



Unitarian Universalist Church at Washington Crossing

One Hundred & One Years of Faith, Hope, Love and Action, 1916 to 2017

UUCWC RACIAL JUSTICE INITIATIVE – JANUARY TO MARCH 2017

Welcome to the first Racial Justice Initiative bulletin for 2017. The name has been changed from Churchwide Racial Justice Project to UUCWC Racial Justice Initiative to better acknowledge that the work towards justice is open-ended. Our nation faces many challenges and great injustices and our seven Unitarian Universalist principles call us to action:

1. The inherent worth and dignity of every person;
2. Justice, equity and compassion in human relations;
3. Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations;
4. A free and responsible search for truth and meaning;
5. The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large;
6. The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all;
7. Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.

There are new opportunities this year, such as monthly Gatherings for Faith in Action, Circle for People of Color, a Racial Justice Book Group, a Faith in Action Facebook page and a Social Justice themed brown bag dinner for families. We will continue with book suggestions and movies. You'll find more information about each of these in this newsletter.

JUSTICE, EQUITY & BEING ALLIES TO ALL OPPRESSED GROUPS

Nathalie Edmond, Racial Justice Initiative Co-leader and member of the Council for Faith in Action

I sense that 2016 was an awakening for many people in terms of how much work still needs to be done regarding racial justice. In 2016 the Racial Justice Project at UUCWC transitioned to the Racial Justice Initiative acknowledging the ongoing commitment the church has towards advocating for justice and equity.

What does it mean to be an ally in our fight against racial injustices? I read that an “ally” is someone from a “majority” group who works to fight against oppression in their personal life and is an advocate for an oppressed group. Becoming an ally takes time and is a process of self-discovery and awareness which often needs to precede action. You can find more tips on becoming an ally: https://www.nasco.coop/files/ally_packet.pdf

As part of the initiative we spent much of the fall having informational sessions and listening circles to understand the new civil rights movement- *Black Lives Matter*- and why it might be important for a predominantly white congregation to be an ally for this movement. The phrase *Black Lives Matter* tends to stir up a variety of emotions for people, partly because of the long history of racial injustice (some overt and some covert) against black people in this country. While the commitment to understanding and fighting against racial injustice towards black people has not changed, the 2016 presidential election highlighted the many oppressed groups in our society that need allies such as Muslims and undocumented immigrants. The Council for Faith in Action will be expanding its' racial justice initiative to include the needs of all these oppressed groups.

Update on Black Lives Matter Information Sessions and Listening Circles

Sallie Dunner, *Racial Justice Initiative Co-leader and Chair of the Council for Faith in Action*

Two information sessions and five listening circles were held during Fall 2016. There was excellent participation, more than was expected which speaks to the passion for justice in our congregation. The consensus was that supporting the Black Lives Matter civil rights movement was in alignment with our principles and values although concerns were expressed about some aspects of the Black Lives Matter movement, such as calls to violence, anti-police sentiment and anti-Semitism. However, there was also understanding that it is a broad based, community and populist driven movement for justice and equity and while we might disagree with some of its' iterations, it is time for change in the deeply destructive racist dynamic in our country. A summary of the circles is available on the Council for Faith in Action page of the church website. Hard copies are also available on the bulletin board in the lobby.

CFA has developed a short survey (6 questions) to gauge the congregation's thoughts about publicly supporting the Black Lives Matter movement. It can be accessed at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/W859GKW> and it is not necessary to have attended an information session or listening circle to participate. In fact, we would really like to hear from folks who didn't attend. Your response will be anonymous unless you choose to include your name. Please note that at this time we are not asking for a vote on having a Black Lives Matter banner outside the church; this is a discussion for the future. For more information, please contact racialjustice@uucwc.org or any of the co-leaders of the Racial Justice Initiative, Sallie Dunner, Nathalie Edmund and Dan Tuft.

Beloved Conversations

Nathalie Edmond and Sallie Dunner

UUCWC is participating in the Beloved Conversations curriculum this year as part of our journey to have open dialogues about race and its legacy on us as individuals as well as our congregation and larger society. The idea is that one cannot move forward and effectively engage in racial justice work without a better understanding of our own privilege and implicit bias. Often conversations about race put the burden on people of color to educate white people on racism and white supremacy.

Beloved Conversations highlights the different spiritual needs of people of color in these race conversations. Here is an excerpt from the curriculum, "People of color have been trained to protect the feelings and prioritize the comfort of white people...We believe that racial caucusing is important because it acknowledges that our experiences in the world are deeply impacted by our racial identity, and the way the world sees us. We are all harmed by racism, but people of color are harmed in very different ways than white people...Race caucusing strengthens us in the work of anti-oppression, and allows us to build up the resiliency and groundedness necessary to forgive each other and stay at the table when things get hard in our work together." Based on this premise as well as a growing need for spiritual connection as issues of racism are more apparent in society a People of Color Circle has been created that will meet monthly. Please see below under the Justice Gatherings for more information.

