



Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website
Session Plan
Faith Connections: God Is Still Speaking: Black Lives Matter
St. Peter United Church of Christ, Lake Zurich, IL,
Stephanie Certain Matz, February 2016

Preliminaries

Opening Reading and Prayer/Candle Lighting

The following reading is from the UCC web page on Racial Justice:

“For all of you are the children of God” —Galatians 3:28

Each person is created in the image of God. But whenever we devise, maintain or perpetuate systems and structures that oppress people based on race and/or ethnicity, we interfere with God's purpose and the opportunity for all God's children to be fully who they are created to be. Racism is an affront to God.

Racism is racial prejudice plus power. It is rooted in the belief that one group has racial superiority and entitlement over others. Its power is manifested in every institution and system, both nationally and internationally, which was historically established and continues to function to benefit one group of people to the disadvantage of other groups. Awareness and education will help us to become anti-racist individuals and foster the development of anti-racist systems and institutions that can eliminate privilege for some and oppression for others.

The United Church of Christ and its predecessor churches have made a priority commitment to supporting policies and structures that make real our Christian commitment to racial justice. The UCC's emphasis means more than simply challenging personal prejudices, but involves a commitment to in-depth analysis of societal policies and structures that either work toward the elimination of racism or perpetuate it.”

Let us be in prayer.

We gather a people rich with color
and replete with the grandeur of God's imaginative eye.
We gather a people rich with culture
and proud of traditions as diverse as the rainbow.
Our tongues speak many languages;
Our songs resonate to different rhythms;
Our prayers are offered in sound and smoke;
And it is all good.

We praise the Creator whose image we reflect.
We honor the Child whose light still shines.
We discern the movement of their Holy Spirit.
Our hearts become full,
our bodies tremble,
and our voices rise in awe and wonder to the Still-Speaking God.

Amen.

--Adapted from a prayer by UCC General Minister and President The Rev. Dr. John C. Dorhauer, on the first anniversary of the shooting of Michael Brown's death in Ferguson, Missouri.)

Check-in

(Remember to keep check-in shorter than in the past to allow more time to tackle the more difficult discussions.)

Meditation

Before getting started, ask the group what thoughts they have—now two weeks later—from the discussion about Jesus and Privilege. What do they think about it now? Did they think about where they in their current lives would have been on the board? Transition from the general topic of privilege to the specific discussion of the Black Lives Matter movement.

Sharing and Listening

1. Debrief the prework. Spend as much time as you need in talking about “I, Racist” and the feelings it provoked. Broaden the discussion to the videos if appropriate.
2. Ask each person to talk about the UCC “Intersections” they chose to review. Take one topic at a time for discussion, pulling from the conversation the embedded reasons behind these issues.

Additional Questions for Facilitators

1. Many believe a direct connection can be made from the time of slavery through Reconstruction through Jim Crow to the policies and institutions working today to restrict the equality of African Americans. What do you think those connections might be?
2. Where were you when you heard about the shooting at Mother Emanuel Church in Charleston, South Carolina? What do you remember thinking? What was the conversation like with people in your life? Do you have a story about something you heard that really resonated with you at the time, or something you heard that you really disagreed with?

3. What do you think about the Black Lives Matter movement? Should it exist? Does it need to exist? How can non-black communities respond?
4. Ponder what you have heard in the news in the last six months about criminal justice in Chicago's black communities. What's going on? What are the contributing factors? How could/should it work differently?
5. Should the UCC be actively supporting Black Lives Matter? Why or why not?

Checkout

Closing Prayer

Oh God, we pray that you will stir the waters, and
agitate the sleepers of our world,
who would rather justify injustice than fight against it.
And give your people—
your young warriors
and crying mothers
and broken fathers—
the courage to accept nothing less than life.
Help us to stand for truth, justice and righteousness.
Give us courage to make our witness against injustice in deep and abiding love.
Amen.

—Adapted from "A Collective Prayer for Ferguson," as compiled and edited by Pastor Renita Marie,
http://www.huffingtonpost.com/pastor-renita-marie-mdiv/prayer-for-ferguson-b_6158192.html

Closing Blessing

And so may it be.
Now go in peace. May you leave this place knowing you are good and knowing you are loved.
Take your light and your love from this place. Use them to bless the world. And stay safe until
we meet again. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.



Faith Connections Session 88: God is Still Speaking: Black Lives Matter *Participant Preparation*

Why “Black Lives Matter”: The UCC Perspective

Our faith’s teachings tell us that each person is created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27) and therefore has intrinsic worth and value. So why when Jesus proclaimed good news to the poor, release to the jailed, sight to the blind, and freedom to the oppressed (Luke 4:16-19) did he not mention the rich, the prison-owners, the sighted and the oppressors? What conclusion are we to draw from this? Doesn’t Jesus care about all lives?

Black lives matter. This is an obvious truth in light of God’s love for all God’s children. But this has not been the experience for many in the U.S. One Black person is said to be killed by security officers every 28 hours. Black women in crisis are often met with deadly force. One in seven Black trans persons who interact with police are being assaulted.

When Black lives are systemically devalued by society, our outrage justifiably insists that attention be focused on Black lives.

When a church claims boldly “Black Lives Matter” at this moment, it chooses to show up intentionally against all given societal values of supremacy and superiority or common-sense complacency. By insisting on the intrinsic worth of all human beings, Jesus models for us how God loves justly, and how his disciples can love publicly in a world of inequality. We live out the love of God justly by publicly saying #BlackLivesMatter.” — *ucc.org/blacklives matter*

The United Church of Christ stands in support of and in solidarity with the movement known as Black Lives Matter. That makes it incumbent upon us to take a deeper look at this movement, to see beyond the headlines or the news footage, and see if we can understand and support our denomination in this important struggle. Everything we have discussed this year so far about “extravagant hospitality,” acts of kindness, and privilege can be applied directly to this session. So, we will begin with some facts.

