

June 2014

What Next?

Longitudinal data from Beloved Conversations alumni is suggesting that we're on the right track in terms of building Martin Luther King's vision of Beloved Community. Dr. King says this, *"Love, and those committed to it, does something to the hearts and souls of those committed to it. It gives them new self-respect; it calls up resources of strength and courage that they did not know they had. Finally, it reaches ...and stirs his [sic] conscience that reconciliation becomes a reality"* (From *Pilgrimage to Nonviolence, 1960*).

Now that you have completed one round, it is important to keep the momentum going forward. You have opened up the minds and hearts of your participants, so it's helpful if you keep providing opportunities for on-going learning, connectedness among the group, opportunities to share what is learned and, generally speaking, opportunities to integrate what was learned into the fabric of everyday life. Those of us who study the process of intellectual and spiritual transformation know that without the opportunity to intentionally act differently in the world – with support from a larger community – the person goes back into old and familiar ways of thinking, feeling, and acting. Here are some of the ways in which you can slow that potential:

Step 1: Develop a 16-month learning agenda. In our fast-paced world, life unfolds faster than we expect. Work with your ministers, social justice staff, D/MRE, and multicultural task force to develop a comprehensive 16-month strategy for talking about race, developing skills, deepening community, and inviting more people into your learning circle. Use BC as part of that plan. Beloved Conversations is proving to be a very helpful tool in "holding the moral center" of the conversation about race and culture in congregational life. Intentional change requires intentional planning. Here are some of the creative strategies being used by some congregations in the Beloved Conversations Network:

- See the list of alternative workshops on our website. Contact Halcyon Westall (hwestall@meadville) for access to this private space.

Step 2: Join the secret, private FaceBook page for Beloved Conversation Facilitators. There, we can each share updates from what we're learning, as well as resources that can be used in follow-up work. Contact Mark (mhicks@meadille.edu) or Halcyon Westall (hwestall@meadville.edu) if you need assistance getting into the page. You need to become "friends" with "MarkAngusMcLeanHicks" then, we can pull you into the conversation among Beloved Conversations Network leaders.

Step 3: Quarterly Conference Calls for Facilitators. Sign-up to attend one of our regular conference calls where you can take part in sharing your insights and questions with other facilitators doing the same thing in their congregation. See our webpage or FaceBook page for BC facilitators for information about how to participate.

Step 4: Align yourself with others in your town/region who are doing the work. Think of yourself as an educator seeking resources to keep fresh ideas in front of your people. Are you a member of Allies for Racial Equity (both regional and national meetings of white UUs working for racial change)? Can you attend the UUA's MOSIAC conference, which is a biannual meeting hosted by a multi-racial UU congregation that features speakers and models the best of practice? Do you subscribe to the Office of Multicultural Growth and Witness's newsletter, "Catalyst" that keeps people in the loop on what we're doing across the Association? What partnerships can you form?

Alternative Formats

Repeat workshops. Repeat retreat plus the 8 weeks of seminars. If funds to bring a member of the BC staff are not available, use the one-day format that builds community (e.g., shared vulnerability, encouragement to take risks, shared commitment to change, develops skills for deepening self and group knowledge of how racism shapes personal and congregational life). Consider the role of BC Alumni in the workshop. Remember, too, that we can use technology like Skype or "Google Hangout" if you want a member of the staff (e.g., your Retreat Leader) to be present during a portion of your retreat.

Weekend Retreats Format. Adapting the 8-week curriculum into a weekend retreat format (Friday night, Saturday, Sunday together on worship, and wrap up on Sunday afternoon). Repeat retreat two-three months later with final elements of the curriculum.

Monthly workshops. Using resources from the BC Webpage (and beyond!), develop skill-building workshops for alumni of the curriculum and the general congregation/public. Use protocols from BC (opening reading, Serial Witness, Rules of Engagement) as a framework. Workshop might include: "Interrupting Micro-Aggressions in Everyday Life." "Micro-Liberation: Putting Love into our Language." Caucus groups for People of Color or White Allies (such caucus groups are NOT for social action or

complaining or organizing, but for exploration of issues of race through the lens of UU theology). A HUGE array of resources is available. Talk with a member of the staff if you need assistance.

Alternative Grouping

Have you thought about a multi-generational Beloved Conversation group? Affinity groups like RE Teachers or Board members of Church staff? A Youth Group? Partnering with other congregations or community groups who, too, want to explore racial diversity? Who do you need to be in relationship with to begin? Talk with staff about what might be possible.

Ready to Integrate Your Insights into Practice?

First Unitarian Church, Portland, Oregon began Beloved Conversations three years ago. Rev. Kate Lore, their minister for Social Justice, has been leading their efforts. Kate reported the following outcomes during a conversation in late May, 2014. How might these outcomes help your congregation achieve a vision of Beloved Community?

- All board members, staff, Religious Education teachers, and 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 talking 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.