

Beloved Conversations Progress Report

First Unitarian Church, Portland, Oregon

June 9, 2014

Rev. Bill Sinkford, Senior Minister

Rev. Kate Lore, Minister for Social Justice, Beloved Conversations Staff Coordinator

The genesis of Beloved Conversations was a commission to Mark Hicks by Rev. Sinkford. He was searching for an instrument to help his large congregational system re-boot its commitments around race/ethnicity. This was particularly important to Bill as a newly called senior minister of color. Kate, as a long-time staff member invested in racial justice, has been a creative and visionary champion of the work, making adjustments and creating opportunities for continuous learning and healing. Kate provided a three-year progress report to me last week. Note the personal and institutional changes that have occurred.

- All board members, staff, Religious Education teachers, the social justice council have participated in a Beloved Conversations group. Opportunities for new members to participate are regularly provided.
- With the recognition that the arts provide a way to enter into deeper conversations about race/ethnicity, the congregation provides free tickets to public high school youth of color to see professional renditions of August Wilson plays (Wilson's plays focus on racial issues). Congregants also attend the plays and participate in talk-back discussions led by the director and actors on what the play says about how relationships are shaped by race.
- Led to a review of religious education programs. They discovered that both the annual Christmas play and the celebration of the Asian New Year were not showing appropriate cultural competence. Changes made.
- A Process Observer now sits in on Board meetings to report out on multicultural competence.
- The use of language that reflects the congregation's commitment to a multi-racial, multicultural and theologically-diverse world is now included in the welcome that begins Sunday worship.
- Graduates of the curriculum led the congregation in creating trans-friendly restroom signs throughout the church.
- Issues related to Beloved Conversations are regularly addressed in sermons and blogs, not just during Black History or Asian Heritage months.

- Members of the congregation are sent to the UUA's biannual Mosaic Makers conference on how to build multi-racial, multicultural congregations. Reps must report their learnings to the congregation.
- Multicultural competency is now a criterion for new hires for staff positions. Audits for cultural inclusion of Bookstore materials are regularly conducted.
- Evaluation of the Beloved Conversations groups revealed that on-going workshops on how to interrupt oppressive language were necessary (a result of the micro-aggression exercises).
- Ministers and staff now report feeling supported by the congregation on interconnected social justice work, like police accountability to persons of color in the city.
- The congregation has reached a tipping point of members who show competency when worshiping/working in a multi-racial, multicultural congregation, and are now reaching out to members who are less competent.
- Hired an assistant director of music who is African American. He has been asked explicitly to bring a diverse menu of musical styles to liturgy and worship.
- People of Color, who found it disheartening to talk about race in the congregation, now find it comfortable to bring their full selves to the work of their own spiritual formation. Ministers report seeing a larger number of Black women wear "church-lady hats" on Sunday morning (a long-standing cultural tradition of African American women).
- All told, over 150 members have participated in the Beloved Conversations workshop, and it is estimated that over 400 people have been touched by one of the programs, workshops, or process tools taught in the curriculum.
- We lift up each of these hard-won accomplishments in the spirit of gratitude and living faithfully into the work we are called to do.

Mark Hicks, recording