

### Our Context

Unitarian Universalism is a transformative religious movement and we are being called by our principles and values as well as the Action of Immediate Witness of the General Assembly 2015 to respond in this moment to the racial injustices that have impaired our nation from its inception. Countryside Church can be a powerful agent for change through our commitment to spiritual renewal and social justice. One of the many strengths of our church is the congregation's willingness to freely engage in spiritual reflection and dialogue without the humanist/theist tension that can often keep Unitarian Universalist congregations immobilized. In addition, the stated priority of the Board of Trustees in developing a long range plan – making social action and community engagement part of the individual spiritual journey – establishes a spiritual context from which to deepen the work of racial justice.

I have participated in, preached about, and observed within the congregation a desire to more deeply engage in Anti-Oppressive/Anti-Racist/Multi-Cultural work. There is a deep and growing commitment to outreach and social justice at Countryside. However, justice efforts have been more focused on financial support rather than demonstrating a willingness to be challenged and changed through relationship. I believe there is an opportunity and this is the time to move further beyond charity and philanthropy into a more personal exploration of cultural identity and develop greater intercultural competence. I have seen a passion and commitment among the Black Lives Matter Initiative at CCUU to address racial injustice in criminal justice, economic, and social systems. The long-term effect of this work would be a greater investment in and capacity for addressing systemic causes and effects of racism in the larger society and even at CCUU. With this work we can be more prepared and skilled in order to transform our world and ourselves by building multi-cultural, multi-generational relationships of solidarity with organizations that share our values.

### The Goal

The goal of my focused initiative is to implement a small group process that will help individuals to better understand our personal and cultural identities and how those identities shape our views. The project will raise awareness of the power and agency we possess (as individuals and as a congregation) so we can choose, from a spiritually grounded place, how to use our power to foster a multi-cultural and racially just congregation and community. While we welcome people of all ages, races, genders, sexual orientations, educational backgrounds, and abilities, our congregation does not reflect the diversity we welcome. Through a deeper, spiritually grounded dialogue about the impacts of oppression, we will create a nourishing and sustaining process for our Anti-racist/Anti-Oppressive/Multi-Cultural work and become ever more inclusive.

The project is based on Beloved Conversations, a program developed and facilitated by Dr. Mark Hicks along with Learning Coordinator Ashley Horan, to grow a congregation's understanding and capacity for building multi-racial, multi-cultural communities of faith

and for becoming more equipped to support, work toward and thrive in an ever more multi-cultural society. “*Beloved Conversations* is an experiential curriculum that provides a space to re-form/fuse the brokenness of racism into new patterns of thought and behavior ushering in social and spiritual healing. New ways of being are learned through the actions of conversation and probing dialogue.”<sup>1</sup> This program will provide a challenging but non-shaming platform for self-examination and exploration of our role in the community. It will help us to develop strategies and actions in support of racial justice, and enable us to develop strong and sustainable relationships of solidarity with community partners.

### The Process

The process starts with a weekend kick-start retreat, which includes participants and facilitators (I will be one of the facilitators). A team of 8-10 people from CCUU would attend a kick-off workshop, along with members of two or three other local congregations. Following the start-off retreat, the group, consisting of 10-12 people, committed to meeting at least once a month, preferably twice a month, will meet for eight, two-hour sessions. “Each session poses questions that connect with both the sources of inspiration as well as the challenges of race/ethnicity that slow our human journey toward wholeness.”<sup>2</sup>

### These are the Seminars At-A-Glance from the Beloved Conversations website:

- Seminar 1    Deep Check-in: Making Sense of the Retreat; The Invisible Footprint of Racial/Ethnic History
- Seminar 2    Exploring Our Dynamic of Racism and Privilege
- Seminar 3    Racism Today: Micro-Aggressions
- Seminar 4    Interrupting Racism
- Seminar 5    Community Audit: The Experience of Race & Ethnicity in your community
- Seminar 6    The Legacy of Racism in Congregational Experience
- Seminar 7    Toward a New Identity: How Can We Be-in-the- World?
- Seminar 8    Collecting our Wisdom, Creating our Future; Celebration of Learning & Community

Beloved Conversations includes ongoing support and resources for facilitators, as well as encouragement to expand and continue the process beyond the initial group. The workshops can be repeated and offered in variable formats (one day or weekend retreats for instance) after the initial pilot group completes the process. Participants in the group become ambassadors to the congregation in advancing racial justice and facilitators of future groups.

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<sup>1</sup> From the Beloved Conversations website: <http://www.meadville.edu/beloved>

<sup>2</sup> From the Beloved Conversations website: <http://www.meadville.edu/beloved>

## Participants

Key to participation in the first pilot group is the willingness to commit to becoming an ambassador and leader in the congregation in continuing the conversation and ongoing racial justice work. Members of the Black Lives Matter Initiative have expressed enthusiasm for participating in the program and the invitation to participate in the start-up workshop and ongoing small group sessions will be extended to those who have participated in previous racial justice events. We will also reach out to and promote this experience to the entire congregation and specifically invite those who may experience discrimination, exclusion, or oppression based on ethnicity or race in order to form a multi-cultural, multi-racial group to the extent possible.

