

TJ Connection

UUA Thomas Jefferson District Office

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Anti-Racism Transformation Teams

Observations about the October TJD Anti-Racism Transformation Team Meeting

I must say that it was extremely inspiring to meet with a team of committed Unitarian Universalist anti-racists. Seeing a live transformation team gave me confidence and hope about the process and programming that we are providing and that our constituents are bringing to life in their day to day practice. This team is doing nothing less than working to bring about a culture change at both the district and congregational level. Their meeting was like no other UU meeting I have ever been to. This is a group that is incredibly mindful of privilege and power dynamics that is intentionally multicultural and anti-oppressive, that spends some time in caucuses to thrash out issues particular to whites and people of color, and that is struggling to put their commitment to justice into a practice that includes not just activism in the community but internal change. This translates into an atmosphere of healthy wrangling about future directions where the status quo is constantly examined rather than taken for granted. Participants spoke about the ways in which they seek to stay rooted in an anti-racist analysis. The tone of the group is very faithful and spiritual and the level of emotional honesty is truly extraordinary in such a large (the team is 40 and about 30 members were in attendance) and relatively new group. The lack of any dogma or political correctness in a group with such a transformative message is also very striking. I felt like I was being welcomed into the heart of a new future for Unitarian Universalism as I spent time with the team.

Basically the TJ Team (and this is true for all anti-racism transformation teams) is carrying out what we on the Faith In Action (FIA) staff are doing with congregations and districts that do not yet have transformation teams. They are doing educating and organizing work with congregations at various stages along the anti-racism continuum. They have organized Jubilee workshops, National Coalition Building Institute (NCBI) trainings, video series, and book discussion

groups with several congregations. They were very eager to receive an anti-racism assessment tool recently developed by Jacqui James which will help them and the congregations they are working with determine their readiness. The tool can be used over time to note changes and progress as the work proceeds. The team is also seeking to find ways to provide greater connection between anti-racism and UU theology and worship.

The team is encouraging congregations to participate in Journey Toward Wholeness (JTW) Sunday and to contribute a portion of what they raise to sustaining the Transformation Team. Another organizational piece is that they are meeting as regional groups now and just twice a year as a district group. This mirrors our findings that the most useful unit of organization is the cluster. However, having the district presence ensures a sense of movement in the district as well. The team is looking at ways to impact overall district culture through the newsletter, the annual anti-racism conference and through recommendations to the Board. They have determined that the push for a name change was premature and are concentrating on getting congregations involved in anti-racism programming. Our workshop on what programming and resources are available was very useful to them. And we learned about resources they are using as well. The team has a multicultural diversity educator on it, as well as ministers and activists that are always investigating new resources.

One recommendation they have made to the district board is to support the South Carolina congregations that are joining the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) – sponsored boycott of South Carolina for the legislature’s refusal to drop the confederate flag as the official state symbol.

As one of three district teams along with Mass Bay and Joseph Priestly, TJ is ready to provide strong leadership in our UU anti-racism initiatives.

President’s Column

Walking the Talk

Linda Lane-Hamilton, President
TJ District Board

We’re in the midst of staffing changes in our district, a result of growth, demands for service and going beyond “talking the talk” to “walking the talk.”

Our Religious Education Program Consultant Committee is in the beginning stages of hiring our own RE field staff person. The committee will be interviewing candidates and making the final decision to bring this half-time professional to our district. The committee, chaired by Rev. Dan King, is composed of members from both our district and the Mountain, which will share the position. Why do we need RE Professionals?

Since 1996, our district-wide religious education registration has grown by almost 400 children, with about 3,500 children enrolled in our programs. In addition, our youth, with active leadership from Raleigh resident, Carissa Hansen, have increased participation not only in local youth “cons” but in national ones, often at considerable personal expense. Also, new and high quality religious education curricula available for our congregations, but both RE professional and our children’s teachers need training. The OWL (Our Whole Lives) program is one example: to teach this program, a replacement for our old “About Your Sexuality course, RE professionals and our children’s teachers must be trained.

