

What happened at “Addressing Classism in Your Faith Community” on March 4th?

About 40 members of WUS attended the workshop from 10:30 -2:30 facilitated by Betsy Leondar-Wright from the Class Matters organization and Denise Moorehead from UU Class Conversations. We began the session by trying to arrange ourselves into a continuum of the class we experienced in our family of origin. We sorted ourselves based on questions that we thought would indicate class distinction such as “What level of education did your parents have?” “Did you have your own bedroom when you were 12?” “What did your family do for vacations?” “Did your family own or rent your home?”

Once loosely sorted, we met in small groups to identify strengths we gained and limitations experienced by virtue of our class background. We discovered that those who grew up in a more working class background had the clearest idea of strengths and limitations which seemed to translate into a set of rules for getting ahead. Those in the continuum of “middle class” had such a wide range of responses to what strengths and limitations were derived from class that it was difficult to identify a summary of commonalities.

A chart depicting the change in income disparity over the past 50 years led to some brief discussion about what role classism and class stereotypes have played in policy-making in our country. The assertion was made that income inequality cannot be addressed without also addressing classism, which also includes racism and gender issues. We briefly pondered how are we doing as a country addressing these issues?

After being nourished by a delicious black bean and sweet potato soup concocted by our F8th-in- Action group, we reconvened to look at how the culture, practices and policies of the Winchester Unitarian Society reflect the classism of our larger society. We looked at the 6 areas:

Worship
Religious Education

Finance
Social Justice Work

Congregational Culture
Decision-Making

Opportunities for greater awareness, growth and further discussion were identified in ALL of these areas, believe it or not!! It was agreed that today’s work was a good conversation starter, yet we know that there are many others whose experiences, thoughts and feelings have yet to be heard. Some concrete ideas emerged about how our culture might shift to be more open, welcoming and inclusive, but we are certain that there are more ideas to be shared. As a community of people who have come together based on a covenant of shared Principles, we understand that our work toward greater class awareness and equity is a part of our spiritual journey together.

We hope to plan another opportunity for a community conversation about classism in our faith community. We also hope that committees and other groups who embody the work of our UU principals here will take time to examine how classism may creep into our practices and policies, or even simply our conversations. If you are interested in joining us for continued exploration of this topic, contact Patty Shepard at shepard.patty@gmail.com.

Additional materials and resources can be found at www.uuclassconversations.org. Look for a list of additional resources by UUs about Class in the Symmes room.