The response from congregants wanting to participate in this UUA justice curriculum over the next months was beyond expectations and unfortunately it wasn't possible to include all those interested in the first offering. However, if enough people are interested it is fully expected that it will be offered again in Fall 2017 so don't despair! It's well worth waiting for and even though we're only into the second session (excluding the initial retreat), the depth of what it offers is thoughtful and challenging. If you want more information about the future offering of Beloved Conversations, please contact Robin Pugh, dre@uucwc.org.

UUA & UUCWC Common Read for 2017

The Racial Justice Initiative is encouraging congregants to read [The Third Reconstruction: How a Moral Movement is Overcoming the Politics of Division and Hate](#) by The Rev. Dr. William Barber II and Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove which is the 2016-17 UU Common Read. To quote from the UUA website:

"Unitarian Universalists were electrified at General Assembly 2016 by Rev. Barber's call for building and sustaining a movement for justice for all people. The Common Read selection committee believes that now is a moment for Unitarian Universalists to answer that call. *The Third Reconstruction* offers helpful, practical guidance for engaging with justice movements born in response to local experiences of larger injustices. Drawing on the prophetic traditions of the Jewish and Christian scriptures, while making room for other sources of truth, the book challenges us to ground our justice work in moral dissent, even when there is no reasonable expectation of political success, and to do the hard work of coalition building in a society that is fractured and polarized. "

Copies of the book will available for sale at cost during coffee hour Sunday, January 15 and 29. Dates of discussion groups will be provided in Crossings II and the weekly email.

Please see the next section for information about the newly established Racial Justice Book Club.

Racial Justice Book Group

David Anderson, Lynne Molnar & Michelle Ruopp, *Book Club Facilitators*

This newly established book discussion group is committed to having interesting and challenging discussions about various books related to race and racial justice. The first book will be the Common Read, *The Third Reconstruction: How a Moral Movement is Overcoming the Politics of Division and Hate*. Subsequent books will be chosen by members of the group.

The first book group discussion will be on Monday, February 13, from 7:00 to 9:00 p.m. at church. Subsequent discussions are scheduled for May 8, September 11 and November 13, 2017.

Everyone is invited to participate in this ongoing group. For more information, please contact Dave, Lynne or Michelle directly.

Faith In Action Facebook Page

This new page is where we can share thoughts, commentary, action opportunities, links, etc., related to justice and political issues. This a closed page which means only page members can participate so if you'd like to join, go to Facebook and type in UUCWC Faith in Action which will take you to the page or type <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1723903287926116/> in to your search bar. Once you've joined the page, please use it for all your comments, information, etc., about justice and political issues, instead of the UUCWC Community page. Any questions or concerns, please contact racialjustice@uucw.org.

UUCWC Community Justice Gatherings:

Some of you may be looking for ways to be an ally or a space to process social justice issues so we are excited to let you know about several new community gatherings which have been established by the Council for Faith in Action and other members of our congregation.

Gathering for Faith in Action:

This group meets on the last Sunday of the month and is open to all. Please come to share your concerns about America's political situation, how it impacts justice and what we might do to express our convictions and work towards a better America. **The next gatherings will be after the second service on January 29, February 26 and March 26 at 12:30 p.m. in Room 202.** Please contact Nathalie Edmond (inatnat2@gmail.com) if you need babysitting.

Circle for People of Color:

Being a person of color in a predominately white congregation presents its' own challenges. To reiterate what Nathalie quotes above from the Beloved Conversation curriculum, "We are all harmed by racism, but people of color are harmed in very different ways than white people...Race caucusing strengthens us in the work of anti-oppression, and allows us to build up the resiliency and groundedness necessary to forgive each other and stay at the table when things get hard in our work together." Based on this premise, a Circle for People of Color has been established. **The next gatherings will be after the second service on January 15, February 12 and March 12 in Room 202.** All those who identify as a person of color are welcome to attend. Please contact Nathalie Edmond (inatnat2@gmail.com) for more information and if you need babysitting.

Social Justice "Brown Bag" Gatherings for Families and Children:

Julie Buehler, Co-Founder of "Brown Bag" Gatherings

"Some of our congregants have created an opportunity for fellowship that can also be positive action in the world. Their primary goals are to offer a regular format for young people to actively participate in social action work and the second goal is to create a situation where parents can have fellowship together. It's difficult for parents to socialize without our kids crawling all over us, so when they are occupied, it gives parents an opportunity to talk, share ideas, and relax together. The group chose the "brown bag" concept to more easily manage food allergies, picky eaters, and time restraints.

