

Addressing Racial Disparity in Madison:
A Summary Brief of the Conversation on November 20, 2016
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From “table notes” assembled by Judy Lyons and Doug Knudson

Introduction

This conversation follows an emphasis on the racial disparity in Madison studied by the congregation of First United Methodist Church in Lent, 2016. The reality of racial disparity in Madison has garnered national attention in recent years (<http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/tackle-racial-disparity-wisconsins-capital-community-leaders-start-young/>). An important Race to Equity Report (www.cityofmadison.com/mayor/documents/WCCFR2EReport.pdf) has given important statistical data that informs the discussion. The November conversation at First United Methodist Church was attended by over one hundred members and constituents of the congregation to rejoin and renew efforts to address this important faith issue in our community. We draw on the theological and spiritual commitments that envision us all as “children of God” and in the Christian community there is “...neither Jew, nor Greek; slave nor free; male nor female...but, all are one...”

The conversations emerged three distinct, yet inter-connected avenues for our continued engagement in this work: *education/formation, direct involvement, advocacy*. An over-riding theme in all of our conversations is that it is time to DO SOMETHING! This brief will lift up the major points in each area and suggest important next steps and a proposed timeline.

Education and Formation

We must keep educating ourselves about a) the nature of race, racial and racism in social construction, b) the narrative(s) of our community, especially the African American experience in Madison and the wider U.S. community, c) the nature of “white privilege” and the way it is understood in the white community and experienced in the black community.

Next steps:

1. Institute a series of book, film and formational studies that will give an opportunity to be consistently exposed and immersed in the issues that confront us.
2. Invite leadership from the African American community to inform and guide our work together.
3. Institute a series of conversations with African American churches and groups to become exposed and immersed in the various narratives resident in the Madison community.
4. Engage in at least one presentation/conversation regarding “white privilege” in Spring or Fall, 2017.
5. Promote the Lyons Lecture in Spring, 2018 as an important part of this effort.
6. Focus on African-American worship experience in a regular pattern throughout the year, especially for Advent, 2017.

Timetable: Produce a preliminary calendar of offerings and events by the Martin Luther King Holiday weekend, 2016. February, Black History Month will be an important time to fully engage this project again.

Direct Involvement

It is important to focus our work. We cannot do everything that may be good to do, but we must concentrate our efforts. Partner with an African-American congregation and be prepared to listen and emerge joint projects and supportive positioning in these efforts. Relationships and partnerships are key. Select key partners that are working with these issues and engage in work that is already being done.

1. Re-engage with John Odom as to places in the community that utilize the gifts of First UMC. Be prepared to mobilize in response to his invitation.
2. Create a guide team within the congregation to inform, invite and support our involvement. Engage a pastoral leader who can help us organize and develop sustainable partnerships as we begin this new phase of our work.
3. Investigate a possible partner church with whom we will journey on this initiative.
4. Review the possible partnerships with others working on this issue and assess the key partners.
5. Build on programs we already have in place.

Timetable: By the MLK holiday we will develop a guide team, explore a pastoral leader (see point 2), we will receive specific guidance from John Odom (see point 1) and review the possible partnerships. As a kick-off to Black History month there will be a strategic planning session planned to focus our direct involvement, make concrete plans and put in place a sustainable strategy for moving forward.

Advocacy

There were strong voices during the conversation that focused on the transformation of social structures that lead to disparity and despair. The United Methodist Church has a strong history of working within the social and political structures for transformation, justice and to give voice to pathways to a more equitable society. Involvement in public and private education, fair labor practices, access to housing and healthcare are historically important issues for The United Methodist Church. The focus is not on partisanship, but on parity.

1. Identify key social issues in Madison that are root causes for disparity. Chart important points of advocacy and partnership. Access these through already established networks among our members and their commitments.
2. Advocate for faith communities to work together and participate in them.
3. Join the Urban League and the NAACP as leaders in this work.
4. Join with UW and other campuses in this important work.

Timetable: As the direct involvement work begins February and Lent, this work is the harbinger of Easter. It will be part of the guide team's portfolio for Spring.