

White Privilege - White Guilting

River of Grass Unitarian Universalist Congregation Men's Group

Davie, Florida, June 3, 2021

Chalice Lighting & Opening Words:

As a new day dawns, we can do as we did yesterday, or we might do differently, and so create a new tomorrow.

Check-in / Sharing: How is it with you today?

Topic / Readings:

There is the story told about the wise old fish who was swimming through the water. As he swam along, he encountered two young fish coming by. He turned to them and asked "How is the water?" and the young fish replied – "What water?"

"White people are raised to be confused about their own color. While we are taught to be aware of other people's color, polite white people do not mention color in public – especially their own." --Janet Helms in *A Race is a Nice Thing to Have* .

It is not a matter of choosing whether or not to be a part of a racist system that benefits white people. You can't simply say, "I am not going to be privileged anymore." As long as the institutions of society are designed to provide us with privilege, we will get these privileges whether we want them or not. -- Peggy McIntosh "White Privilege."

Progressives and feminists do not articulate a vision of how white males can be part of positive change. They want me to feel guilty for being male and white in place of delivering a message that I can feel responsible – responsible for noticing and challenging racism, sexism, and heterosexism. –Emma Brown in *To Raise a Boy*.

You may be in a meeting or conference overhearing a conversation. You may be in a more private setting, seeing a picture being passed around. When you hear it or see it, what can you do in that moment?

Once I feel like I am getting attacked, then I just shut down and don't listen.

When I occupy the dominant social position, and someone challenges me to think critically about how I am helping perpetuate injustice or inequity, it is not totally unpredictable that I am going to react defensively.

We might decide to learn to recognize what we are looking at in a social situation. We might decide to be part of the change. If you see something, say something.

Questions for Sharing:

1. When did you first notice privilege in your world?
2. When did you first notice racism in your world?
3. How have these concepts changed as you've grown older?
4. What stories were passed down to you? Have you carried for them with you and passed them on?
5. When did you first feel like the world was different from what you were told growing up?
6. Are you a part of any social group that takes you outside of the white, middle-class experience?
7. Do you see racism as an either/or choice or a matter of many complex layers?
8. Labels for various cultures, nationalities, sexual proclivities change frequently. Some of us keep current with these changes, and some do not. Where are you in this evolution? How do you feel about others who stress the latest political correctness?
9. What does it take to walk away from a story you've been living for a long time? What does it take to be part of the change?

Wrapping Up: How did you like this session?

Closing Words:

One of the key things I think is important is, how unaware I might be of our white power and privilege. It is just so much a part of our lives, I don't even have to think about it. But, You can think about it.

Extinguish the Chalice:

Credits for sources for this presentation.

Emma Brown, *To Raise a Boy*, Simon & Schuster, New York, 2021.

Ijeoma Oluo, *Mediocre: The Dangerous Legacy of White Male America*, Hachette Book Group, 2020

Janet E. Helms, *A Race Is a Nice Thing to Have: A Guide to Being a White Person*, 1992. (out of print).

Tom Wise, "Explaining White Privilege or Your Defense Mechanism is Showing," www.tomwise.org, 2008.

Amy Carol Webb, "If You See Something, Say Something," Folk song, born from this phrase first seen September 12, 2001.