As our religious education programs grow, so do the number of adults teaching, supervising and administering, and eventually the number of religious education professionals guiding these programs. Our RE committee has been sometimes overwhelmed with responsibilities for running district training as well as working in their own congregations. Our new program consultant will support these professionals, and ultimately enhance our programs in every congregation.

Who is paying for this consultant? The answer is as complicated as the job definition will be, but the position is funded by the UUA, The mountain and TJ District. To support this position (as well as the Anti-Racism program described in this newsletter), the district will begin a fund raising drive at the April Annual Meeting.

As the first stage of fund raising, the TJ Board has been asked to “walk the talk” in support. At our January board meeting, the board pledged \$18,000 to be paid over five years, in support of our two major district initiatives. For more information about how you can help support these important district initiatives, contact me at my email address llaneham@widowmaker.com.

Qiyamah’s Corner

Qiyamah Rahman, District Executive

Racism is a difficult subject for Americans. Likewise, it is a difficult one for UU’s. This month’s issue of the TJD Connections is devoted to anti-racism and anti-oppression.

I am aware that a number of UU’s of European descent in the TJ district are very upset about the use of the term “racist.” I cannot know what it feels like to be called a “racist,” but I do know what it feels like to struggle to name parts of myself that were almost too hideous for me and others to identify, name and embrace.

I grew up in an abusive family. My mother was a battered woman and my siblings and I were battered by my parents. When I first became a parent I beat my children when they misbehaved. I deliberately do not use the word “spank” here, although that is how it was referred to when I sought help to change. The language allowed me and others to justify this behavior. We have learned to sterilize our acts of violence through such accommodationist language. The act of naming the behavior for what it was was part of my self education and my decision to step outside the conspiracy of silence. In seeking to change I had to

remove myself beyond the reach of those who would seek to aid and abet my behavior.

My name is Qiyamah A. Rahman and I am a child abuser. Those words allowed me to move toward healing and to non-violent parenting. To call myself a child abuser seemed extreme to some but in the face of a society that sought to accommodate my behavior I needed to vilify to myself and others. It was painful to name myself a child abuser. But one cannot begin to heal until one speaks the truth, as painful as it may seem.

Annual Meeting – Eno River

The Annual Meeting at Eno River Should Be A Blast!!

Save April 28-30 for our Thomas Jefferson District Annual Meeting! Our Keynote Address will be given by Geoff Canada, well known author of *Fist Stick Knife Gun* and *Reaching Up For Manhood*. His books will be available in the bookstore. There will be lots of exciting workshops.

Also, there will be a Senior High Youth CON. And, the Sunday worship service will be a Musical service presented by the Eno River Singers and Orchestra.

Come join us and help Eno River celebrate their new building. It's big, it's beautiful and it's a wonderful way to start the new century in the TJ District.

GA Preview

Dig out your guitars and put on your dancing shoes, because General Assembly 2000 is in Music City – Nashville, Tennessee. The Ware Lecturer is Morris Dees, founder of the Southern Poverty Law Center, and the sermon at the Service of the Living Tradition will be delivered by the Rev. Marilyn Sewell. For more information about GA programs, displays and registration, visit the General Assembly website, www.uua.org/ga/index.html, or contact the GA Office at 617-742-2100 ext. 209

Minister's Corner

Information From or About TJD Ministers

Anti-Racism and Our Small Denomination

Rev. Dr. Randolph W.B. Becker, Minister
Williamsburg UU's

It is hard being such a small denomination when we are confronting an issue as big as racism. It is doubly hard when we end up confronting ourselves before we even get near racism.

Too often I hear fellow Unitarian Universalists claiming that they will not work on anti-racist initiatives because "the approved UUA methodology does not

match my personal ideology” (or some more colorful or colloquial version of the same sentiment).

If we were an association of millions, with coffers to match, we could easily offer diverse pathways to the same end – a world dealing with its racism. But, we are small, and we have limited resources. We can't explore, support and offer every approach to being anti-racist. It strains our limited resources, at times, to offer even a single approach! In a District like ours, travel and training costs for those who would consult with congregations seeking to do anti-racism work can be large.

