



**Emma Min-Gi Olson**  
White Bear UU Church  
Mahtomedi, Minnesota

When we went to California for our family's first A/PIC annual conference two years ago, I was thrilled because I wouldn't have to go to school for two weeks! But when we got there, I realized that A/PIC had a lot of really interesting members, and what fun it was to be with kids like me.

I learned about Asian art and history, many things I hadn't known before. I got to take part in a meeting and got to express my thoughts to our group. This year, in my language arts class at school, I told people that I am 25 percent Korean. One girl exclaimed, "Oh, so that's why your eyes are slanted!" At first, I was angry, but then I realized that there are a lot of other people I can relate to who, like me, are judged by their appearance every day.

Being in A/PIC has helped me to further embrace my Asian side and to help me get a sense that I am not alone in a world of racism.

**The Rev. Manish Mishra**  
Minister  
Unitarian Universalist Church  
of St. Petersburg, Florida



India...home of Hinduism, Buddhism, great vegetarian cooking, and the land from which my parents came to the United States.

Because I was born in the U.S. and raised as an orthodox Hindu, identity has always been something I have wrestled with. What does it mean to be nonwhite, Hindu, and vegetarian, having grown up in a Jewish neighborhood, in a Christian country?

Add on the gay identity I later came to understand and accept, and it's easy to see why others have always looked at me, and my life, as a symbolic representation of diversity. But I never asked to "represent" any community (gay, Asian, non-white, Hindu, or any other). These are facets of identity that, in part, have been layered onto me by the majority culture.

We are categorized by our culture, and then asked to teach those in the majority about our lives and struggles. This can be a lonely experience for us UUs of color. When there are only a few of us in any given congregation, how do we find the spiritual sustenance we need? Where and when can we be just be ourselves, and not "representatives?" Where can we be truly safe?

Within The Asian/Pacific Islander Caucus and the larger DRUUMM community I know that I am safe. When we gather, it is as brothers and sisters who share similar values and shared experiences of Unitarian Universalism. If you have ever felt lonely within your congregation, wondering where the other Asian/Pacific Islander faces are, look no further. We are here for you, and invite you to join us. You are not alone.



**Catie Chi Olson**  
White Bear UU Church  
Mahtomedi, Minnesota

A statistician could have predicted that I would join our denomination. In many ways, I appear to be the "typical" Unitarian-Universalist. I was raised in a church that I felt limited how much of me could be welcomed, so I am a "come-outer", a UU convert not content to say words without deeds.

I was raised in an upper-middle family that valued education and community service. We viewed voting as a responsibility, not only a right. My husband and I joined the UU church for our children's liberal religious education. This place has become our spiritual home.

But what sets me apart from the majority of UUs is that I am not white, but *hapa*, the Hawaiian term for someone of Asian and European descent.

To describe how racism affects me, I would have to say it's like a scene in the movie "A Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy." The heroes encounter a planet where each time someone thinks, a fly swatter-like thing springs from the ground and smacks them in the face. Anywhere, any time, from anyone, I can feel that "smack" when something tells me that I am being judged NOT by the content of my character, but the color of my skin (or the slant of my eyes).

As a UU seminarian, I hope that the good news of our faith can help change that by welcoming all people with radical hospitality. Let's join together to celebrate our differences as part of what is best about our faith and our country.

**The Rev. Jennifer Youngsun Ryu**  
Co-Minister  
Williamsburg Unitarian Universalists  
Williamsburg, Virginia



When I visit my parents in Ohio, where I grew up, I often go to church with them.

Theirs is a small Korean Presbyterian congregation. It comforts me to hear the sermon and hymns in Korean. The prayers have a certain cadence that remind me of my grandmother who passed away a few years ago. And the traditional Korean lunch they serve after worship is a delight to my taste buds. I see the children and remember what it was like to be one of the few Asian students in school. Part of me feels right at home there, but it cannot be my spiritual home. The majority of Korean churches in the United States are severely conservative theologically and hostile toward women in church leadership and gay/bisexual/lesbian/transgender rights.

My spiritual life has grown and blossomed since finding the Unitarian Universalist faith over ten years ago. The first seeds of my call to ministry were planted when I met The Rev. Cheng Imm Tan at the Urban Church Conference. It was the first time I had seen the three parts of my identity in another person: Asian, female, and Unitarian Universalist. My mind and my heart opened that day to the possibilities of a larger, fuller life—one that enfolds all my identities.



