

Widening the Circle of Concern with UUs of Mt Airy: A Personal Digest of Workshops January - June 2021

by Cathy McCoubrey on behalf of the 8th Principle Team

Background information: In response to evidence of a pattern of discriminatory hiring practices by the Unitarian Universalist Association in 2017, the UUA president resigned, and the Board tasked three co-presidents, UU leaders of color, to form the UUA Commission on Institutional Change. Members of the Commission analyzed structural and systemic racism and white supremacy culture within Unitarian Universalism and developed recommendations “to advance long-term cultural and institutional change that redeems the essential promise and ideals of Unitarian Universalism.” In June 2020, the Commission published their report, *Widening the Circle of Concern*, which included a series of twelve workshops to enable UU groups to implement these recommendations.

These workshops were conducted via Zoom by the UUs of Mt Airy 8th Principle Team to reflect on ourselves, our religious community, and our community relationships for the purpose of identifying and challenging barriers toward UUs of Mt Airy’s vision of Beloved Community, rebuilding personally and collectively to embody our beliefs and values, and developing action plans to achieve attainable objectives. This digest only hints at the rich dialogue and learning that approximately thirty participants shared over the winter and spring of 2021.

Themes and Resources Across Workshops Toward Beloved Community:

In-House: Issues identified for follow-up include

- Spiritual foundations for social action: What does it mean to be a UU? a member of UUs of Mt Airy?
- *Radical hospitality*: Individual and congregational attitudes, practices, and responsibilities toward newcomers, friends, and members; integrating lessons from workshop on welcoming transgender folks; what it means to be “open to all.”
- Anti-racism: Decentering whiteness with alternatives to Eurocentric norms in worship and organizational culture; funding and empowering members with marginalized identities to participate in UUism; reviewing bylaws with inclusion lens; and implementing sociocracy in self-governance. (A brief introduction can be viewed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b6r3-s2p7el> .)
- Informal groups (flexible, responsive, in-group, hidden) vs formal groups/committees (slow, accountable, more visible) related to information- and power-sharing in congregational life.

Community outreach and Interface

- Potential projects for local collaboration, e.g. multi-church flea market; indoor/outdoor events for children/youth.

- Branding: How does everything we do/say/present communicate *radical hospitality* and who we are?

Community partnerships and their action areas

- UUJusticePA teams: Gun violence prevention; environmental justice; good government; criminal justice reform; reproductive justice; and economic justice
- PIHN: Homelessness prevention, housing, shelter, and advocacy
- POWER, now state-wide, “committed to racial and economic justice on a liveable planet.” Campaigns: Live Free*, Education, Economic Dignity, Civic Engagement (includes voter registration), and Climate Justice.
- N’COBRA: Members and allies for African American reparations. [Stay tuned for winter workshops on having conversations about reparations, led by N’COBRA members.]

Potential areas of action identified by workshop participants outside of current partnerships:

- Indigenous peoples: Land acknowledgement; self-education; showing up; & reparations
- Local affordable housing/gentrification (Germantown/Mt Airy)
- Immigration (New local team underway within POWER’s Live Free campaign.)

Questions:

- What is our capacity for UUsMA-initiated activities and participation in collective actions of our community partners?
- What are the pathways for involvement, and how are they communicated and facilitated?
- What are the barriers for involvement or limits to our capacity? Are they structural? cultural? theological?
- How does this inform our living out the congregation’s Mission?

Next steps

The 8th Principle Team invites you to share your comments with us about what is important to you, so we can see where our energy is and in what areas we are primed to act. We encourage conversation about this feedback from the WCC workshops. Please send questions, comments, and concerns to Cathy, catherine.mccoubrey@gmail.com, 267 972-1121. We expect that our congregation will have a Town Meeting to talk about this report and the workshops early in the new year, and help to decide how we move forward with the recommendations.

*POWER’s national Live Free campaign is an umbrella for these Philadelphia action teams: Anti-mass Incarceration; Police Accountability (Rev. Mark Kelly Tyler has been appointed to the panel choosing commissioners for new Community Police Oversight Commission, recently legislated by City Council); FOP Contract; End Stop & Frisk; Act 111 team (reform of binding police arbitration); Real Community Safety (alternative to “defund police”); Ending Gun Violence; Immigration and Detention; and Communication team. To learn more about their activities and to see who’s involved, ask Cathy for the link to open monthly Zoom meetings.