Reflections and Notes from GA 2020 by Pete and Sharon Piehler

We attended the featured lectures each day, a total of six plus the Ware Lecture. We also attended five workshops, all great value. The theme for GA, “Rooted, Inspired, and Ready!” was an overall call to action, to move us in the right direction while acknowledging the wrongs of the past. A great deal of information and accompanying videos are available for you at UUA.org under the GA link.

The attending membership voted to “Embody Human Rights In Our Investment Decisions”. A pledge was made to not invest money or transact business with corporations or countries that engage in systematic human rights violations or abuses.

The membership also voted overwhelmingly to approve two Actions of Immediate Witness

1. Address 400 Years of White Supremacy Colonialism, in support of Indigenous tribes and social and environmental issues affecting them and their land.

2. Amen to Uprising: A Commitment and Call to Action, pledging to move from reliance on police forces and move toward community safety and mental health initiatives. A pledge to get active in the momentum to honor Black Lives and stop hatred.

Just a few of the takeaways from the many workshops we attended:

In understanding racial inequalities:

- We need to engage in a more visceral level and be in the community
- Our minister and POC are NOT the poster child, they can be our reality checkers
- Instead of proclaiming what we believe in we need to listen and develop relationships

#UUTheVote

Have values-based conversations with the public. UUA is collaborating with several other organizations to get out the vote.

Voting is just one strategy toward liberation, enacting and changing policy is as important, nationally and locally.

Work is national and hyper-local.

We need to make sure corporations follow through on their promises.

Use of funding from heroes’ act to staff polls and hire workers should be managed and encouraged.
Work with voters to make sure their information is updated and they can’t be purged from the voter lists.

Getting white voters involved….white men control 95% of all of the countries resources

White silence and white voters are the largest barrier to progress. Whites vote in solidarity, often against POC just as a rule.

Help people to be involved on the front lines:

- Watch their kids, provide transportation, money
- Take things to protesters, water, ice, food
- Build partnerships in the community

How to start in a congregation:

Just get started- postcards, phone banks

**Mass emails don’t work, or church newsletters**

Send emails to just a couple people or call using a phone bank or phone tree, make a personal connection, also friend banking where you find 3 people who will help.

Ladder of engagement:

1. Take action- get involved
2. Be a repeat participant
3. Join a team
4. Help organize an event or action
5. Help organize or lead a team

Teams:

- Coordination
- Outreach
- Communications
- Data
- Training and education

Set both impact and engagement goals, 20% of Sunday attendance is a good goal

**Workshop – Why we want and resist change with Keith Kron**

Similarly to when he presented at our church, Keith reviewed how people hold their personal beliefs in four concentric circles of belief systems.

Dead center- adamant for change - will change

1. will change with effort
resists change, may change over time
dead set against change

Our best effect is conversation with people in next sector, you can best create change with someone not vastly different in values.

The work to dismantle oppression is deeply personal and systematic.

Much of what we do is subconscious, based on what we have been taught and what we are exposed to

We need to confront what we were raised with and taught, be uncomfortable in it and be willing to walk through the discomfort. Self-compassion is key in this.

The young people in our church are watching and listening!

We must be radically welcoming of differences, we see ourselves as complex, others as simple.

We see disability as a pity issue rather than a justice issue.

“We have to be prepared to move slowly because we have so little time”!

We must create a safe space for people to share feelings.

Reparations

Slaves were not taken from Africa; people were and then were made into slaves. Stop saying slaves were brought from Africa.

Reparations is an acknowledgement that a wrong has been done, not punitive, should restore the injured party to prior status.

Needs for the injured party may need to be restored from outside their community, external reparations.

Religion has been used to justify dehumanization. Paganism allowed whites to see Africans as unhuman and treat them as property.