**The Asian/Pacific Islander Caucus (A/PIC) of the UUA People of Color Affiliate, DRUUMM (Diverse and Revolutionary Unitarian Universalist Multicultural Ministries) endeavors to build a safe and sacred community among UU members who identify, wholly or in part, as Asian and Pacific Islander, hapas or Asian adoptees.**

**To this end, we pledge to:**

- minister to one another's needs
- support one another in our spiritual journeys as A/PI UUs in our Unitarian Universalist (UU) faith communities
- strengthen the caucus's roles and linkages within UU Congregations to effectively advocate for our needs within the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA)
- help improve and enhance existing anti-racism work of the UUA by sharing with others our A/PI perspective and experiences
- work in synergy with DRUUMM and other identity-based caucuses to collectively identify and transform the structures of oppression towards an equitable, inclusive and just community
- provide authentic cultural resources for the UUA

**A/PIC members and friends are invited to join our email list [general@apiuu.org](mailto:general@apiuu.org) and the A/PIC Annual Conference, DRUUMM Annual Conference and A/PIC and DRUUMM gatherings at the Unitarian Universalist Association's annual General Assembly.**

**[www.apiuu.org](http://www.apiuu.org)  
email: [steering@apiuu.org](mailto:steering@apiuu.org)**

# Asian/ Pacific Islander Voices in Unitarian Universalism



**ASIAN/PACIFIC ISLANDER CAUCUS**  
of Diverse and Revolutionary Unitarian  
Universalist Multicultural Ministries (DRUUMM)



### Hiro Nishikawa

*Main Line Unitarian Church  
Devon, Pennsylvania*

I started attending the Unitarian Fellowship of Corvallis, Oregon while doing post-doctoral research there in the late 1960's. Until then, I had attended Buddhist churches since elementary school in California, where my family and I had returned from a concentration camp in Arizona during WWII.

Through my undergrad years at UC Berkeley I continued regular attendance at a nearby Shinshu Buddhist temple. My wife and I were married in a Sotoshu (Zen-sect Buddhism) temple in Honolulu before we went to Oregon for grad school.

Attending a UU church was easy for me since I didn't have to check my prior religious studies or beliefs at the door. But there were some observable changes in our worship environment. The Buddhist temples I frequented were nearly 100 percent Asian. UU churches are 90 percent-plus white. The temples burned incense. UU congregations are smoke-free. But actually, many of the philosophical values and abiding principles are quite similar—only the vocabulary and ritual practices are different.

Forty years after stepping into a UU fellowship and becoming acquainted with my first UU minister, I now interact with his son who attends my church in Devon! Is this life going full circle or what? Moreover as a Medi-Care-eligible senior, I've gotten up to my eyeballs into social/racial justice work—something I never did as a young Buddhist. How being a UU has changed me!

### Joseph Santos-Lyons

*Director-Campus Ministry and  
Field Organizing, UUA*

Unitarian Universalism is the religion I was born into, or rather, adopted into. My white adoptive parents gave me a sound liberal religious upbringing and raised me with great privilege through education and attention. But they could not give me other things I needed, such as a connection to my bi-racial identity and a dialogue about “who I am.” I knew little beyond that my parents were teenagers in Portland, Oregon; my mother was of Czech descent and my father of Chinese-Hawaiian descent. I needed to know what my parents believed and how racism and oppression shaped their worldview, including their decision to give me up. I needed to understand how the communities of my birth family and my adopted family co-exist in our society and within the spiritual theology of UUism.

I have long grappled with these questions, and found comfort in knowing that there are other UUs in A/PIC and DRUUMM also trying to understand their identities. As a seminarian and UUA staffer working with UU youth and young adults of color, I am continually moved by how our theological ideals and faith community provide saving grace to those, who, like me, will always be seekers of our own identities and truths.



### Alexander Lok-tin Szeto

*Spiritual Seekers Society  
Hong Kong, China*

I am a 40-year-old nuclear medicine physician, born, raised, and living in Hong Kong. My wife of one year, Flora Hoi-yiu Lee, is a special needs child care worker. I

discovered UUism on the internet in 1996. Appreciative of its inclusiveness and brand of religious liberalism, I eventually joined the Church of the Larger Fellowship. I also joined the UU Christian Fellowship ([www.uuchristian.org](http://www.uuchristian.org)), where I constantly find liberal Christian sermons that always make my day.

I began to wonder why there was no UU presence in a world city like Hong Kong, so I initiated the “Liberal Christian Forum of Hong Kong” two years ago on the internet (<http://www.armsbell.com/forum/index.php?mforum=liberalhk>) to attract other Chinese liberal Christians. We formed the Spiritual Seekers Society to try to capture the core spirit of UUism while retaining some congregational freedom.

Today, about 7 to 10 of us meet bi-weekly for fellowship and worship. We are grateful for the beloved community of Unitarian Universalism and for the commonality we have found with fellow UUs of Asian/Pacific Islander descent in A/PIC.

### KokHeong McNaughton

*UU Church of Los Alamos  
Los Alamos, New Mexico*

I am ethnically Chinese, born and raised in Malaysia. My family practiced Buddhism for its sacred regard of life, Taoism for its earth-centered spirituality, ancestor worship for its wisdom of our past, and Confucianism for its ordered view of the universe. In Malaysia's multicultural society, we celebrate Hari Raya Puasa (Malay New Year after Ramadan), Lunar New Year, Deepavali (India's Festival of Lights) and Christmas—along with other national and religious holidays.

When I found out about Unitarian Universalism (a well-guarded secret) in the mid 70s, I found a community that embraced me in my totality. I didn't have to leave a part of myself behind. Instead, I was able to grow spiritually, adding to my multi-faceted religious heritage.

