

## Beloved Community Conversation Café Notes

Sept. 18 and 21, 2022

Fifty-five WSUU members and friends joined together on September 18<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> to imagine the future of our congregation as we commit to building a beloved community and to begin to identify first steps in achieving a future that is grounded in the values of the 8th Principle. The conversations on those days were focused on four topic areas: Spiritual and Personal Growth, Right Relations, Institutional Equity and Actions in the Wider Community. Participants first co-created a vision of what success would look like in each of these topic areas, and then brainstormed potential action steps to move toward the vision. The work of refining these action steps continues. The transcript of the notes taken at the Café sessions follows:

### Spiritual and Personal Growth

#### Vision

- Adult Sunday School every Sunday (Common Quest?)
- Spiritual development practices
  - we read a common book, etc.
  - Things/practices the bring us together
- Our culture is one in which we are comfortable talking about white privilege, race, and privilege in general
- Minister and others as spiritual guides—including study groups, etc.
- Right relations practices in place—continuous learning and opportunities
- Ongoing spiritual learning (e.g. informal “beloved conversations”)
- Exploration of practices for grace with ourselves and others
- Diverse opportunities for growth, e.g. walking meditation
- It is important for us to acknowledge and examine our privilege; the insights that come from this examination can be productive.
- Members should communicate ways they engage with their communities.
- Members should have opportunities to share their own views on essential matters of death and meaning and the larger questions we grapple with.
- The Build Your Theology Workshops provide an opportunity for bonding and for newer members to share an exploration of our shared and divergent beliefs.
- Nurturing culture-building among our young people is vital, and bringing them into the different facets of the congregation’s mission.
- Connection. Connection among ourselves, across ethnicities, across ages; connection to external agencies.
- Interfaith sharing opportunities. Arrange visits with other faith groups.
- Use the every-other-Sunday space for continued dialogue, build trust, create opportunities for everyone.
- The congregation is full of people committed to personal growth
- Integrate into membership orientation to build collective identity
- Build Your Own Theology workshops for newer people

- Borrow from YouthCon culture-building activities
- Intentional orientation
- Growth opportunities for all ages
- Retreat opportunities, e.g. Seabeck
- More connection
- Trust and ability to deal with conflict
- Talking about big questions
- We have a rich educational program, language classes-ASL & Spanish, learning about dismantling ableism, doing the work to be fluent and welcoming to polyamorous families, fluent and welcoming to gender expansive folks, tabling at Burien and White Center events, active and engaged in how these things grow us.
- The average age of congregants is lower and reflects the larger demographic
- Likely a white majority congregation, but a fairly safe space for someone who is clearly different – from a variety of axes.
- Large number of spiritual explorers
- People of color see that we take these issues seriously and address hardships
- Everyone is welcome and feels comfortable
- We have sermons, speakers, workshops about different religions, points of view
- Building on our common ground - we want to be fair and grow as people
- We are able to accept and meet people where they are. Patient, gentle and respectful because we come from different places
- More young people, poor, with disabilities, everyone feels supported. Widely diverse group of people

#### First Steps

- Address our tendencies to be judgmental vs. curious/welcoming/encouraging
- Conversation groups to talk about issues. Maybe after or during Coffee Hour?
- Alternate Sundays have facilitated convos about self-understanding and overcoming biases and enhancing spiritual growth
- Our covenant contains our direction—it should be the start of everything we do
- Communicating how to get involved
- How can we use what we already do to forward our spiritual growth?
- Bring minister on board
- Establish spiritual and personal growth as criteria for leadership for ministerial search
- Defer to Right Relations planning group to establish practices (ASAP)
- Survey to find interested leaders for spiritual and personal growth within the congregation
- Learn about BIPOC communities and be an ally
- Day of education—witnessing inequality and disparities
- With sharing of the offering donations, learning and volunteering with groups we give to
- Reading group, movie, etc for ongoing learning re: bias & understanding white privilege

- Visit other (BIPOC) faith communities and seek partnership
  - Local/neighborhood level
- Preserve every other Sunday space for dialogue like this
  - Sharing experiences
  - Accelerating racial equity learning through sharing experiences
- Regular revisiting of “building beloved community” through programs like OWL
- Opportunities for all ages
  - All ages and intergenerational
  - Multiple ways to develop shared vision and values
- New activities on off weeks: service, sharing, learning
- We have a new brochure or welcoming information about racial justice
- People feel safe and are motivated to examine biases while building and affirming relationships
- People are willing to engage in conversations, resisting divisiveness
- Classes that take place outside a service. So that anyone can opt in.
- We have space where white identified people meet together to grow an understanding of racism. A place where white people can talk honestly without doing harm, learn and support.
- Small group discussions -- white affinity group
- Small group experiences can be really strong and powerful
- Book discussions -- ways to discuss views together
- "Whole congregation reads" a book periodically. ie similar to the whole UUA read
- Place materials on website -- links to resources, sermons, central location for resources. Elibrary.
- Related areas of spiritual growth - for example Hidden Brain -- course on Unhide Your Brain
- Update our physical library. Expand.
- There is a mental health curriculum that is available for free from UUA. Would increase our spiritual growth and willingness to learn in this area
- Our minister is important -- what do we want from the minister?
- Our congregation has an interest in shaping the worship service – the minister should be in sync with that approach

