



Stories of Hope

2024-2025

Expanding the Welcome Table



Contents

Story 1: Suleyman Wellings-Longmore..... 1
Story 2: Konea Ishimura..... 5
Story 3: Pink Haven Coalition 9
Story 4: Anna-Maria Tesfaye..... 13



Learn more!



Give today!

Dear friends,

This year's Guest at Your Table theme, *Expanding the Welcome Table*, was inspired by the hymn, "Gonna Sit at the Welcome Table." Originally created and sung by enslaved Black people in the United States, the hymn celebrates God's welcome, a joyous hospitality to be enjoyed by all. It also speaks to God's justice in verses frequently left out in more sanitized renditions of the hymn, such as the version included in *Singing the Living Tradition*. For example,

"I'm gonna tell God how you treat me, I'm gonna tell God how you starve me" was a traditional early verse. The song later became an anthem during the Civil Rights Movement, when activists added verses such as "I'm gonna be a registered voter" and "I'm gonna sit at the Woolworth counter."

The historical and cultural context of this beloved hymn matters because it is a song that is rooted in the hope, defiance, and imagination of the community that birthed and nurtured it. This song, in its many evolutions, speaks to the need for accountability and justice as well as healing.

For fifty years, through the Guest at Your Table program, the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee has used the metaphor of a global table where we come together to learn each other's stories and share our hopes for a future in which all may thrive. Our partner-led model of justice work centers the hope, defiance, and imagination of the communities we engage with. The relationships of trust upon which we base our work extend to each person who would take their place at the table and engage in the accountability, justice, and healing needed today.

Whether you have been participating in the Guest at Your Table tradition for decades or are here for the very first time, we are so glad you have joined us. Thank you for being a part of this Welcome Table, for sharing in the calls to justice given by our grassroots partners, and for spreading the word in your circles about our collaborative work for human rights.

In fellowship,

Rev. Mary Katherine Morn,
President and Lead Executive Officer

Dear fellow justice-seekers,

This year, we are celebrating Guest at Your Table's 50th anniversary with the theme *Expanding the Welcome Table*. We are excited to introduce you to our featured partners!

In this booklet, you will meet:

- Suleyman Wellings-Longmore, a legal fellow with the Haitian Bridge Alliance, who is researching the ways racism is impacting the experiences of migrants of color in the United States.
- Konea Ishimura, a young climate activist from the Marshall Islands who, along with his colleagues at Jo-Jikum, is helping his community heal from the destructive legacy of nuclear testing by the United States while envisioning a sustainable future for the Marshallese people.
- Pink Haven Coalition organizers who are creating networks of safety and welcome for trans and gender expansive people forced to flee unsafe states in the United States.
- Anna-Maria Tesfaye, co-founder of Queer Svit, an organization offering resources and companionship to the queer community in Ukraine who have been impacted by Russia's invasion.

Thank you for joining UUSC for Guest at your Table to learn more about our global partners who are embodying hope, transforming lives, and ensuring all are made to feel welcome. We invite you to help advance community-led change by making a gift at uusc.org/givetoguest. Together, we can find new points of connection and sources of inspiration as we continue to expand the welcome table for all people.

In faith and solidarity,



Rev. Laura Randall,
Director of Congregation Relations



Story 1

Suleyman Wellings-Longmore

What does it mean to ensure everyone is welcome at the table? It's more than there being an extra setting. It's ensuring that the guest can arrive at the table safely and be treated with respect. The United States, with its many resources and opportunities, often serves as a table and The Haitian Bridge Alliance (HBA) is ensuring that members of the Haitian diaspora and other Black immigrants have a seat. They address issues that unfairly—and uniquely—bar Black migrants from entering the United States and dismantle barriers making it difficult to remain here. Racism does not belong at the table, and HBA expands the United States'

table by removing injustices that keep those in migration from having a seat and being in community with all of us.

One of HBA's goals is to "transform the perception of the border from the misguided stereotype that it only impacts a set of people to a trans-American, global space that includes Black people—because immigration is a Black issue." As part of this work, HBA is gathering quantitative evidence which exposes the discriminatory treatment that Black migrants commonly face from U.S. immigration authorities.

