits from unearned white privilege.

That those who look like me benefit from white privilege is a given. Our society is structured thus—the assumptions about race, and who is good, smart, and valued run deep through our American culture. But this is a difficult concept to grasp, especially when you feel yourself struggling and not benefiting in any tangible way from the whiteness of your own skin.

Enter the UUA’ s acquaintance with the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS).¹² The DMIS posits that we go through developmental phases of how we deal with “differences that make a difference.” The research demonstrates a standard bell curve distribution of people vis-à-vis their relationship to these differences. At first, we can’ t see differences (denial), then we live in a world of us/them (polarization: defense, when we are the “good guys,” and reversal when we are the “bad guys”). The middle of the bell-curve is where we

¹² The Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) was developed by Milton Bennett, and includes a six-stage understanding of how people understand and react to differences. It describes a shift from a mono-cultural mindset to multi-cultural mindset, and works on the premise that people can develop skills and abilities to work more effectively across cultural differences, or “differences that make a difference.”

believe that there are truly differences, but deep down, we’ re really all the same and the differences don’ t truly matter as it’ s all about “me” and my viewpoint (minimization). The next stage is when we realize that things are much more complex—that the differences are real, it’ s not just about me, and we realize the subtleness of those differences. No longer captive by our own perspective, we still don’ t know how to use the knowledge (acceptance). Eventually, we become so aware of who we are, culturally, and who the other is, we differentiate ourselves, and we have the capacity to shift our own behavior (while not losing the self) to be able to join others where they are for the sake of effective interaction (adaptation). In this paradigm, there are particular developmental goals at each stage that provide the template for advancing one’ s competency in the intercultural frame.

Having been trained in the model, what is so evident to me is that we UUs are really typical—that the majority of us, as well as our theology and hymnody, are solidly in that middle place—minimization. We value differences to a point, but then, we have a “but we’ re all the same under the skin” attitude where we claim to not see color/race, and instead promote that we all want the same things—for our family, the

world, ourselves. Just run through the hymnals, or the meditation manuals, and minimization of differences leaps out—once you know to look for it.

There’ s nothing inherently wrong with this, but it does reveal that in general we are trapped in our own unconscious belief that recognizing the humanity of everyone is sufficient. It’ s a good first step, but it’ s not the endpoint, for that kind of belief has lingering in it the assumption that’ s “what’ s good for the goose is good for the gander.” That there *is* a solution to the world’ s ills and desires, rather than a messy complexity of multiple solutions, none of which will be “the” right one.

The hope—it comes in having this model to help explain to the incredibly well-meaning among us that this is not enough. That we need to delve deeper into the differences and find the place where the platinum rule reigns: “do unto others as they would have done unto them.” It’ s not one size fits all, and the more I teach and explain this newer DMIS paradigm, the more I see people begin to transform. At times, there’ s hurt and disappointment when people discover themselves not to be as high on the developmental stages as they wish. We do, after all, always want to be at the top of every scale, a Fowler 5 for example. So the

realization that where we actually are doesn't meet our aspirations can be daunting. But after a bit of mourning, there is an awakening that the aspiration to be better can lead us forward to a point where we learn to be more and more effective in our interactions. It will take a while, but I have seen people (myself included) come alive with the possibility in this model whereas we were disappointed and beaten down by some of the previous models that were used. DMIS helps us see through a glass more clearly.¹³

And it's people showing up, again and again, to support immigration issues and changing in the immigration laws. It's people showing up to support voting rights; it's people showing up in Ferguson, asking for a better way there, holding alive the memory of Michael Brown and all those whose names we don't know who have died at the hands of our fear of the other, the unknown. In the unknown encounters of hundreds of UUs acting as volunteers in urban schools, opening their doors to house those who find themselves homeless; and more and more and more examples of our UU family showing up to stand on the side of love in all its configurations.

¹³ Let me state that the Crossroads model, and the Journey Toward Wholeness models, are marvelous for folks at the Acceptance stage of the DMIS—at that point, people's relationship to differences is such that the next step is the systemic analysis and understanding of the underpinning of oppression and racism. Up until then, it's too hard to be open and relate to these understandings.

*Come, come, whoever you are,
 Wanderer, worshipper, lover of leaving.
 Ours is no caravan of despair,
 Come, yet again come.*¹⁴

I' ve always loved Lynn Unger' s setting for this Rumi poem, but even more so once I learned of the line she left out, and the setting of that line by Harold Brown of the Unitarian Church of Vancouver, British Columbia, to music. For that line is what makes the hope possible:

“Though we' ve broken our vows a thousand times.” For it is there that hope survives.

We as UUs, as human beings, blow it. We make assumptions; we step on our best intentions; we strive to protect ourselves from hurt. But the genius of our covenantal way of work is that there is a place to come back to so we can begin again. From the humble learnings of the UU Living Legacy, and the incredible transformation of the UU College of Social Justice service/learning trip to Haiti, I' ve had my eyes open within

¹⁴! *Come, Come, Whoever You Are*, Rumi and Lynn Unger; *Singing the Living Tradition*, #188.

a religious tradition that has held me as I have learned and grown. It has not shunned me when inside I' ve been held captive by a refrain "I didn' t know; how could I not know?" It has held me as I' ve wept for others I could not save, and for myself as I' ve been saved again and again by their generosity.

Where is the hope? In the end, it' s a matter of faith. It' s a matter of deciding to believe that we can make a difference, that the world can be a better place, that we can have the courage to seek ever anew ways of being together across differences of race, culture, color, ethnicity, of being human. It is in our congregations where we can be held, in community, to stumble, fall, break our vows a thousand times. At least it is for people like me, and, I hope and expect, also for people of color who are looking for a way forward through the tangled forest of race in the United States. It is in the faith we have that here, we can be more, in love.

What can they do to you?

Whatever they want.

They can set you up, bust you,

they can break your fingers,

*burn your brain with electricity,
blur you with drugs till you
can't walk, can't remember.
they can take away your children,
wall up your lover;
they can do anything you can't stop them doing.*

*How can you stop them?
Alone you can fight, you can refuse.
You can take whatever revenge you can
But they roll right over you.
But two people fighting back to back
can cut through a mob
a snake-dancing fire
can break a cordon,
termites can bring down a mansion*

*Two people can keep each other sane
can give support, conviction,
love, massage, hope, sex.*

*Three people are a delegation
a cell, a wedge.*

*With four you can play games
and start a collective.*

*With six you can rent a whole house
have pie for dinner with no seconds
and make your own music.*

*Thirteen makes a circle,
a hundred fill a hall.*

*A thousand have solidarity
and your own newsletter;
ten thousand community
and your own papers;
a hundred thousand,
a network of communities;
a million our own world.*

It goes one at a time.

It starts when you care to act.

It starts when you do it again

after they say no.

It starts when you say we

and know who you mean;

and each day you mean

*one more.*¹⁵

This is where we find our hope. By knowing each day we mean one more.

¹⁵ *The Low Road*, by Marge Piercy, from *The Moon Is Always Female*, published by Alfred A Knopf, 1980