International definition:

Restitution as appropriate, enjoyment of human rights, return to one’s place of residence if chosen. Return of all property. Principle of non-repetition, code of conduct including law enforcement, media, etc. Principle of compensation, the need to restore all economic damage as necessary. Blacks were held part of the industrial revolution. Satisfaction, it’s not done until we say it is, reburial of victims, etc. An official declaration restoring dignity and rights of all victims, a public apology including judicial and industrial sanctions. Includes an accurate count of the violations.

Why are reparations due?
Racism has done more for whites than equal right has done for blacks

To make change you must change the narrative. Don’t use slaves, use enslaved. Slave was originally a term used for a large number of Europeans. Originally Armenians, etc. used to produce sugar in Greece and the coastal areas. Slave comes from the word “slav”.

Time for Americans to admit we are not the shining city on the hill. We have lost from our actions. We have the world’s highest murder rate, 31 million live below the poverty line. If we do not repair these crimes against POC we will maintain this same system.

African chattel slavery system still exists in the way we treat all POC and the poor.

If we base our actions on “why” we will miss the basics of the problems. We will only treat the symptoms. Example, why did whites’ spit at a black child? If we only focus on that we miss the deeper systems.

Chattel slavery’s global power- the cotton industry became global. The southern cotton industry spurred the global economy. Slavery expansion was a driving force in American history.

Slaves performed work for free while being subjected to physical, sexual, mental abuse and violence.

Slaves were marched from Virginia to Arkansas, may have genetically spurred present day kidney function issues.

Dehumanization and denial of culture that continues today through education and media. Such as right to vote granted in 1865. The real right was not in full effect until 1965. Still voter suppression today.

Lincoln granted 40 acres of land to each slave, Andrew Jackson returned it to enslavers. Today’s value of that land is 600 million dollars.

Whites need reparations to prevent spiritual decay. We knew slavery was wrong. Jefferson and Adams spoke of the stain of slavery.

Spiritual reparations – the prerequisite to healing. We cannot heal if we live in a society that still embraces chattel slavery through poverty, etc. Slave patrols have become home alarms and current day police forces.

Do the limits of our courage allow us to face this and correct the damage? Are we relevant or suppressed?

Reparations – how do we do it? A negotiation process with the enslaved as the focus. Not unilateral decisions.

**Units of government** - call elected officials and ask them to sponsor HR 40 commission to develop reparation standards, need 150 cosponsors.
Financial Institutions – slavery disclosure laws (includes Iowa) have to disclose slavery policies from the past and provide financial reparations. Adopted in 8 cities, 3 states. Wells Fargo is a descendant of slave holder banks, also Chase, BOA, Citizens Bank.

College and Universities – Free tuition, free law clinics

Religious Organizations – Sermons of repair. Jesuits sold slaves to fund their work and fund Georgetown University. Churches can fund operations, share supplies.

Reciprocal zero sum negotiations – outcome must heal descendants of slaves and enslavers.

Minister Ari Merretazon, Philadelphia is a key contact if we want more information. 215-850-1699

Injury areas

1. destruction of culture
2. denial of rights and resources for a productive life
3. education, denial of rights
4. maintenance of dual and unequal systems
5. health- focus on physical and mental health
6. examination of post slave stress syndrome and genetic damage
7. criminal punishment- a dual system still exists (racial profiling)
8. wealth and poverty, confiscation of land

Reparations must be restorative.

Gratitude and Spirituality

Presenter Rev. Galen Guengerich

Reflection by Terri Lynn Brewer

What can be important comes to social justice? The spirituality of our first principle interacting with our approach to social justice within ourselves with gratitude, compassion, attitude and spiritual connectedness. These are points presented in this workshop.

The speaker noted that to understand our own spirituality is to recognize the deep connections made up relationship as. Be it an interplay of spirituality through openness. As gratitude is a gift we give ourselves, the reality of what is our own truth while we see the reciprocity of our total community.

Suggestions given to build faith in our own spirituality is to show an inner gratitude. Write a daily gratitude list, read poetry, pause and breathe, lastly spend quality time with yourself by

Lastly Rev. Guengerich said remember these three B’s…

Bees, Butterflies, and Breeze…added, slowly breathe.