Decisions have to be made. One of the decisions that has been made (at the Association level, as well as at the District and even the congregational level) is that it is better to do something we can afford than to do nothing for lack of being able to do everything.

Yes, it may appear that there is a “company line” that is being pushed because only one approach is funded or offered. Friends, it is not a “company line”; it is the hard reality of our situation as a small denomination.

Our UU Minister's Association chapter, on its own initiative and as the only chapter in the UUA to do so, has committed itself and additional program fees from each of its members to be able to experience two different anti-racism approaches this year. Those two will probably still leave many of us wishing we could still work together on finding ways to do just that. We won't let limitations on budgets and energy at the denominational level deter us from our quest for a more humane, a more just, a more open society.

Using personal disagreements with a specific approach to anti-racism as a reason to do nothing or using personal disagreements with denominational decision-making or budget-making processes as a reason to do nothing is to let the reality of our denomination's size determine the size of your own participation. You don't have to be small in your thinking just because we happen to be small as a religion.

A world of our sisters and brothers of color don't care about our internal denominational and personal issues. They only wonder if we are going to be part of the solution or part of the problem. They wonder if we, each of us, can think big enough to envision a world beyond racism and work toward that goal without excuses.

From the Desk of Rev Robert Murphy

Friends,

I offer this Unitarian Universalist story as one contribution to the discussion about anti-racism and religious liberals:

In the summer of 1998, the Ku Klux Klan was trying to reassert itself in eastern North Carolina. Unitarian Universalists from New Bern and Morehead City decided to go to Pollocksville to add their voices to an anti-Klan protest. As the Morehead City people were preparing to leave for Pollocksville, one local woman warned, “Be careful! The Klan will be taking notes on all of your out-of-state license plates.” What to do? Was it possible that the anti-Klan gathering

was just another clash between local people and 'outsiders'? In Pollocksville, some of the UUs looked around to see if out-of-state license plates were conspicuous. All of the license plates were North Carolina plates! It was clear that North Carolina folks had taken the lead in developing the anti-Klan protest. A few days later, in Morehead City, local Unitarian Universalists joined with other townspeople to help stop plans for a Ku Klux Klan march... The local newspapers gave the 1998 events some attention but that was as far as the story went. So if you're outside the area, you may not appreciate the significance of these anti-Klan moments. Yes, there's still a lot of racism in the rural South. However, the anti-Klan protests of 1998 suggest that times have started to change in Southern cities and towns. The Klan is still a menace, but there are more people in the South – of all races – who are willing to say “no” to Ku Klux Klan activities. I call that progress and we should be mindful of the cultural changes that have taken place in recent years. Still, we have a long way to go in order to defeat the more subtle forms of racism in America.

Sermon Spotlight

Good sermons act as the moral compass of our times. As a way to share some of the most compelling and inspiring sermons by TJD ministers and lay leaders, the TJD website (<http://www.tjd.uua.org>) will feature selected sermons.

This month's sermons are authored by the Rev. Patrick Price at UU Fellowship of Columbia and the Rev. Christine Brownlie at UU Fellowship of the New River Valley.

Print copies of these sermons are also available through the District office for those who do not have access to the Internet.

Comments From Around The District

Pledging the Seven Principles

Bonnie Blue Crouse

Since 1994, I have had the opportunity to benefit from quite a few learning and training opportunities as a result of the UUA and TJ District anti-racism initiatives; each time I have willingly made a commitment to provide a “return” on that investment. At present I am in my third year of working as a member of the TJ District Anti-Racism Transformation Team.

In that capacity, I have been asked and have agreed to guide the planning and arrangements for the upcoming **11th annual TJ District Anti-Racism Conference**, which will take place in **Greensboro, NC** the weekend of **March 11-12**. It promises to be a very exciting and productive weekend. News and registration information about the conference will be available not just on the TJD maillist but will go directly on the web and by mail to UUs throughout the Southeast in a matter of days.