What is Black Lives Matter?

It is an activist movement originating in the African-American community. It campaigns against embedded, institutional violence against black people. Black Lives Matter regularly

organizes protests around the deaths of African-Americans in killings by law enforcement officers, and broader issues of racial profiling, police brutality, and racial inequality in the U.S. criminal justice system. (*Wikipedia, revised.*) The movement does not have a centralized structure. Rather, it has chapters all around the country that communicate with one another and have produced a number of leaders. While largely made up of members of black communities, many folks of other races have joined their ranks and support their goals, particularly through primarily mainline Protestant Christian denominations like the United Church of Christ.

What Black Lives Matter is NOT

While calling attention to the built-in inequities in our society that are centuries old, Black Lives Matter is not a movement “against” whites or “against” police officers. Rather, it springs from the belief that the majority of those in the black community have been and continue to be permanently stymied from participating equally in our economy, justice and political systems, and the basic human rights many Americans take for granted.

Still, the term “Black Lives Matter” got an immediate response from (predominantly) the white community who proclaimed that “All Lives Matter” would be a more inclusive and accurate name. Maybe. And maybe not. These quotes may help us understand the phrase a bit better, and why its usage is important.

President Obama spoke to the debate between Black Lives Matter and All Lives matter by saying this:

“I think that the reason that the organizers used the phrase Black Lives Matter was not because they were suggesting that no one else’s lives matter. . .rather what they were suggesting was there is a specific problem that is happening in the African American community that’s not happening in other communities. . .a legitimate issue that we’ve got to address.”

Hip Hop duo Macklemore and Ryan Lewis quote an activist in their song, “White Privilege II” who argues:

“If there’s a subdivision and a house is on fire. . .the fire department wouldn’t show up and put water on all the houses because all houses matter. They would show up and turn their water on the house that was burning because that’s the house that needs the help the most.”

Matthew McGorry is famous for his metaphor:

“#BlackLivesMatter doesn’t mean other lives don’t. Like people who say ‘Save the Rainforests’ aren’t saying ‘F***Other Types of Forests.’”

And this from the Rev. Emily Mitchell:

“Black Lives Matter is a movement because black lives don’t get treated like they matter. It’s not putting all other lives down. It’s lifting black lives up to be on an equal footing with the ways that all (white) lives are treated. I would love to live in a world where we could say “all lives matter” and that it would actually be true. But we don’t. So we still have work to do. I think it’s very telling about how black lives are treated in American when just saying “black lives matter” is a controversial act.”

And now you get my two cents:

The purpose of the Black Lives Matter movement isn't to say that no other lives matter, or that black lives matter "more" than everyone else's. Its purpose is to point out the discrepancy in how races are treated within the justice system, economic, and other systems of our country. My favorite metaphor at the moment: All water matters, but right now, FLINT'S WATER MATTERS more because the system is broken and help needs to be provided to be fix it, but also awareness needs to be raised about underlying causes of this life-threatening catastrophe.

What Caused All This?

Figuring that out is your homework for the next session. But you're getting lots of help. Video links, short readings, and all the work you've done on "extravagant welcome" so far this year. With that said, let's jump in.

Participant Preparation

1. **PRIORITY.** Read the sermon, "I, Racist" by John Metta (provided). This has been one of the most read and forwarded pieces of the Black Lives Matter conversation. For many, it is a challenging piece to invite into one's heart and consciousness. But if believing in "extravagant welcome" means anything, it mean at least being willing to make space for and invite in hard truths and new perspectives. Come to the session prepared to share your reactions and responses, whatever they are. There are no "right" answers. The text is attached or you can read it online at http://www.huffingtonpost.com/john-metta/i-racist_b_7770652.html
2. **PRIORITY:** The UCC has a commitment to advocate for justice and some years ago embarked on a "sacred conversation about race." As part of that effort, they compiled seven short fact sheets called "Intersections." These fact sheets explore "Race and. . ." (voting rights, public education, etc.) Go to the UCC website to find: http://www.ucc.org/justice_racism_intersections CHOOSE TWO of the fact sheets to read and think about and then talk about as we uncover together the reasons WHY Black Lives Matters arose in these times. (Please, don't everyone just read the first two!!) If you have time, do a little research and see if you can find backup documentation or statistics from reputable sources.
3. Watch the following short videos:
<http://live.huffingtonpost.com/r/segment/reverend-jim-wallis-ferguson-christianity-/5437df74fe34440995000c8a> Rev. Jim Wallis, founder of Sojourners, talks about the movement and his participation in the protests in Ferguson, Missouri.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yveGB1VGGB8&feature=youtu.be> This is a short segment from the CNN documentary, "Black Men in America."
http://www.ucc.org/news_blackmon_why_i_protest_01182016 by The Rev. Tracy

Blackmon, executive minister of the UCC Justice and Witness Ministries

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qffCO1b-7Js> Stephen Colbert interviews Black Lives Matter leader, DeRay Mckesson

<http://www.cc.com/video-clips/j79s76/the-daily-show-with-trevor-noah-beyonce-s-halftime-show-message> A commentary with humor from The Daily Show about Beyonce's half-time show at the Superbowl.

Questions to Consider After Reading and/or Viewing

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