

Our Next Right Action, Unity Church-Unitarian

Meeting Notes

On June 4, 2020, approximately 75 people attended “Our Next Right Action,” an online program of Unity Church-Unitarian, and participated in eight breakout groups for discussion, brainstorming next steps, and to share resources in response to the May 25 murder of George Floyd. The resource list generated from these discussions is being prepared separately. Follow-up and next steps are underway by the Beloved Community Staff Team—check the daily email from Unity Church, the website, and commUNITY for more information. Led by Karen Hering and K.P. Hong.

Summary

Participants were grateful for the opportunity to connect around these issues, though many were overwhelmed by how to help and seemed to feel the need for guidance. In general, groups recognized that there is much work already started and many resources available, such that next steps involve building on that and not reinventing the wheel. Also, recognizing that one session can only begin to delve into questions and work to be done, most groups discussed suggestions for next steps. Many are ready to start on next steps right away.

Summaries of Breakout Group Discussions

1. Funding Emergency Needs, Facilitator: Barbara Hubbard

This group of eight talked about the privilege and the responsibility to address the emerging needs with financial support, both short term, immediate needs as well as the need to provide long term support to keep these efforts moving forward.

The main questions about short term needs centered around how to know which efforts to support, given that there are so many, if or when needs have been filled, and which groups are still fundraising. Recognizing that *changing the culture and systems that undergird oppression and racism* requires efforts on many fronts, the discussion on long-term needs turned to funding police reforms, addressing gaps in education and housing, working on economic disparities, and strengthening our existing relationships with people of color and partner organizations led by and serving people of color.

The discussion on solutions included these ideas:

- Maintaining a list of resource links on the Unity website, which would require the list be updated, revised, and links checked by someone regularly.
- Deciding on organization support by the church. Unity could decide on what issue to support and make a multi-year financial commitment. Obama School could use more financial support and involvement, for example.

A question for further discussion: should Unity take an approach that is singular or multi-faceted?

2. Hands-on Volunteering, Facilitator: Lisa Friedman

People feel better when they do something concrete to help, but some people:

- are high-risk for Covid19 and have limitations on what they can do.
- don't know where to find opportunities.
- don't know what the needs are.

- want to do something they can do with their child or children (as young as two), and/or find hands-on things for kids to do.

Questions and discussion:

- Where can we show up now? and where for the long haul?
- Would it be better to set up something like a drop-off site at Unity or connect with things like this in the community? The consensus was to check in with existing partners/organizations with which we have a connection and ask what they need such as Circle of Peace, Obama School, Prior Crossing, Jeremiah Program.
- What opportunities are available for children and parents?
- Find out about opportunities on neighborhood websites and Facebook.
- Someone who is at risk could serve as a resource person or coordinator of volunteers.
- Find out more about Mapping Prejudice Project: www.mappingprejudice.org/

- 3. Legislative Demands Around Policing**, Facilitators: Karen Hering and Pauline Eichten
 With one of largest of the breakout groups, the discussion centered around many excellent questions that call for a deeper look into police violence, defunding the police or police abolition (being called for by black-led groups), police reform, legislative action, while acknowledging that the problem is bigger than police reform. With a desire to learn from and build on what has come before, many questions for further study or discussion were raised.

General Questions and Notes:

- What has already been proposed or begun?
- Who is proposing or doing it? Are they credible? Are Black leaders involved?
- Should we become allies or followers, rather than reinvent the wheel?
- How do we build political power to implement change?
- How do we look at proposals like defunding the police with open minds and hearts, overcoming a knee-jerk fear of lawlessness?
- How do I decide the best way to use my time to make a difference?
- Which people in Minnesota are willing to use their fame or public platform to garner support? E.g. R.T. Rybak, professional athletes.
- How do we avoid what has happened in the past, which is that the urgency of the moment passes, and things go back to the way they were before?
- Action: email council members who are interested in police reform.

Police Violence

- What's the best thinking about police violence and how to address it?
- What does the Black police officer's organization (separate from the union) have to say about the way forward?
- John Harrington and Keith Ellison lead a working group on police that recently reported out. What was in the report that could be followed up on?
- What's being done successfully in other countries that we could learn from?

Police Reform

- What's happening in other places; what are the most effective reforms? Would Jim Davnie be interested in being involved?

- Is it possible to require police to live in the neighborhood, what would be necessary?
- What legislation or policies are already in place but not being enforced? Can we find out what else needs to be in place?
- Is it possible to fire all police officers and then hire back the “good” ones?
- Should police carry their own insurance? Who should be involved in developing police training?
- Gaining support for reforms from the police themselves may lead to more effective reform. Which police groups would work with us?

