

NOTES FROM COMMON READ DISCUSSION  
May 27, 2017

This year's readings were grouped around the topic "Understanding the Politics of Race." We included several documentary films, articles, and books (soon to be listed on Social Action page on our website).

Interest was generated in the idea of "fusion politics" (see William Barber's work) and what that would look like in the North Country.

How to connect our concern with "inequalities in the NoCo" while addressing White Supremacy?

- ✓ Connecting with prisons: check out the Church of the Larger Fellowship's web site on prison-ministry, and in particular how to become a pen-pal for a prisoner -- <https://www.questformeaning.org/programs/prison-ministry/>
- ✓ Host a Coffee, Conversation and More with locals who teach/work in prisons
- ✓ Connect with Father Chuck Smith (Grace Episcopal) for his prison ministry and possibility of a half-way house for women
- ✓ Ogdensburg Presbyterians meeting families of prisoners who come to NoCo to visit their family members (NY state has removed funding for such travel).
- ✓ Are there Imams in local prisons we might connect to?

Work to see connections between our concerns about race and poverty –

- ✓ attention to immigrants (e.g. Immigration Navigators workshop)
- ✓ support for local low-income families and ways to meet them
- ✓ Campus Kitchens
- ✓ Church and Community Program
- ✓ new local group "Community Conversations about Poverty"

SAC Minutes – June 2017 – Further issues for Discussion on Race

Discussion Topics

- What do we need to think about when taking our social actions into the public sphere?
  - Need for accountability partners as SURG promotes (e.g. BLM)
  - Concern that we did not have a mechanism for reaching consensus about taking action in the wider community (e.g. walking in Dairy Princess Parade with "This house believes..." signs, UU Church Banner, and BLM sign); how can we advocate/witness in public in a way that both affirms our values and encourages dialog?
  - Questions raised in discussion: Should we do some education among ourselves? How might we go beyond the church community to do education/encourage dialogue? Is there room in this community for a range of viewpoints? Can we reach consensus on contentious issues or do we toe the company line?
  - Power and vulnerability are important aspects of these questions. We through our have power, longevity and credibility in the wider community. We need to use these to

support those who are vulnerable; we should stand up for them. This was an opportunity to use our power. We are not creating a controversy but had an opportunity to stand up.

- BLM sign on the church began the conversation in the community because it was disruptive. Need to think tactically about when to use disruption and when to use education.
- We wish to support the vulnerable in our community, but this includes at least: people of color and ethnic/religious diversity AND people in poverty (mostly white, here, and many opposed to a BLM message. We don't want to have an either/or choice on this matter but to emphasize the LINKS that connect people with less privilege.
- Discussion good and what is needed.
- Question of process (or lack of) for decision to post BLM signs was raised. Did we do the homework necessary to get the congregation to buy in with a full understanding?
- Suggestion to spend time discussion Rev. Barber's work.
- Concern about perception that we are elitist and need to work on that perception. Need to develop our own thinking, and that of the community about the connections (LINKS) between race, class, and other forms of oppression.