

Unitarian Universalist head resigns amid controversy about staff diversity

by [Adelle M. Banks](#) in the [April 26, 2017](#) issue

The president of the Unitarian Universalist Association has resigned three months short of the end of his second term, declaring that someone else is needed to address issues of diversity in the association.

Peter Morales, the first Latino president of the liberal and theologically diverse association, resigned effective April 1 as criticism mounted over hiring practices.

“It is clear to me that I am not the right person to lead our association as we work together to create the processes and structures that will address our shortcomings and build the diverse staff we all want,” he wrote in his resignation letter to the UUA’s trustee board.

The controversy came to a head when a white male was chosen to lead the group’s southern region, replacing another white man who was retiring. Christina Rivera, a Latina laywoman who has served on the UUA’s board of trustees since 2014, revealed that she was a finalist for the position.

She asked in a blog post on March 27: “How do we hold the UUA accountable for racial discrimination and upholding white supremacy if no one stands up in the public square and says ‘me, it was me, you did this to me, and it is not OK, I demand you make this right!’”

Later that day, Morales sent a letter to UUA staffers saying that people of color among the staff have increased from 14 percent in 2008 to 20 percent today; managers of color have increased from 5 to 9 percent. He also noted that UUA members, numbering about 200,000, continue “to be overwhelmingly white and of European origin”—as much as 98 percent.

Morales, who succeeded the movement's first African-American president in 2009, added that no one is above criticism.

"However, I wish I were seeing more humility and less self-righteousness, more thoughtfulness and less hysteria," he wrote.

As he resigned, he apologized for his letter, saying it "made matters worse."

The UUA's Leadership Council, which includes top staffers, also apologized in a separate statement.

"We take very seriously the question of how our policies, practices, leadership and culture systematically center and advantage white people within Unitarian Universalism," the council wrote. "We acknowledge that it is past time for us to examine more deeply than we ever have the patterns of institutional racism that are embedded in our practices of leadership, including hiring."

Members of the more than 1,000 Unitarian Universalist congregations embrace seven principles, including justice, acceptance of one another, and the belief in the dignity of every person. They include people from a variety of beliefs, from atheists and humanists to Christians, Muslims, Jews, and Buddhists.

Harlan Limpert, the UUA's chief operating officer, has been named the senior staffer until the trustees select an acting president. A new president will be elected at the General Assembly in June. —Religion News Service