

Widening the Circle Notes, 5/4/2022

Attending: Lisa Dutton, Lee Meinicke, Treva Burger, Andrea Barsevik, Linda Bernstein, Shobhi Kanal, Jim Salom, Ryan Hurd, Dev Howerton, Margaret Thompson, Kent Matthies, Eric Foster, Barbara Dowdall

Check In: Sharing about April anti-oppression workshops

Trans inclusion workshop

Very interesting, informative, good resources shared – especially a piece on culture. A bigger takeaway: so much of the discussion was not specific to trans inclusion, but was to help us think about culture and environment and how these affect all people who are not in the majority.

Leading the program was transformative, made some public mistakes and saw how important this work is. This could be a yearly training; USG has the rights to keep offering the program.

The radically welcoming message is, bring your whole selves, your culture, come grow with us.

Applicable to all aspects of marginalized groups and anti-oppression.

Did not attend this workshop, but learned from child's recent interaction with medical professionals; as parents we usually try not to speak for our (young adult) child, but I learned my child wanted their parents to speak up on their behalf. Important for allies to check in.

Most excellent. Learned, was moved. Encourage redoing it. One part of the work is not committing microaggressions. Get to know every person.

White organizational culture workshop

Informative, some of the information wasn't new. It reinforced things that were presented in ERC.

Resources were helpful, particularly characteristics of multi cultural organizations.

We need to keep in mind the importance of seeing each person as an individual; gave example of a Black congregant who likes Mozart best and wouldn't want others assuming based on his race that he preferred some other music.

Learned from a Ukraine vigil where a Black man stopped his car and got out and spoke angrily to a Black member of our group about the choice to hold a vigil for Ukraine; as a white person, thought shouldn't insert himself, and a Black police officer went over instead. Person later offered feedback that they would have liked the person to come over, get involved, offer support. Again, allies need to check in.

The white organizational culture sessions were interesting. It's clear USG operates according to many white org culture norms – unconsciously, because it's the water we swim in. We need multicultural approaches to welcoming, and fostering connection with other human beings is very important, and it doesn't always have to be heavy.

One presentation was on "white Christian supremacy." We should learn more about that history and how U.S. culture and UU culture has been shaped by it, since UUism has roots in Christianity.

Platinum rule: Do unto others as they wish you would do unto them.

Margaret talked about overlap between our 8 UU Principles and the characteristics of multicultural organizations and shared a grid table showing her sense of these overlaps.

Review of WTC goals and proposed additions, led by Andrea [references the Discussion Guide for Restoration, Reparations, Accountability, Resources, and Final Thoughts]

Recommendation 1 ("As an act of reparations, funding and administrative support . . .") – already approved by WTC group. For H3.1 action, proposed and the group agreed to add national events to the list; it was pointed out USG has already supported congregants financially to attend GA.

Recommendation 2 ("Methods for encouraging and channeling productive conflict . . .") – the group approved T3.1 proposed addition: that the requirement for annual anti-oppression training could be met with training to build skills in dealing with conflict.

The group, which included 2 members of the Committee on Ministry, approved RR1.1 proposed addition: that COM members have skills training around conflict resolution, as they are currently USG's conflict resolution team.

Question: which staff will be included in the requirement for staff to attend anti-oppression training?

Kent: “staff” means anyone on payroll; the group agreed to leave the wording as is.

Ryan: Oren Sofer gave an excellent training on nonviolent communication and conflict resolution. Jesse Frechette also offers relevant workshops. (USG Center for Mindfulness has sponsored programs by both these teachers.) A Trans Inclusion participant was very impressed by Jesse Frechette’s contributions in the Trans Inclusion workshop.

Recommendation 3 (“Channels and procedures for identifying harm, making amends, and financial reparations . . .”)

Additional possible RR2 Goal: Consider ways USG could make amends and offer financial reparations. A local Friends congregation has embarked on interesting ways to enact reparations. We could apply this to USG’s investments in some way, not sure how. We could add an action step of researching what other congregations are doing to enact reparations.

