

**A New Paradigm for Social Justice Work**  
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On March 30 several members of High Plains Church UU (HPCUU) and All Souls UU Church of Colorado Springs (ASUUC) were privileged to attend a workshop facilitated by Kiersten Homblette, Beloved Community Coordinator for the Boulder Denver Cluster of Unitarian Universalist Congregations. We learned about a shift in how UU congregations approach social action/justice work that promises to enrich and revitalize our lives and the lives of those we hope to serve. This template for social justice work in our congregations is modeled after small group ministry programs that have invigorated and grown churches all over the world.

Small group ministry social justice work would not supplant Ultimacy & Intimacy Groups but serves as another avenue for personal growth and for building Beloved Community. A small group justice ministry meets regularly; a Boulder group focused on immigration issues meets bimonthly, once in the evening and once during the day in order to fit the varying schedules of those who may be interested.

A typical meeting begins with one member offering a reading related to the issue around which the group organized. Another presents a story of a personal incident related to the issue and which impacted that person's personal growth in some way. Then the other members are given time to react to that story, offering how that story or a similar personal event impacted their own spirituality. Another member leads the group in a spiritual practice that has been helpful to him/her. This "check-in" period lasts about one hour. The second hour is given over to planning social action/justice events or activities related to the group's issue.

A paradigm shift that Ms. Homblette described to us involves our attitudes towards those in our communities whom we wish to serve. To my mind, it is a shift from our usual top down focus to one from the bottom up. Rather than those of us outside the effects of some problem/issue we see in the world deciding how we want to help or just throwing money at a problem, building Beloved Community involves walking with those affected by the issue. The group can still do advocacy work, demonstration participation, and working with organizations outside the church, etc., but that work is informed by those with whom they companion. The Boulder group "companions" with three immigrant families. They work with, not for, these families and report that this shift in focus has grown the spirit of each UU involved.

I think this approach to social action/justice work may just be one vehicle that can revitalize this component of HPCUU's service to our membership and to our wider community. HPCUU members have many suggestions for social justice focus: service to our military community; service to the aged; service to the homeless; service to foster families and those who work with children; and environmental issues. Because programs for our children have been a vital part of High Plains ministries, I can envision a group of families with children where the children and their adults find an issue of interest to both and function in a social justice group similar to that described by Ms. Homblette. All Souls UUC has a small group focused on alternatives to violence, and workshop participants expressed a desire to work with High Plains Church members in small group ministry social justice work. I suspect the Mountain Desert District and Ms. Homblette would be willing to work with any HPC and/or HPCUU & ASUUC group.

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