Police Abolition/Defund the Police

- If black-led groups are saying we need to defund the police, what does that mean? How do we look into this proposal with open minds and hearts, overcoming our knee-jerk fear of lawlessness?
- What does abolition of police mean? Does "abolished" mean independent vigilante groups guarding neighborhoods (dreadful idea)? Maybe the "abolition" refers to racism and not the police force itself.
- If no police, then what? What would take its place? What does it look like to not have a police force?

Legislation

- What black-led groups are working on legislative advocacy? What is the right level of government to pay attention to?
- How do we build the political power to help to implement effective legislation, policies & practices?
- Is there a legislative agenda from the Harrington/Ellison task force report that we can organize around? What are some concrete proposals for change and who is proposing them?
- What specific legislation needs to be passed? (Politics is power; we can protest/push to get legislation passed.)
- Would any of this be related to reparations?

Police Union

Note: The Police Federation is a union, just not affiliated with the AFL-CIO. The city is ultimately responsible for the police department and police culture.

- Question: Why is the Police Federation so powerful when it's so mired in brutality and is a corrupting force?
- What can we do to help legislators dismantle police unions that are toxic *and* politically powerful? The proposals are there. The cities need to put them into action. What is hindering our otherwise progressive politicians, and what can we do about that? What effective countermeasures exist?

Several members are interesting in being part of an on-going group.

4. **Protesting**, Facilitators: Laura Park, Janne Eller-Isaacs

Surprisingly, this group was small (two facilitators and two attendees) but the discussion around protesting, choosing protests, finding protests, and considering protest goals and mindset was rich. Noted: “Protests come in a lot of flavors.”

Questions to guide us in deciding whether to protest and what protests in which to participate:

- Who’s leading the protest?
 - What’s my relationship or connection to the protest leader(s)?
 - How credible is that person or organization? How experienced in leading protests are they?
- Is it useful for me (if white) to be here? Can I be a white ally or am I taking up space that could be better used by someone else?
- Am I prepared emotionally to listen to the protest leaders? Am I ready and able to check my ego? What is my emotional state? Am I able to fully participate and deal with the potential irritations and annoyances in a reasonable way?
- If the protest raises tough feelings, how will I handle them? How and with whom will I process them after the protest?
- How can I avoid catching or spreading COVID-19?

How to find protest opportunities (and other information) of reputable organizations:

- Social media: protest organizers use social media, specifically Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, to announce and publicize their events. Follow organizations.
- Unity website: A sidebar on the home page currently has a box, “Justice for George” which includes links to messages and updates from the Beloved Community Staff Team, as well as a link to the Beloved Community Team blog.

What is the goal of protesting; what do you need to participate?

The specific goals of the protests change as the situation changes but the over-arching goal is to keep the pressure on to make meaningful improvements. Movement leaders warn against going home, getting back to our “normal” lives and falling asleep on the issue. Protests alert the people with power that we are still paying attention. Protests can help to build a movement and educate us about other efforts, tactics and allies.

Specific goals might include not renewing the Minneapolis police union contract, removing the Minneapolis police union president, cutting funding for the Minneapolis police department, and getting organizations to cut their ties with the Minneapolis police department. Consider a mindset of protecting, not protesting, without taking on the “white savior” persona.

5. **Education (for white folks)**, Facilitators: Angela Wilcox and Shelley Butler

There is definitely a need for more learning around anti-racism, history of racism, white supremacy, intercultural competence (IDI), legislative work, and current events and thinking around police violence. The consensus of the group was that while all have good intentions regarding self-education, we don’t always follow through; accountability is an issue.

Ideas:

- Encourage more people to take the IDI—Intercultural Development Inventory
- Encourage a commitment to follow through on the IDP—Intercultural Development Plan:
 - Small groups or IDI partners could be formed before taking the IDI and then work through the whole process together.