## **Right Relations**

### Vision

- What does it look like in action?
- Have protocol that is grounded, taught, used by all of all ages
- Communication skills used and taught among congregation
- Communal understanding what Right Relations (RR) is—covenant that we know what it means
- System of support for individuals who are feeling harmed

- What does equity look like?
- Trusted team that is trained
- Congregation reflects diversity of the greater community, e.g. White Center
- Develop practices for constructively working through feelings—develop infrastructure
- Younger members represented
- Address/include inclusive practices in all areas of WSUU
- Better, not afraid to tell our truth, more courageous and trusting
- More interesting
- A model organization politically, socially, etc.
- Respectful and skilled at effective conversations, conflict resolution
- We know the principles of respectful communication (reminded of them at every meeting)
- We expect conflict to occur and have guidelines about how to deal with it, being more direct (rather than gossiping)
- Clarity in how to resolve conflict in congregation
- Avenues to express views
- Listen to others
- Who: more diverse people in terms of ethnicity, viewpoints
- We have a good minister
- Opportunities to come together and talk—light structure
- The more we know each other, the easier it is to resolve issues
- Process/system for staying in RR
- Simple, age-appropriate, everyone is trained
- Education is kind and loving
- Seeks understanding of those involved, where they are coming from
- Restorative justice
- Next minister needs to have restorative justice skills
- Bring people back into community
- Today is a start: café style is effective
- A team to lead the right relations activities
- Train WSUU members in skills to facilitate and address instances
- Training on diversity and inclusion, communication
- Get over/learn alternative communication to avoid passive/aggressive behavior
- To respond within covenant and timely
- Goals: kind, loving, informative, relaxed
- Look at Youth Con structure and process
- We'll have established, clear right relations procedures, oversight and authority
- We'll have a system that works. We had a covenant of right relations that wasn't too bad, but it didn't work.
- We get on this issue before things go wrong. Need someone who does this work.
- We'll have established, clear right relations procedures, oversight and authority

- Best covenant is one that people can buy into and have a common understanding of. Mutual accountability is better than authority
- Covenant is not the same as procedures. Covenant is a promise, backed up by processes and procedures.

#### First Steps

- Education about Right Relations for all
- Develop/practice covenant that provides guidance/framework for behavior, communication
- Use worship services to help explain Right Relations—reinforce Right Relations
- Educational plan
- Embedded in small steps
- Reach out to current members within our community
- Identify members with experience working with race, equity (not only credentialed people)
- Possible survey
- Create/nurture safe environment for expressing feelings/thoughts
- Establish process and practice that is radically safe
- Conduct a skill survey to ascertain members with skills sets
- Reach out to members who left
- Create training for conflict resolution for as many in congregation as possible
- Establish formal committee of RR, begin by inviting interest from broad group
- Hire someone trained in RR to begin working with committee
- Develop congregation agreed upon conflict resolution guidelines
- Hands on detailed approaches, guidelines, manual
- Ensure that everyone knows what the guidelines and protocols are
- Continuous, ongoing training (one-time doesn't work)
- Continuous problem solving
- Commit to continuous growth
- Hiring minister with conflict resolution skills
- Add conflict resolution in covenant
- All should be involved
- Announce at services and via emails, soliciting involvement in café, training, committee, etc.
- We have congregants with experience and skills in conflict resolution
- Committee should report out to the congregation what they are doing
- Mostly 1 step/meeting—not a huge commitment
- Entire congregation involved and everyone buys in
- Someone present in each right relations meeting who captures record of what has happened from the perspective of who is there and under the microscope. A support person.
- Good officer model is interesting.
- Minister is key, but we should solve our own issues first

- Need professional consultation. Other local congregations have done this
- Hire a professional -- someone who is not invested in the outcome.
- Mental illness had played into each issue. Need to be more educated about these issues and how they show up and when to get outside expertise
- Usually multiple parties are involved in conflict -- some kind of grievance. So multi-party model. How do we talk to one another, respect one another?
- Someone to help us develop our structure, covenant
- Education about mutual respect -- what are the practices that we do together
- Adopt relationship development as an explicit goal, not an incidental by product
- Ask ourselves what we are doing well in this arena and explore how to widen and deepen our capacity for positive and sustainable relationship development
- Adopt an involuntary, formal/corrective process for addressing objectively determined violations of our community standards
- Adopt a voluntary, informal/restorative process for addressing interpersonal/inter-group challenges based on subjective experiences.