Suleyman Wellings-Longmore, a legal fellow at HBA, explains: "To try and tackle this issue, the Haitian Bridge Alliance together with UUSC have created surveys for both Black asylum-seekers and attorneys working in immigration. Whilst we are still analyzing this data, we have discovered wide-ranging evidence of deplorable detention conditions for Black migrants;

psychological and physical abuse, inadequate food, and widespread solitary confinement has been reported." Suleyman adds that there are flagrant due-process violations of how Black migrants are processed in the U.S. immigration system.

This data is being shared in a report to be used by everyone who is a part of the ongoing fight to liberate those in detention and procure national and international legal protections. Importantly, Suleyman emphasizes, "These issues really go beyond immigration and are anchored in anti-Black racism throughout the world and country itself. You can't really solve one without effectively solving the other as well."

Reflecting on the collaborative relationship with UUSC, Suleyman remarks, "I think UUSC's partnership has been vital in our work, from assisting in creating the surveys themselves, to managing the gift card payments to respondents, to analyzing the

raw data and sharing drafting responsibilities. This report would not have happened without UUSC and the entire team.”

UUSC is proud to partner with HBA to continue telling the powerful and nuanced stories of Black immigrants—and continue our tradition of expanding our table!

Go deeper and take action:

- Learn more and watch a video of Suleyman at [***uusc.org/guest***](https://uusc.org/guest).
- Make a donation to UUSC today at [***uusc.org/givetoguest***](https://uusc.org/givetoguest).
- Engage in needed human rights advocacy at [***uusc.org/action-center***](https://uusc.org/action-center).



Story 2

Konea Ishimura

As kids, many of us have known the feeling of being relegated to the “kids table” at family functions. Part of that feeling is that we can’t contribute to the important discussions happening simply because of our age. The subtle message is clear: When you are young, your voice and opinion don’t matter as much. UUSC partner Jo-Jikum makes space at the table for those inheriting the future.

In Marshallese, the native language of the Marshall Islands, Jo-Jikum stands for *Jodrikdrik in Jipañ eno eo e Kutok Maroro* (“Youth for a Greener Environment”). Marshall Islanders continue to live with the

long-lasting health hazards of the 67 U.S. nuclear tests conducted on the cluster of atolls between 1946 and 1958. Program manager and native Marshall Islander Konea Ishimura explains how Jo-Jikum “provides youth with the tools and knowledge necessary to become future leaders of tomorrow in order to stand up against the injustices that we face due to climate change and our nuclear legacy.”

In their youth-led environmental justice efforts, Jo-Jikum relies heavily on art. “Art is our culture ... it has always been there for us to convey a message that we otherwise could not through writing or through speech,” Konea explains. Marshall Islanders contend not only with the United States’ shameful nuclear legacy, but also with current climate change impacts such as rising sea levels, saltwater intrusion, and excessively humid temperatures.

Konea, a new father himself, thinks a lot about future voices. He contemplates what kind of

world he wants his child to live in 25 years from now. “I would like my son, 25 years from now, to experience what his ancestors experienced—which is life in the islands like no other. Surrounded by community, surrounded by his culture, surrounded by his family, and surrounded by the land and sea that encompass and make up the Marshall Islands. I want him to enjoy the fullness of what it means to be a Marshall Islander so deeply rooted in our *manit* (culture).”

It is Konea’s wish that his son doesn’t have to look over his shoulder at the constant threat of climate change like he must. “Compared to now, a lot of us as youth growing up were forced to grow up so we could speak up at local levels, regional levels, and international levels to try and fight for our right to enjoy living in our own homes that are threatened by these outside forces which we cannot control.”

UUSC’s support has meant a lot for Konea and Jo-Jikum: “It’s really empowering for an organization

so small like Jo-Jikum, from a small country in the middle of the Pacific Ocean to feel like they are being heard, that our activities and projects are influential and powerful. I think being heard goes a long way and having a partner like UUSC being there, listening to what we need, what the country needs, what our programs need, is key to the success of small organizations like ours."

Go deeper and take action:

- Learn more and watch a video of Konea at ***uusc.org/guest***.
- Make a donation to UUSC today at ***uusc.org/givetoguest***.
- Engage in needed human rights advocacy at ***uusc.org/action-center***.



