

Workshop: **Dismantling Ableism** (#405)

Notes: Donna Caldwell

Vee and I attended this virtual workshop, focused on enabling the full engagement of people with disabilities in the UU community as well as general society. Ableism is discrimination or prejudice against individuals with disabilities. Examples are sub-minimum wages and inaccessible buildings. Beyond the usual discrimination fueled by something that makes someone “other”, it can also involve a fear that you might become disabled yourself (and a desire to distance yourself from this possible future reality).

What does it mean to be a human being? Can some people really be considered less human? This justice work is rooted in our first and seventh principles. Each person informs our understanding of what the world is – we need to appreciate each person’s contribution.

The workshop provided a history of disability justice work, including the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in 1990 which prohibits discrimination based on disability. It affords similar protections against discrimination to Americans with disabilities as the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Advocacy work leading to this is captured in the PBS documentary “The Capital Crawl”, during which protesters abandoned their wheelchairs and walkers to crawl up the steps of the US Capital.

Steps congregations can take were outlined, including describing on your website access to your facility and steps taking to accommodate others (e.g., our ramp and automatic door, and hearing loop). People attending services and activities need to feel more than welcomed, they need to feel included (to the extent of their interest), being mindful that some disabilities are not necessarily visible. Further community work includes engaging with your state’s disability rights organization and promoting self-advocacy efforts – recognizing the importance of everyone’s story, and helping to bring those voices forward.

I shared in the breakout chat rooms which were part of this workshop some of Vee’s engagement in our congregation, an example of living into our principles. I am committed to continuing advocacy work as a member of the Disability Committee and as a member of our congregation, and welcome dialog with others about this topic. All of us need all of us to thrive.