The first event in December was small with four families and nine youth ranging in age from 2-14. When the kids finished their dinner early, they colored or played with Legos while the adults continued talking for a while. Everyone then joined together to make popcorn snack bags, wrap plastic cutlery, and make greeting cards, all of which were delivered to the Trenton Area Soup Kitchen.

The second gathering was due to be held Saturday, January 14, the day before this bulletin is being distributed. The plan was to enjoy dinner and then make fleece blankets for two Syrian families relocating to the area, along with fleece scarves, snack bags and greeting cards for TASK. The hope is that young people of all ages, their parents, and church members who want to spend time with them, attended the event. If it was well received, the gatherings will continue monthly. For more information about upcoming gatherings and how you can help please contact juliebuehler@verizon.net.

Movie Screening

“13th”- Friday, February 13, at 6:30 p.m., Crossings Room. Pizza & beverages will be provided.

“13th” is a new documentary about race and mass incarceration by Ava DuVernay, director of “Selma”. To quote from Fortune.com, “Named after the 13th constitutional amendment, which abolished slavery except as ‘punishment for crime,’ the documentary uses archival footage and expert commentary to make the case that slavery hasn't disappeared from the U.S.—it's evolved into our modern system of mass incarceration, one in which many prisons are run by for-profit companies and prisoners can be paid a pittance to work for corporations. Coming at a time when Black Lives Matter and police bias are being hotly debated, *13th* was the first non-fiction film to open the prestigious NY Film Festival in its 54 years.” For more info on the film, go to <http://fortune.com/2016/10/06/13th-netflix-documentary-ava-duvernay/>

We will meet at 6:30 for pizza and start the movie at 7:00. Run time is one hour and forty minutes so we will have time for discussion afterwards with a goal of ending the evening between 9 and 9:15. **To ensure that we have sufficient pizza, we request that you please sign up by emailing racialjustice@uucwc.org.**

Reflection on Poverty, Inequality & Society

Mike Wilson, *Member of the Council for Faith in Action*

I have worked in Los Angeles, Dallas, and Paterson, NJ with schools located primarily in poor communities. Most of the students were children of color. I wondered why all the poverty I observed seemed to fall primarily on these people. It seemed to me then, as now, that forcing people to be poor and experience the withering punishment of a daily grind to survive was not consistent with equality and freedom promised to all the people of our democracy. There seemed to be an obvious flaw in the way the social order was constructed when people I worked with lived with misery and hopelessness while others, like myself, enjoyed comfort, safety and little deprivation. What is it in our culture and country that allows over 45 million poor people to go without the basic aspects of equality and freedom? Around 85 percent of those in poverty are people of color with the largest proportion being black, meaning that the greatest burden and the least equality and freedom tends to be experienced by those of us who are not white.

I have tried to understand what it is in our culture that allows this level of discrimination in a democracy where all people are supposed to be able to equally pursue life, liberty and happiness. The following are just some of the questions to which I have been unable to find satisfactory answers:

- Are we too involved in personal wealth and acquiring things to realize the needs of people in poverty or have time to bother with people's suffering?
- Are there no satisfactory examples or proven reliable approaches to guide us in ensuring that inequality and poverty ceases to exist?
- Is it about a lack of knowledge? Or simply a lack of caring? Do people realize the devastating nature of poverty and how our support is extremely lacking for those trying to exit poverty?

- Are there no brothers' (or sisters') keeper notions alive amongst us, i.e. we do not hold or see ourselves responsible for the condition of those in trapped in the ghetto?
- Is there so little democracy in this country that these gross inequalities and denial of freedom are out of our control?
- Are we able to ignore others' suffering because we can confine it to spaces away from us and thereby can pretend that those in poverty and experiencing injustice have brought it on themselves so there is nothing we can do?

There are some things of which I am fairly certain. One is that those who are forced to live in poverty need to have the primary role in solving the problems they experience. Another is that there is no single grand solution to "fix" all the ills of poverty, inequality and damaged freedoms. There must instead be an array of solutions that people can use to extricate themselves from the grips of their economic, social and political afflictions. I am also certain that money alone is not at the core of the problems although it needs to be part of the solution. Finally, my sense is that the ultimate reduction of the inequality and lack of freedom experienced by those of color involves cultural change. Our entire society needs to gain a more accurate perspective of what it is to be minority and poor, be responsive to the burdens they face, and support them in the struggle for equality and economic security.

“But I know, somehow, that only when it is dark enough can you see the stars.”

