UUCSC Anti-Racism Meeting
September 12, 2022
Meeting Notes

1. Penny welcomed everyone back after the summer break.

2. Report from Barbara Holtzman, Taylor Ellis and Johnnie Rodriguez who checked in with people that stopped coming to the meetings last year. Reasons people stopped coming:
    - "Zoomed out"
    - Meetings in the evening were too difficult due to having kids
    - Busy, tired, sometimes not interested in a particular topic
    - Meetings were predominantly white people; would prefer a more racially mixed space
    - Hope it's comfortable for people to pop in and out
    - Interested in having more involvement in the community
    - Something we can do as a community project, not just within the UU community, but also the community at large
    - Being able to talk about different perspectives
    - Love learning about different issues and ways to help, but don't want to be made to feel guilty for not volunteering
    - Some liked the book that was read; others did not
    - Racism isn't her problem to work on

3. Nancy Richman facilitated an open brainstorm of ideas / wishes / hopes for what people would like to see take place over the course of the year. As a brainstorm, there was no evaluation of the ideas, feasibility, cost, format, how it might happen… just everyone sharing their ideas. The list below is grouped by the common themes that emerged.

    Educate Ourselves
    - <u>Read / Watch and Discuss</u>
        - Read another book together, or watch a film and discuss it
        - Read and discuss articles about current events
        - Take a look at history (e.g., the 1619 Project[1]). There are constantly new things to learn about our country's history.
        - Learn about RI heroes we've never heard about. Local PBS series.
        - Learn about what Mayor Elorza is doing in Providence regarding reparations. What's going on? Is it helping?
        - Interested in the topic of education and the libraries.
        - The "ISMS" – interested in the juxtaposition of racism, antisemitism, homophobia, classism…

[1] The 1619 Project is a journalism effort which seeks to reframe the country's history by placing the consequences of slavery and the contributions of Black Americans at the very center of the national narrative.

- Discuss personal emotional responses to current events. We could consider current events and maybe even write our thought down and consider them. How does that affect us emotionally? How to move forward.
- Book idea to read together: "*So You Want to Talk about Race*"
  - Comment: The Teacher's Union formed a racial justice group and read this book. Got a lot of flak initially, but the book helped turn people around.

- <u>Go Out to Learn</u>
  - It would be interesting to take field trips to learn the history of local indigenous people and those that were enslaved. (e.g. The Tomaquag Museum, Smith Castle, Linden Place…)
  - Agree with comment to tie in the Tomaquag Museum
  - There may be things going on at URI on these topics that we should learn about.

Skill Building

- Host workshops: e.g., Braver Angels "*How to Bridge the Divide*", or "*Depolarizing Conversations*"; Martina on "*Non-violence*".
- There is a program called "*Heal the Divide.*" Very revealing to explore our own understanding of systemic racism. I thought I knew a lot and still discovered a lot that I didn't know.
- Would like to have the knowledge on how to slow down a conversation rather than having it ping back and forth so quickly.
- Would like to talk about the awkwardness of reaching out and making connections to people
- I'd like to learn how to say things in a way that doesn't create defensiveness, so people can hear it. I worry about backlash. (First, seek to understand, then to be understood).

Building Connections

- Would like to figure out how to better connect to communities of color, not just learning about, but making actual connections. In the past UUCSC connected with a Muslim group in Kingston. (The young Imam moved to Canada.)
- Find ways to connect with other groups to do projects together.
- We could connect with other faith-based congregations (Native American, Muslim…) and host a picnic or potluck and get acquainted.
- With regard to making connections, maybe it's time to do something different. When you see a person of color in a store or wherever, how about stopping and introducing yourself ("*Hi, I'm [name]. Happy to meet you. Have a nice day*.") I don't think a couple of meetings each month will create significant change.

Educate Ourselves in Ways that we could Open to the Broader Community

- Present the program by Mixed Magic, "*Reflections: Growing Up as a Black man in America.*" Elizabeth has already spoken to Mixed Magic about the possibility of bringing this program here.

- Host a guest lecture series for people from UUCSC and the community: BIPOC voices tell their stories.
- View the film: "*Traces of the Trade: A Story from the Deep North*"
- Other local resources: Joanne Melish
- Good idea to have programs that bring people to UUCSC; raises awareness of our UU community as well as the important issues
- If we make a BIG NOISE, we can bring people to us. IF we put ourselves out there in a good way, we can attract people to us.
- Host a film series (Nancy Rose and Charlie Connelly are putting together a racial Justice film series)
- People have been talking about hosting things at the UU. If we put programs in a different location, like at the high school, it might be more inclusive. Education is key.

Local Anti-Racism Activism

- Concerns about granddaughter having experienced racist activity at the high school. Interested in our joining with other groups to address the racism in the local schools.
- There is ongoing racism in our community. How do we define our community? How do we define structural racism in our community? There are places where people of color are doing things. We can join them.
    - Comment – it's a great gift to us and the community that Johnnie and Taylor are doing so much anti-racism work with the schools
- We could write letters to the editor expressing views on local issues and taking a stand.
- Would like to learn more and force myself to DO more action.
- We need to focus on systemic racism, both understanding systemic racism in our town, state, and country and taking action to address these issues. Ultimately, that is our vision, what we're working toward. We can't be silent about the systemic stuff.
    - Comment: I'd like to learn how to say things in a way that doesn't create defensiveness, so people can hear it. I worry about backlash. (First, seek to understand, then to be understood).
    - Response: Backlash tells us where we need to work.

4. Meeting Frequency – The group agreed to continue to meet on the second and fourth Mondays, from 7-8pm.

5. Nancy will send these meeting notes to Etta and Sara who will put them into the newsletter via link. The Newsletter blurb will invite the congregation to join us for the next meeting to add ideas to the brainstorm and help us decide on priorities for the year. In addition, how to find meeting zoom links will be in the newsletter blurb.

NEXT MEETING: September 26, 2022

Submitted by: Nancy Richman