RR2.1 action, supporting UU seminary students. Should we keep our reparations more local? Supporting seminary students from under represented identities does align well with this goal. We did a Share the Plate collection for the UU seminaries, very little was donated. Maybe we didn’t promote it enough? We didn’t have a speaker for it, as we often do from STP beneficiary organizations. Every UU congregation should do an annual STP collection for our seminaries. With a compelling speaker or a good video, we could get a better STP response.

RR2.2 action, consider making a contribution to local music group working with Black youth every time we use a Negro spiritual in service or programs. Proposed change: “consider making a policy that a contribution be made . . .” Germantown Quaker meeting is giving money to help people clear titles to their homes, the Sullivan fund could donate to this effort, it’s a good method of making reparations. “Outward-facing” (as opposed to UU focused) reparations could take the form of donations to local, community-based organizations led by POC folks. Some USG covid relief fund distribution didn’t center voices of people who’d be receiving the funds, but also gave two substantial donations to the Germantown Mutual Aid Fund which was very effective, and gave USG credibility in the local community. The intent around the idea of broadening reparations to the local community is understandable, but the original intent, the goal, of this recommendation relates to UUs with marginalized identities in our own congregation. The outward-facing reparations ideas could be brought to the board as a separate matter, not part of this WTC effort.

Recommendation 4 (“Widespread practices of acknowledging UUism’s foundational complicity . . .”)

RR 2 Goal:

Proposed addition to RR2.1 action, “continue to use worship services to educate and racism and anti racism at USG and in the UUA.”

Proposed RR2.2 action, “conduct research in USG archives into USG history related to oppression as well as on USG’s history of anti-oppression work.” E.g., William Henry Furness, a very effective abolitionist preacher, was senior minister at USG for a time. Longtime USG member Fran Emery did extremely important anti-oppression work.

Recommendations on Accountability and Resources – we’ll save review for June meeting, as we ran out of time today.

Check out

Reiterated importance of approaching new people as we return to in-person services at USG, not only reconnecting with folks we already know.

The Welcoming Team has had a big burden as USG has reopened, to recognize and welcome new people who first joined us via Zoom services. We can’t rely on Welcoming Team to do all this work – we need to remind ALL people and groups at USG to approach and welcome new folks. Remember, if you’re sitting up front, you’re not seeing everyone behind you – take time to look around and approach people you don’t know yet.

We haven’t re-started the Black Lives Matter vigils. Mary Kalyna started these, and is now focused on the Ukraine vigils, but the BLM vigils aren’t Mary’s responsibility, they are USG’s.

We do need to-restart the BLM vigils. We need to find leadership for this effort, to have one point person each evening for security, ready to call 911 if needed. Our Lincoln Drive vigils are perhaps our greatest security risk (risk of drive-by shootings).

Ryan: I'll take these [WTC/COIC goals] back to ASD and CSD committees. We've broken down the false dualism that has led people to separate "spirituality" and "social justice." These are not separate things.

First Board priorities for 2022-23:

1. Provide support for committees, groups, and initiatives to implement changes to USG systems and processes consistent with goals from Widening the Circle of Concern report.
2. Support the new staff and liaise with the congregation during the transition with a new interim minister, music director, and DSD.
3. Support and encourage programs and practices that will help people to come back to USG and participate fully in the life of the congregation, both in-person and remotely.
4. Continue to review and revise policies and procedures as appropriate as well as governance and ministry structure, to ensure USG is on a firm footing to live out our mission.)

Treva wrote an annual report for WTC, to publicize our work to the congregation, similar to the way USG committees each write an annual report. She put the UU 8th Principle as our mission statement "We journey toward spiritual wholeness by working to build a diverse, multicultural Beloved Community by our actions that accountably dismantle racism and other oppressions in ourselves and our institutions." Kent shared that he is emotional at this penultimate meeting, but that he thinks the WtC plans are excellent and is hopeful and confident about our future.

Next meeting: Wednesday, June 1, 7-8:30pm