

April 12, 7pm

Social Justice Ministry meeting with Rev. Dr. Velda Love

Attendance: Josh and Jen Case, Pastor Amy, Frank Hairston, Donna Hess, Barb Hanniford, Pam Quelhorst, Rev. Dr. Velda Love

Pastor Amy opened by bringing Dr. Love up to date on our church's journey. We introduced ourselves to Rev. Dr. Love, and she told us a little of her history and how she came to serve at the UCC national office.

Rev. Dr. Love started by talking about some of the things we had brought up in our introductions. One of the first things she said was that not everyone's going to be on this journey with us. It's difficult to give up privilege and power because then one has to see one's self as part of the problem. It's easier to say, "I've attended a workshop. I'm good. I'm done." We can nudge, but if they want to be on the journey, they will be on the journey. We have to allow our own selves to be transformed, and then when we show up in a room the way we act and talk and what we talk about shows that we follow the radical Jesus. Some people will be attracted that our commitment and will ask how to get started.

She encouraged us to remember a few things on the way. The first is that we ourselves, as individuals and a ministry, stay on the journey and continue doing the work. Second, we need to be moving at a pace that is slow enough for people to keep up and not get lost. Third, we need to know how to let go because losing relationships is a reality when one starts swimming in the water of working against white supremacy. Finally, we can't jump into doing things before doing the important anti-racism work on ourselves.

Rev. Dr. Love opened it up for questions, and Josh asked about how to start with the members of church who have remained on the periphery. Rev. Dr. Love said that we can start urging the answering of the questions: who are you? Who did you come from? When did your ancestors come here as immigrants and find and take their space in this land? When did they start seeing themselves as white? As a part of the faith community, when did they learn that justice was not for all?

Rev. Dr. Love told us about some of the education she does, including training facilitators of racial justice conversations. Her main program is called "Sacred Conversations", and it is a yearlong program for a cohort that she vets based on an application process. Work is the center of this program (as opposed to white guilt, our own feelings, etc.). Skills that are developed here are how to listen, how to keep the focus on the work. Cohort members meet twice a month, and commit to doing a lot of work in that one year.

She also offers a Spring and Fall 5-week intensive workshop, which are an introduction to "Sacred Conversations". She also teaches 2-week workshops on womanism and reading the Bible through a different lens.

Jen asked what does it actually look like to be a multicultural, multiracial church? Is that our goal? How do we do that without fishing from Black churches? Rev. Dr. Love said that it is about equity and inclusion, not diversity. White churches often have a structure that will not be moved such as following a certain schedule and liturgy. We can ask ourselves how do we create space to learn from those who

are not Euro-centric? When we have non-white visitors, we cannot make assumptions. We need to ask questions and listen, but not in a probing way that will become a microaggression, ie. "where are you from?" It's about developing a relationship, not interviewing someone.

Barb asked a question about how a white church sings gospel/spiritual music without appropriating? Rev. Dr. Love said that we need to be asking and answering important questions, as we as SJM can lead the church in doing so: What do we know about the music? Where it came from? If we don't teach the history, we're appropriating.

Pam asked about more resources such as the EJI calendar. Rev. Dr. Love pointed out that resources don't have to be books. They can be art, music, 5-10 minutes visuals from YouTube, documentaries. We can use these to ask questions and engage. One example might be to watch a favorite TV show and then ask the questions: who is it for, who is it by, who's missing? Some book recommendations are "The Warmth of other Suns" and "The Case for Reparations", especially since reparations is a national conversation right now. She has a viewing and reading list that she will send us.

As we close, we agree that we should plan on doing Rev. Dr. Love's 5-week Fall Institute as a ministry starting in September/October. We will need to apply as individuals at the end of August.

Pastor Amy closed out with a prayer and gratitude to Rev. Dr. Love.

Next meeting: April 19, 7pm. Josh will not be present due to the Re-Opening TF meeting, but Frank will.