My ethnic differences are not only welcomed, but also affirmed and upheld. People are interested in what I have to share. With my church as sponsor, I taught Taiji and Qigong classes to raise money for a youth GA fund. UU friends and I cooked elaborate Chinese dinners to raise funds for social action outreach. My opinion matters.

Not only do these opportunities give me pride in my culture, but they also encourage me to dig deeper into my heritage to find out more in areas where my knowledge and expertise are lacking. They help me to look at my culture and heritage with fresh eyes, and with greater appreciation and gratitude.

For me, service to others is an important spiritual practice. Being a UU helps me to be the best that I can be.



### Sharmila Khare

*First Unitarian Congregation  
of Ottawa  
Ottawa, Canada*

Membership in A/PIC has been truly life-changing for me. Growing up in Canada, I never wanted to distinguish myself as

culturally different or as a person of color. I just wanted to fit in.

When I discovered Unitarian Universalism, I started on a path of identity and spiritual development that has helped me to understand who I am. This means reclaiming my East Indian heritage, learning more about it and being proud of it. This means recognizing that I am a person of color and how this has affected how I interact with the world and how the world interacts with me.

This means accepting that I have experienced racism throughout my life and that much of this has been internalized. I love my country and am proud to be Canadian, but it is by no means the multicultural “mecca” I always wanted to believe it was.

A/PIC has provided me with the foundation to pursue my identity development in a safe, supportive and constructive manner. As a result of what I've learned, I have been able to speak up and address racism within our UU congregations. I know now that I can do my part to create an anti-racist religious community, where we can realize the UU principle of affirming and promoting the inherent worth and dignity of every person.

### Karen Eng

*First Unitarian Church of Oakland  
Oakland, California*

For most of the first 20-plus years that I was in UU congregations, I was so delighted to have found a spiritual home that I didn't think very critically about it. That really changed when I met Young Kim at Cleveland General Assembly, where he started the conversation about why there are so few of “us.”

In recent years, we have been intentional about gathering Asian/Pacific Islander UUs together. We gather at General Assembly, at meetings and conferences, and in our districts and congregations. For me, it is transforming and powerful to be in religious community with others like me. It changes my worship experience when I see myself reflected in the pulpit and the pews. It changes my sense of community when the ways we are with one another are like the ways I am with my relatives. When I am with other UUs of color, I feel less like the odd person out or that my being Chinese is invisible.

I believe that we are called upon as people of faith to transform our church into a multicultural community that works to dismantle racism and counter oppressions. We have to “walk the talk” of our UU Principles. When we lift up that work, we make more room for the likes of “us” in this beloved faith. We all deserve to feel the power of seeing ourselves reflected in Unitarian Universalism, and the faith community is better off for it!



### Vivien Hao

*Pacific Unitarian Church  
Rancho Palos Verdes, California*

Born in Taiwan, I immigrated to the U.S. when I was 6. In Los Angeles, my family's social life centered around Mandarin Baptist Church, where most people spoke English and

Chinese—*Chinglish*—and, like me, straddled two languages and cultures. Even though we had similar backgrounds, I soon learned that my Baptist friends didn't think at all like me.

By high school, I had rejected my family's faith. Fifteen years later, I was delighted to discover Unitarian Universalism, where I found acceptance, fellowship, and a tolerance for diverse beliefs... but not people who “looked like me.” In my western New York UU church, I was mistaken repeatedly for the only other Asian American in the church, and was even asked to speak for “my people” on China-US relations. Even as I struggled to define my spiritual identity, I realized that I needed to also address my racial/ethnic identity.

I returned to LA, where I discovered that the Asian American community had grown six-fold since I left 20 years ago. But the half dozen Southern California UU churches I have visited are still virtually all white. Many in these congregations share my vision of a multi-racial, multicultural UU community. But for now, it is still a dream.

Because of how I look, I will be a perpetual foreigner in my country. In the same way, my “Asian-ness” makes me an alien in my faith community. In A/PIC, we are cultivating spaces where, for a time, I can truly *belong*... where, for a time, the dream is reality and I am home.

### David Yamashita

*UU Congregation of Atlanta  
Atlanta, Georgia*

*Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Atlanta is a community of faith that encourages and supports our individual spiritual quests out of which we act together for social justice.*

This is my congregation's mission statement. I heard these words and I really didn't fully appreciate their meaning. One always associates any religious affiliation with spiritual words, so “spiritual quest” sounded good, but provided me with no context. I never felt spiritual and certainly, did not feel like I was on any quest.

At General Assembly in Long Beach, California in 2004, I attended the A/PIC networking meeting. Imagine my surprise at meeting other UUs who looked like me! This magical moment brought context to my sense of community and work in social justice by adding that key ingredient called “spiritual quest.”

Until then, I had never really thought of myself as a “person of color.” I had never felt affiliated with anyone, especially not other Asian/Pacific Islanders. How things have changed for me since that moment!

Now, I have finally embarked on my “spiritual quest”—to discover things that cannot be read or discussed — but experienced.