- People who have already taken the IDI could form buddies or work partners with whom they could follow through on the IDP.
- Create anti-racism learning groups or reading partners:
 - small groups or partners could meet monthly (or as they choose) to discuss books, podcasts, and/or videos
 - small groups or partners could meet weekly or bi-monthly to discuss a book, one chapter at a time
- Gather resources that we can tap into for programs, speakers etc. For example, the Landscape Arboretum holds an Equity and Inclusion series.
- To Do: Inform the congregation about ways to share resources such as writing for or sending information for the BCT blog and commUNITY article, adding resources (including online) to the Unity library catalog and specifically to the Anti-racism Collection and Writers of Color Collection, write for Cairns.
- Learn from the Legislative group about policy and legislative work (for study):
 - Look at how they play into the systems
 - Understand how anti-racism work could apply to our public spaces

6. **Neighborhood Organizing**, Facilitator: Ray Hommeyer

The discussion centered around how people in various neighborhoods around the Twin Cities have organized, volunteered, or engaged with each other. Ideas include:

- create a map of people living on your block with contact information.
- create a hard-copy neighborhood directory with contact info
- serve as a block leader
- hold nightly block meetings, attend meetings on other blocks to learn more
- provide refreshments at meeting to make people feel more welcome and comfortable
- attend National Night Out
- talk with people at work or in your circle about what others are doing
- create a Facebook group for your block, and establish WhatsApp chat for rapid communication
- leave hand-written postcards with contact information with your neighbors
- spend time chatting in your front yard/strike up a conversation (gardening is a good conversation starter)
- connect on Nextdoor website/app

One person talked about volunteering in an ops center monitoring scanners and learning from listening to white people talk to police and national guard, in addition to offering first aid skills at a neighborhood church.

Questions:

- How to get to know neighbors more and more deeply?
- This moment has cultivated new connections; how can we make these connections helpful and how can we sustain them?
- How do we have conversations about whiteness and why the white neighborhood feels so safe?

7. **Youth and Parents**, Facilitators: K.P. Hong and Drew Danielson

The breakout for youth was unique, inviting both action items but chance for youth and parents to broadly reflect.

- Parents anxious for youth in multiple ways, from safety amid protests to parenting activists to preparing their children in the work of dismantling white supremacy.
- Powerful connection from Minneapolis memorial service, noting the moment when George Floyd called out to/for his mother. That site of intense pain resonates for parents and our theological stance that "there are no other people's children."
- Slavery essentially not as a relation to (forced) labor--as there were other people/groups in forms of bonded labor--but slavery as about property, with children and parents witnessing each other being sold/bought as property, and that primal experience of "natal alienation." Floyd's call for/to his mother haunts us with this ongoing history. How do we as a faith community protect, nurture, and cultivate sacred bonds of parenting and family life? How do we further the work of equipping and supporting parents as the primary spiritual directors of their children? How can we deepen these relations in Tower Club, with programmatic dimensions that expand our focus on youth and parents?

8. **Overview (aka overcoming paralysis and frustration)**, Facilitator: Laura Park

Issues discussed around paralysis and frustration included:

- feeling overwhelmed by events and sense of so much to do.
- wondering what difference one can make.
- wanting to be involved but concerned about age, family illness, Covid 19, etc.
- confusion about one's place in this and not wanting to appropriate someone else's grief.
- fear of losing oneself by getting too involved, or overcommitting
- intimidated by technology.
- feeling radicalized for long-term systemic work but lacking the courage to act on them.
- wondering how we can heal and confront biases that we have when roots are so deep.

Wisdom from the group:

- Consider thinking about the systemic aspect of the situation rather than just one area.
- Remember that it's not events that make you feel how you do; it's how you react to events. Play your piece so that there aren't holes.
- We need to understand we are not going to be the decision makers in this movement. Just like in marriage equality, LGBTQ people wanted to lead it because it was for them.
- Deep change only happens in human relationship. "cultural awareness" dog and pony shows haven't worked. We need real, deep relationship and there's 400 years of barriers.
- A village that helps one move in the right direction is what the church aspires to be; to help people take next step wherever they are while recognizing that we are not THE village. We are A village that is sometimes capable of learning from our neighbors. Everything needs to change but if I'm not willing to change much, that can be hard to live with. To avoid that, one can develop kinds of practices that can prepare you

for moments like this so you can take step forward into this. There is no simple solution, but it is useful and hopeful that our village is mostly holding together.

The group expressed desire for:

- Guidance on how to be a part of the village that helps, and on ways to participate in different paths as part of our village.
- Long-term approach with a village to explore and learn together, raise awareness, and systemic work to bend the arc. Help in understanding how to react to community members who are unaware of white privilege and who don't see the issues.

In answer to the question, "What is the heart of our group's intention for action?" Rob suggested that the quality of village that is a real village is that there is an appropriate place for each person. Not the same place. What I hear is a lot of folks looking for their piece of it? What can I do, what is my place in the village (not necessarily "how can I help")? There is tension between "do the right thing" and "do something". Need real relationship without being manipulative or artificial. Be together respectfully recognizing diversity. In a village, people recognize the diversity of where you are. One phrase to sum up the group, "Creating village to make change as imperfect ally using real relationship across cultures."