

I Am A Racist

Unitarian Universalist Community Church, Augusta, ME, Rev. Carie Johnsen, March 2016

Opening/Chalice Lighting *We have only begun to know
the power that is in us if we would join
our solitudes in the communion of the struggle.*
~ Denise Levertov

Checking In/Sharing

Reading Excerpt from February 21, 2016 sermon, "Black Lives Matter"
by Rev. Carie Johnsen

I'm a racist. I am a student of life. I am a righter of wrongs. I am a good person. Still I am a racist doing my best to live out anti-racist values.

Every day as a woman of northern European descent living in Maine, I get to choose whether I will acknowledge the race story that has been unfolding across this continent since the arrival of white Europeans. Since the early days of genocide of the indigenous people of Turtle Island, since the forced migration of the people of Africa, and with every new wave of people immigrating a new prejudice arrives in their wake.

Every day living in Maine, I am comfortably situated in my whiteness, comfortably living out the dream in the professional middle class, comfortably serving a progressive religious community where the percentage of people of color in the membership book, 2% to be exact, is slightly above the county's demographics. Conveniently comfortable unless I choose otherwise!

Living here in central Maine,

I need to go out of my way to interact with people outside my race, (Yes, I have a race. It is called white.)

Equally,

I need to go out of my way to stay informed, to seek out current thinking, to engage in the national dialogue.

I need to go out of my way to stay abreast on the current call to action, to recognize the urgency.

Here in Augusta, Maine,

I need to be intentional in my ministry, my studies and my leadership on issues of race and racism. It is not in my face. It is easy to minimize the urgency. It is easy to get distracted by the long list of social issues vying for my attention.

Here at Unitarian Universalist Community church,

I am the spiritual leader of a community of people that may not see racism as a problem. Still, I am called to wrestle with the issue, sit in empty circles, recommend books, plan workshops, keep the topic on the table, and most importantly, facilitate the conversation.

In Huffington post blog “Why I’m Not Cool With My 96% White Church”, Michelle DeRusha writes, *“The problem of racism is simply not registering. Racism in America may be seen as a problem generally... but it’s not seen as a problem for us – for upper-middle class white people attending a white church and, for the most part living in white suburbia.”* I would add, it is not registering for people living in central Maine.

Questions:

1. Would you agree or disagree with the proposition that issues of race and racism are not registering with the people living in central Maine? Why or why not?
2. *I am a racist doing my best to live out anti-racist values.* Does this statement resonate with you in any way? How and why or why not?
3. How do you experience or understand the problem of racism in your life? In your familial or social circle? In your neighborhood, town or faith community?
4. How do you think your faith community could engage the issue of race and racist in Augusta, Kennebec County and Maine?

Check-out/Likes and Wishes: How was the session for you?

Closing Words “Distant Return” by Stephen Shick

Someday, out there, on a day like this
in a place I will never see,
where the clearing winds always come
after the storm,
I will arrive nameless
on a distant memory
carrying with me all the best
I gave back to this earth.

All the hope I found
scattered by others
along the roads
I traveled

All the courage that came
unexpectedly when you took my hand
and we cried
for those we could not save

All the love that exposed
the lies I told myself
about who I was
and what I was meant to do

All the faith that came to me
when I saw others
carry these things
into the future.