Story 3

Pink Haven Coalition

Due to the growing persecution Two-spirit, transgender, and gender expansive people face, and the determined, organized efforts to bring about their complete eradication from public life, all quotes will be attributed to Pink Haven to protect identities and provide discretion.

In the 19th century, people who were escaping slavery sought a burning lantern as a signal they had reached a safehouse. It was a covert way to say: We have space and safety at our table for you. Today, Pink Haven is serving transgender and gender expansive people in the same spirit. A collective of organizations and individuals, Pink Haven formed in response to the increasing number of anti-trans bills proposed across the United States in recent years. The coalition is creating networks of safety and aid for "trans beloveds and their families who need to

escape unsafe states, access healthcare across state lines, or stay as safe as possible where they are.”

Pink Haven is building a bigger table for trans individuals and their families when so many states are cutting away place settings. Pink Haven staff share that the growing number of fascist legislative threats to trans people “has created a human rights crisis of internally displaced persons fleeing anti-trans states for safer states elsewhere.” 2023 set records for anti-trans legislation, and 2024 has proved just as dangerous, with more than 600 anti-trans bills being considered by federal and state legislators.

Oklahoma, for example, isn't O.K. While many of their 55 anti-trans bills have been defeated, nine are currently advancing. One bill would impose barriers to providing accurate state IDs. Even more destructive and restrictive is Senate Bill 1530, a deceptively named “women’s bill of rights.” In reality, it will codify gender discrimination into law, enforcing an unscientific binary classification of terms like “female” and “male” according to sex assigned at birth.

In North Carolina, legislation has been carried over and introduced that will force any transgender youth to be outed to their parents if they report experiencing any form of gender dysphoria to a teacher or medical professional. Further legislation in the state is also impacting transgender youth’s ability to access gender affirming healthcare.

And this is just a small sampling of the legislative violence being done to trans and gender expansive people in the United States. The American Civil Liberties Union is currently tracking anti-trans legislation in process in 43 states. Additionally, an unprecedented 75 anti-trans bills are being considered at the federal level, up from 53 bills in 2023. These bills, both at the state and federal level, block the right of trans people to receive healthcare, access education, obtain legal recognition, and even exist in public.

This is why Pink Haven’s partnership with UUSC has become so vital. Working as a coalition with UUSC; the Unitarian Universalist Association; progressive Quaker, Jewish, and Christian organizations; local mutual aid groups; care

providers; as well as transgender activists and organizations, Pink Haven can safely provide support where it is needed. The network organizes housing and transportation for these “passengers,” the term given to those being helped.

“Pink Haven has saved my daughter’s life, aiding us to flee a state that was no longer safe for us in any way, shape, or form,” explains one Pink Haven passenger. “I’ve been a single mom their (her children’s) whole life, and Pink Haven is the first group of people who has helped us. It brings tears to my eyes. It truly does take a village. It just took us a while to find ours.”

Go deeper and take action:

- Learn more and watch a video from Pink Haven at [***uusc.org/guest***](https://uusc.org/guest).
- Make a donation to UUSC today at [***uusc.org/givetoguest***](https://uusc.org/givetoguest).
- Engage in needed human rights advocacy at [***uusc.org/action-center***](https://uusc.org/action-center).



Story 4

Anna-Maria Tesfaye

In February 2022, Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Over 35,000 civilian casualties have been reported. The invasion forced 14 million people to evacuate, and another three million people are internally displaced. UUSC offered swift support to these communities in partnership with organizations on the ground.

Even the shadow of war does not end the harmful biases people hold. Ukrainian people of color and the LGBTQI+ community face the same oppression in migration as they did at home. To address these inequities, four activists came together in March 2022 to form Queer Svit, a Black queer-run organization that provides services to BIPOC and LGBTQI+ people

affected by Russian aggression. The organization uses community feedback to shape its services and plays a critical role in ensuring that LGBTQI+ people are not erased and have a seat at our table.

Anna-Maria Tesfaye, one of the co-founders of Queer Svit, shares, "Our organization seeks to empower marginalized communities by providing opportunities to voice their concerns and needs."