Sallie Dunner

This quote from Martin Luther King, Jr. is giving me comfort and courage as I struggle with our nation's current reality and wonder what the future holds. It's from King's last speech, "I've been to the Mountaintop" given on April 3, 1968, in Memphis, Tennessee, where King had come to support the sanitation workers strike which was in its' eighth week. When the workers demonstrated, which was almost every day, they carried signs stating "I AM A MAN" and were often met with police brutality in the forms of mace, tear gas, and billy clubs. (A fictional but historically accurate account of the latter part of the strike is included in "Grant Park", an excellent book by Leonard Pitts, Jr., available in the Journey Toward Wholeness Library, and which is where I read a version of this quote.) I first learned about the strike and the terrible conditions of the sanitation workers at the National Civil Rights Museum in Memphis, which is built onto the Lorraine Motel where King was assassinated and which is a national treasure. These workers were brave men, virtually all black, standing up to intransigent power and demanding recognition of their union, decent wages and better safety standards. The conditions they worked in were horrendous with wages so low that many were on welfare. On April 8, four days after Dr. King's assassination, an estimated 42,000 people silently marched through Memphis in his honor, demanding justice for the workers and recognition of their union. A deal was reached a week later although the union had to threaten another strike after a few months to ensure the authorities lived up to their commitments.

Stories like this remind me that, however dark and difficult circumstances might be, anything is possible if good people stand together, make power accountable and do the work of justice with compassion. So, I am letting go of my despair and instead I'm choosing hope and love as I move forward.

Organizations of Interest

Many of us are looking for ways to connect with action groups outside of UUCWC and to learn about justice opportunities. Listed below are some organizations, both local and national, for you to check out.

Local:

Action Together Delaware River Towns holds meetings in Lambertville several times a month. Connect with others with like concerns and involve yourself in practical actions that make a difference. Receive Action Alerts several times a week on ways to resist the new administration's agenda. To receive Action Alerts or to join this group, contact Naomi Drew at win47win@gmail.com.

Not In Our Town (<https://www.niot.org>) is a movement to stop hate, address bullying, and build safe, inclusive communities for all. NIOT provides films, new media, and organizing tools help local leaders build vibrant, diverse cities and towns, where everyone can participate. There is a chapter in Princeton (<https://www.niot.org/group/not-our-town-princeton>) which hosts discussion groups, forums, movie screenings, etc., on issues of racial justice.

Campaign to End the New Jim Crow Trenton/Princeton Chapter (<http://www.endnewjimcrownj.org>) mission statement reads "To expose the injustice of mass incarceration as a form of racialized social control and to advocate for the end of institutional racism in our criminal justice system that decimates communities of color and perpetuates a permanent undercaste." Go to their website for information about their meetings and actions.

Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of New Jersey (www.uulmnj.org) coordinates grassroots advocacy and works to establish public policy that is consistent with Unitarian Universalist principles and purposes. There are many opportunities for direct action. UUCWC is a dues paying member of UULMNJ.

Unitarian Universalist Pennsylvania Legislative Advocacy Network (<http://www.uuplan.com>) is an action group working to articulate and advocate for all goals of social and environmental justice.

Hopewell Valley Race and Diversity Discussion Group (email: hvrddg@gmail.com) is not an action group but provides a forum for people to talk about these issues. For more info email them and also see an article written by UUCWC member, Angela Jacobs, at <http://mercerme.com/hopewell-valley-community-discussing-issues-of-race-and-diversity>.

National:

Standing on the Side of Love (<https://www.standingonthesideoflove.org>) is a public advocacy campaign sponsored by the Unitarian Universalist Association. They currently have an action campaign against proposed harsh anti-immigrant bills in Arizona.

Planned Parenthood (<https://www.plannedparenthood.org>) has a list of things you can do to help them and the communities they serve.

The Southern Poverty Law Center (<https://www.splcenter.org>) "is dedicated to fighting hate and bigotry and to seeking justice for the most vulnerable members of our society". This is an excellent source for information about hate groups. Their Teaching Tolerance program produces and distributes – free of charge – anti-bias documentary films, books, lesson plans and other materials that reduce prejudice and promote educational equity in our nation's schools.

The Equal Justice Initiative (www.eji.org) "is committed to ending mass incarceration and excessive punishment in the United States, to challenging racial and economic injustice, and to protecting basic human rights for the most vulnerable people in American society." The "Get Involved" section of their website has a list of actions one can take as well as sources for further education about racial and economic justice issues.

UUCWC's Racial Justice Initiative is under the umbrella of the Council for Faith in Action. RJI co-leaders are Sallie Dunner, Nathalie Edmond and Dan Tuft. The Council for Faith in Action meets the third Tuesday of the month and all are welcome to attend. Any questions or concerns, please email racialjustice@uucwc.org or cfa@uucwc.org.