In the meantime, speaking purely for myself, I'd like to share a few thoughts...

I believe that we would be well served as a religious movement if we could pledge that the seven principles of Unitarian Universalism will always serve as the portal through which our passionate disagreements – AND passionate agreements – will pass.

We are not in need of a censor or a muzzle. But I do suggest that we are in a unique position to benefit from an important filter, and that is context – the context of people belonging to a religious movement that is on record with hundreds of years of written and spoken commitments that identify who we are – and who we want to be and who we aspire to be – with respect to human worth and dignity.

In such a context, our commitment to work for justice and equality would serve us well even if we have honest disagreements about the best way to do so; our covenant to support each other in our “responsible search for truth and meaning” would require us to respect each other’s honest personal appraisal of what are the next most important arenas for taking action; an honest indicator of our willingness to work for transformation is our pledge to give a hearing to each and every person who wants to be a party in creating that transformation. Even if we have passionate disagreements about how to move forward, we can gain from listening to those who agree that we need to.

I know I, for one, would welcome it.

Bonnie Blue Crouse

A 12-Step Program To Fight Racism

The following steps were developed by John J. Procyson:

- 1: We understand that RACISM is hatred for or mis-treatment of people of another color.
- 2: We acknowledge that Racism exists among all cultures/races.
- 3: We believe that we are NOT powerless to fight RACISM
- 4: We pledge to oppose RACISM wherever we see it, hear it or experience it.
- 5: We understand our individual limits in fighting RACISM; therefore, we come together as UU’s to strengthen our resolve.
- 6: We pledge to place principles before personalities, as we believe that all people are born with equal worth and dignity.
- 7: We pledge to share economic fortune with everyone, in creative ways which will enhance individual lives, such as interracial adoption.
- 8: We acknowledge the errors we have made, as well as the omissions in our actions, that have contributed to feelings of mistrust among people of color with whom we associate.
- 9: As a gesture of confidence in the rightness of individual action, we each pledge \$100 to establish a fund for education of disadvantaged youth.
- 10: We renounce angry, hurtful rhetoric.
- 11: We reaffirm the democratic process and the right of individual conscience for each person or congregation to determine its programmatic approach.
- 12: Each of us will do all that we are able to influence the hearts and minds of others.

A Civil Rights Retrospective

By Hans Christian von Baeyer
President, Williamsburg UU

I hadn't found the UU's yet, back in the early sixties when I was a graduate student in physics at Vanderbilt University. That happened a few years later. But my experiences there helped to shape my subsequent spiritual journey.

Nashville students had already contributed to the arsenal of the war over civil rights by inventing the lunch-counter sit-in, when a friend introduced me to SNCC, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. The local chapter of this loose organization brought together students from Vanderbilt with those from Fisk University and other predominately black colleges. Our common goal was simple, powerful and refractory: the elimination of racial barriers. We were young and sure of ourselves.

Only months after I joined, the leaders of SNCC decided to expel all white members, and to go it alone as a black organization. Painful as this rejection felt at the time, I understood its motivation perfectly well. The people who were really hurt by it were not Northern liberals like myself, but those of my friends who came from white Southern background, and who had courageously decided to break with their own families in the matter of civil rights. (Today I wonder whether SNCC's decision would STILL be justified in the fundamentally changed environment of the year 2000? Or more ominously, would it be justified AGAIN?)

By being forced out, my white friends from Georgia, Alabama and Mississippi found themselves rejected by both sides of the struggle – a painful and undeserved fate. Some of them quickly coalesced into a new support group called, as far as I remember, SSOC, the Southern Student Organizing Committee, pronounced "Sock."

I vividly recall hours of lonely, cold, boring shuffling in a circle, carrying polite signs of protest, in front of restaurants that held on to their traditional segregationist policies long after they had become illegal. Passers-by would cheer, or sneer, or debate, people in cars would honk, yell, spit or shout encouragement, restaurant managers would come out and shout, argue, threaten, shove a little, call the police and ultimately retreat back into their warm, safe havens. One of them weighed about 300 pounds and delighted in facing us nose to nose so he could step on our toes. Ouch!