The expected outcomes of this program will be...

- Stronger relationships of trust within the congregation and solidarity with community partners
- Spiritual deepening and personal faith formation
- Intercultural competence and an understanding of our own cultural perspectives
- Understanding of personal power and mutual empowerment
- Developing a plan of action to further educate, advocate, and organize for racial justice within the congregation
- Building and growing our capacity for service and partnership with local organization(s) such as:
  - Partners for Our Community (P.O.C.) – a network of community organizations empowering people in need in Palatine. There are opportunities for mentoring and teaching
  - Community Renewal Society (CRS) – a community organization advancing racial and economic justice in the Chicago-land area.
  - Palatine Faith in Action – Interfaith alliance of outreach and service
  - Lawndale Christian Legal Center (LCLC) – providing legal services grounded in restorative justice for youth in the Lawndale area of Chicago
  - Prisons and Restorative Justice work through UUANI – ministering to, providing re-entry support, and compassionate welcoming to people leaving prisons.

## Timeline:

Spring – Summer 2016

- Continuing efforts of the Black Lives Matter Initiative to educate ourselves and the congregation:
  - Race: The Power of an Illusion – film showings and discussions
  - Black Lives Matter Buttons and handouts with suggested responses to challenges or questions about support of the movement
  - Prisons and Restorative Justice sermon presented by UU Chalice Connection as a summer worship
  - Discussion of Ta-Nahisi Coates “The Case for Reparations” article

September – October 2016

- 3 sermon series on Racial Justice and Beloved Conversations

- Exploring relationships with community partners – P.O.C., CRS, LCLC, UUANI – attending events, actions, workshops, lobby days

#### October 2016

- Beloved Conversations start-up workshop (8-10 participants from CCUU) with other congregations, possibly hosted at Countryside.
- Focusing on one or two organizations to work closely with on racial justice.

#### November 2016 – March 2017

- Eight small group sessions with participants
- Developing and promote opportunities for the congregation to engage in education, actions, service, witness, with organizational partners.

#### April 2017

- Presentation to the congregation of Beloved Conversations learning – in a worship service and/or large group gathering.
- Plan second round retreat (one-day or weekend) and set up ongoing groups to be facilitated by participants in pilot.

#### May 2017

- Establish resources and plan with Black Lives Matter Initiative for continued growth
  - Join Allies for Racial Equity and connect with BC resources and support
  - Develop skill-building workshops for participants of Beloved Conversations (ie. Micro-aggressions, identity and intersectionality, class)

#### Resources

The cost of Beloved Conversations will be approximately \$1000 for our congregation as it looks as though we will partner with three other UU congregations in the area for the initial workshop. Half of that amount will be coming from the Social Action Committee budget for 2015-16 and the other half may come from the next years budget, a fundraiser, or professional expenses.

Rev. Hilary is supportive and wants to participate in the workshop. Eileen Wiviott will be one of the facilitators of the conversations and will need to determine who the other facilitator will be with the hope to include a diverse perspective and voice if at all possible. This will require small group facilitation skills, deep listening and pastoral presence.

#### Measuring Our Success

Much of the work of this focused initiative will be in building our capacity to be agents of greater justice through probing questions, rigorous spiritual development, and honest relationship building. It will be difficult to measure these things beyond anecdotal reports from participants and community partners. However, some of the signs of positive impact of this work will be:

- CCUU will be a place where people of all races, cultures, classes, genders, sexual orientations, and abilities will be spiritually nourished, challenged, and enriched.
- Regular opportunities for actions, activities, events, and/or direct service will be offered to the congregation:
  - Regular opportunities (monthly opportunities for individuals or small groups or quarterly for larger groups)
  - Public relationship building within and beyond the congregation
  - Multi-generational opportunities – open to people of all ages whenever possible
- Increase participation of congregation in racial outreach activities – actions that promote racial justice through education, advocacy, public witness, and organizing - by at least 25%.

Through this expanding process, we will be preparing ourselves to be an increasingly inclusive community, spiritually nourishing for all people. We will be building our capacity to more fully engage in racial and social justice, and creating a community where we are both nourished and challenged together. This will be a covenantal, mutually respectful, and committed process of praxis – creating opportunities for deep study, service and reflection. We will move our internal, spiritual work into action by engaging in witness, advocacy, and solidarity as those opportunities arise. The internal reflection and learning will inform the action and the action will then provide a way to reflect and learn. This is the cycle that we will develop as an ongoing small group committed to social, racial, and economic justice.