## **Institutional Equity**

### Vision

- More diverse congregants (define, including people of color)
- More special interest groups that serve/attract people of color, recent immigrants, etc.
- Committees and board is more diverse and inclusive of BIPOC, youth
- We institute an equity audit for services, committees, practices, etc.
- Use equity tool (put into regular practice)
- Need to determine what RE could be in the future
- Diversity of music, speakers, singing (choir)
- Address language issues (interpretation, ASL, etc.)
- More diverse fundraising (not dependent on single event)
- A clear shared vision of what an equitable institution is
- Moving away from meeting individual (personal) needs to creating a collective culture/meeting community needs
- How do we have more diverse voices without burdening people of color with educating others?
- How do we welcome people from other parts of West Seattle?
- More discussions after a Sunday service which offers diverse perspectives
- System to make it happen
- Equity tool/Apply tool to RE, staff, pulpit, board, etc.
- Clarify what barriers exist through an audit
  - Make visible and understand
  - Listen to those affected by barriers
- Increased hospitality

- Large group activities to build belonging
- Collective ownership of values and identity
- Intentional process like Welcoming Congregations—throughout/across all activities
- We need a process, an action plan to make improved institutional equity happen. We need to use our equity tool to consider equity in regards to programs we offer, who is invited to the pulpit, who's on the board, who's on staff, and so on.
- We might have an audit to identify barriers, to recognize them and make them visible.
- Welcoming is very important—consistent hospitality.
- Large group activities can be a part of our collective development of identity.
- We would like to further articulate our shared beliefs as we implement the eighth principle.
- In considering next steps, we acknowledge that members have felt hurt, and that we are engaging in a process of healing.
- We should identify and articulate best practices for equity using resources available to us.
- We must be able to accommodate new perspectives as a part of improving our institutional equity.
- We should facilitate members' telling their stories as a way to establish connections among us. We should acknowledge past hurt and move forward. We should make sure everyone has a chance to take part.
- We should bring in/encourage new leaders.
- We have had positive experience with the buddy system of shared leadership.

#### First Steps

- Advertise/market
- Outreach to other faith-based communities
- Review and educate around equity tools we already have
- Explore equity audits/use/benefits/lessons learned
- Determine what skills or resources are already in the congregation
- Talk to people who have used the equity tool to get better at using it
- Using Sundays with no service for institutional community building
- Equity audit of common practices
- Make it okay to ask questions about what we don't know
- Book club? To understand diverse perspectives
- Questioning/surveying practices to evaluate needs being met
- Audits of government structure: is it inclusive?
- Evaluate what equity means for us
  - Can everyone who wants to participate?
  - Is everyone participating?
  - What practices do we have that keep people from participating?
  - Rob's rules, masks
- 8<sup>th</sup> Principle discussions drove some people away

- Healing is needed, people need acknowledgement
- Audit
- Apply best practices from UUA, other congregations, other community groups
- Communicate care for all individuals, as with recent postcard, plus personal outreach
- Openess to change
- Inclusion of past, present and future members
- Use storytelling (vs. categories and identity-based generalizations)
- Listening
- Look forward/future orientation (vs. rehashing the past)
- Acting like a large and a small congregation at the same time
- Small: grab who you can to do jobs/join committees
- More structure is needed and ways to tap all gifts
- Buddy system/shared leadership to bring in new leaders

## **Actions in the Wider Community**

### Vision

- Work with other churches and organizations
- Attending other church services and other activities
- Researching opportunities for volunteering and outreach
- White Center Food Bank, and WIN Duwamish
- Guest speakers, adult education classes
- Developing “elevator speech”
- More members and curious visitors
- Be more welcoming and friendly
- Active partnerships with other faith-based groups and nonprofits, e.g. interfaith network, White Center Food Bank
- We are living up to the banners that we display, e.g. Black Lives Matter
- Active recruitment of groups not already well-represented in the congregation
- Be active/involved in activities addressing racism
- Small group/committee to lead efforts
- The actions we take as a congregation are widely known to congregants
- We serve in the ways that the impacted people tell us are best
- Work against the trend of UU’s partnering with white-led organizations. Seek partnerships with organizations that we want to see grow and we follow rather than lead. We don’t have to be at the front.
- We are taking physical steps to nurture our relationship and work for justice for the Duwamish people

### First Steps

- Support other churches/community activities/services, esp. during the holidays



- Intentionally share that we are WSUU members
- Educate people at Sunday services (with facilitated discussion after)
- Make materials available online for social justice efforts
- Promote education for action—steps that people can take home and practice
- Take stock of what is available, what are priorities, narrow to a few priorities
- Sponsor actions that allow us to meet different communities—be purposeful about which communities
- Leverage existing training efforts offered by partners
- Invite speakers from local faith-based groups/campaigns to present at part of Sunday service
- Congregational programming on racism and oppression
- Use our space for outside groups to meet
- Partner with another church that is not white- or majority-led
- Support work through the Highline School District or White Center organizations
- Projects such as a seed library, non-perishable library, menstrual products, diapers
- There are exciting organizations working on culturally appropriate food security, how do we interact/support with logistical work?
- Support the work of a community garden