I was never beaten or arrested, but as the days stretched into weeks, and the weeks into winter months, we were often discouraged. The only things that kept our spirits up was singing. The fact that I can't hold a tune didn't matter, because "We shall overcome" was more than a song to us. It was warm, comforting, nourishing food for the soul. It still sends shivers down my back.

Occasionally, when morale sank really low, even stronger medicine was called for. Once or twice, in a state of dire spiritual starvation, we joined our black fellow students in the basement of some Baptist church, sat on the floor, sang a little, and waited for inspiration. After an hour or so it would come in the form of an inconspicuous, solidly built black man called Martin Luther King. The

time I happened to sit in the front row – literally at his feet – was an unforgettable event. It didn't really matter what he said. He put his right hand behind his back, punched the air with his left, and in that low, melodious preacher's voice told us that we were right, that the struggle was just, that we must have faith, that eventually we would win. Courage and energy flowed from the body and soul of this one man into all of ours. That night I learned more fully than any other time in my life what leadership is all about.

Today, almost forty years later, as I reflect on those days, I am struck by how simple the issues were. There was no doubt in our minds, and, in time, our values were vindicated. As the third millennium begins to unfold, I hope that our children and their children will also find struggles that they can totally, unconditionally believe in and devote themselves to. And I hope they too get a chance – even just once – to encounter greatness.

UU's Raise Their Voices

The following information is provided from some of our South Carolina congregations regarding the current NAACP boycott. UU's from North and South Carolina represented a strong presence among the 48,000 demonstrators at the January 17th rally at the capitol. The purpose of the rally was to demonstrate our support for the removal of the confederate battle flag from the Capitol.

At A Special Congregational Meeting UU Fellowship of Clemson

On December 5, 1999, members of the Fellowship passed a resolution supporting NAACP sanctions in South Carolina. As long as the Confederate flag flies over the state capitol, members resolved that they:

1. Will not patronize industries and organizations which overtly declare their desire to have the Confederate flag remain atop the state capitol, and will patronize business that support the removal of the flag.
2. Will not use Fellowship funds to attend statewide church functions in South Carolina.
3. Will make the Unitarian Universalist Association and its affiliate organizations aware of these actions and encourage them not to schedule events in South Carolina.
4. Will contact other Unitarian Universalist congregations in South Carolina and ask them to join this effort.
5. Will seek the advice and counsel of the South Carolina NAACP in more accurately defining the potential economic impact and hardships that might result (particularly to low income families) from the imposition of the NAACP sanctions.

The actions of the Fellowship reflects fundamental principals of UUism. Two themes ran through the lengthy discussion of the membership around this issue, according to Sandra Clipp, a member. "We appreciate that some people view the

confederate flag as a representation of their Southern heritage,” Clipp said. “However, the flag also represents the heritage of slavery and is therefore rightly offensive to thousands of citizens, including African-Americans.”

Petition to the Unitarian Universalist Association

We the following Unitarian Universalist and Friends of South Carolina wish to join with NAACP in saying that the time has come to take down the Confederate Battle flag from the top of the capitol building of our state.

The Confederate flag is a symbol that has come to mean many different things to various people. However, one thing is certain, the Confederate Battle flag is not a banner under which all the citizens of South Carolina can find a sense of unity or common cause. It is not the official flag of our state or of our nation. Therefore we conclude that it is time to take down the flag.

We believe that the NAACP sponsored boycott of our state is a responsible attempt to educate the citizens of South Carolina and the nation about a genuine problem. It is an effort to remind the world that our state consist of people of all colors and faiths. The banner we fly over our state capitol should be one that brings us together as one people and not one that causes unnecessary division.

For this reason, we are asking the leadership of our denomination, the Unitarian Universalist Association, to consider locations other than the state of South Carolina as convention or meeting sites until such time that the Confederate flag is removed from positions of sovereignty in the state of South Carolina.

Large type copies of this newsletter are available through the District Office.

Call for more information.

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