This mission allows Queer Svit to meet needs in tailor-made ways. "We ensure the right for our community to self-identify with legal gender marker changes." Anna-Maria explains. "We address racism at border crossings in Ukraine. We also deliver food and medication to communities at the border."

Queer Svit serves those in Ukraine and in other countries impacted by Russian imperialism. Anna-Maria shares, "We also help queer people and people of color from countries who can be the subject of Russian imperialism, which is

most of central Europe—excluding the European Union—and Central Asia. We also help people who are located in Russia as well."

New grassroots organizations like Queer Svit often have difficulty securing initial funding, as well as sustainable support, due to a lack of prior funding history. "UUSC took a chance on us and recognized the potential of our work," Anna-Maria explains. "Our partnership with UUSC has been transformative. Our organization is sustainable, allowing us to continue our mission."

UUSC funding allows Queer Svit to increase the good it does. Anna-Maria noted that successful partnerships between larger and smaller organizations are key: "Institutions working together is what generates change."

Anna-Maria urges allies in the United States to keep their community at the forefront of our minds and hearts. "Many communities face ongoing challenges. Their needs and

struggles must remain in focus.”
Donations, awareness building, and
advocacy are ways you can help.

UUSC is proud to continue its
relationship with Queer Svit, an
institution that ensures that our
collective table is filled with the
presence and voices of members
of the LGBTQI+ community. Like
Anna-Maria, we also want to
live in a world “where there’s no
homophobia, transphobia, racism,
or sexism.” Our work with Queer
Svit makes that hope that much
closer to reality.

Go deeper and take action:

- Learn more and watch a
video of Anna-Maria at
uusc.org/guest.
- Make a donation to
UUSC today at
uusc.org/givetoguest.
- Engage in needed human
rights advocacy at
uusc.org/action-center.



Please join UUSC in our work with these
partners — make a contribution to
support our efforts.

Your donation of \$40 or more earns
you and your loved ones annual UUSC
membership benefits. In addition,
all individual and family unrestricted
contributions of \$150 or more are
eligible to be matched dollar for dollar by
the UU Congregation at Shelter Rock in
Manhasset, N.Y. — doubling the impact
of your gift!

Complete the form on the other side
of this page and mail it to the following
address:

UUSC
PO Box 808
Newark, NJ 07101-0808

All donations are tax deductible to the
extent permitted by law. UUSC’s tax ID
is 04-6186012. UUSC’s CFC number is
11685.

GAYT 24-25

USC thanks you for your generous gift!

Your donation of \$40 or more earns you annual USC membership benefits, and a gift of \$150 or more is eligible to be matched — doubling the impact of your gift! Please list all who are included in your gift.

Total gift enclosed

Individual Name(s)

\$

Youth Name(s)

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Email _____ Phone _____

Congregation _____ City _____ State _____

I would like to establish a monthly pledge of \$ _____.

Transfer funds each month from my checking account OR Charge my credit card every month

Enclosed is a check for my first monthly contribution to USC. I authorize my bank to transfer my pledge from my checking account each month. I understand that a record of each gift will be included on my monthly bank statement.

Check enclosed (payable to "USC")

Charge my credit/debit card:

MasterCard Visa

American Express Discover

Card # _____

Expiration date _____

Cardholder signature _____

Print cardholder name _____

All donations are tax deductible to the extent permitted by law. USC's tax ID is 04-6186012.

UUSC is an independent, nonsectarian 501(c)(3) nonprofit member organization. We are a leading voice for human rights and social justice in the United States and around the world. Please support our work — begin or renew your membership today!

As a member of UUSC, you join a community of over 40,000 supporters who share your principles and passion for justice. You also stay up to date on pressing human rights issues through periodic mailings, action alerts, and our semiannual newsletter, *Rights Now*. And most importantly, you join a coalition of others who put their hands to the arc of the universe and help it bend toward justice.

Advancing human rights is the work of many joining hands. Join us — with a gift that earns membership for you and your loved ones this year!

For more information about UUSC, visit uusc.org.



Unitarian Universalist Service Committee
689 Massachusetts Avenue
Cambridge, MA 02139-3302
tel: 617-868-6600 • fax: 617-868-7102
development@uusc.org • uusc.org • CFC#11685