

THE JOURNEY

A guide for reflection

RACIAL JUSTICE AND RECONCILIATION

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First Unitarian Congregation of Toronto



This month we are taking up the topics of racial justice and reconciliation. Yet these are, of course, neither new subjects nor passing concerns, here this month and gone the next. Instead, this month's theme is an invitation to go deeper than we have before, both as a congregation and as individuals. A time to listen to each other, and to intentionally check in with ourselves about where we are in what has been called a journey towards wholeness.

Each of us comes to these issues with different identities and experiences—and with different perspectives on how best to address them. Our conversations at First Unitarian are also taking place within a wider context, as countries, communities, corporations, and, yes, congregations grapple with their role in overcoming racism. As well, as you likely are aware, the delegates of our own Canadian Unitarian Council will be meeting later this month to vote on whether to accept a motion for an 8th Principle that reads (with recently updated language): We, the member congregations of the Canadian Unitarian Council, covenant to affirm and promote:

Individual and communal action that accountably dismantles racism and systemic barriers to full inclusion in ourselves and our institutions.

What is clear from the debates within our denomination and the discourse in the wider world is that there are significant areas of disagreements, even among those committed to meaningfully addressing racism and its ongoing legacy. The spiritual path before us, in my view, is to find as much common ground as we possibly can to enable real progress.

As you engage with this month's materials, and especially as you engage in dialogue with others in your Journey Group, please be mindful of how your words may impact other people—especially people who have racialized identities. Let us welcome one another into courageous space, a place where we require respect from and for each other, as well as a spirit of generosity, given that we, as a community, are at very different places when it comes to discussing these issues. We only make progress on these issues at the “speed of trust,” so let us be gracious while we move, ever and always, onwards.

In faith and love,
Shawn

Questions to Live With



- 1 What important lesson have you most recently learned about racial justice and reconciliation?
- 2 What are you still trying to learn? What do you understand about your next possible step?
- 3 What actions are you feeling moved to undertake to affirm and promote reconciliation and racial justice?
- 4 Can you identify a time when bias, assumptions, or stereotypes affected how you experienced or acted in a situation?
- 5 What might it be like to journey for a day in the shoes of someone with a different set of identities?
- 6 If not one of these questions, what is your question about racial justice and reconciliation this month?

For Inspiration

No matter what, when you are having a conversation about racial oppression, these conversations will always be hard, because they will always be about the hurt and pain of real people... racial oppression should always be an emotional topic to discuss. It should always be anger-inducing. As long as racism exists to ruin the lives of countless people of colour, it should be something that upsets us. But it upsets us because it exists, not because we talk about it. And if you are white, and you don't want to feel any of that pain by having these conversations, then you are asking people of colour to continue to bear the entire burden of racism alone.

- Ojeoma Olua, *So You Want to Talk About Race*

There is no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives.

- Audre Lorde

When your innocence is stripped from you, when your people are denigrated, when the family you came from is denounced and your tribal ways and rituals are pronounced backwards, primitive, savage, you come to see yourself as less than human. That is hell on earth, that sense of unworthiness.

- Richard Wagamese, *Indian Horse*

... racism is not about people's intentions. Racism is about the impact and the hurt of their actions. Intentions do not matter. And that's a hard one for people, because they cling to being good as a way of saying "I am not racist." And my thing is, I don't care if you're racist. I care if you're hurting me.

- Desmond Cole

The opposite of love is not hate, it's indifference. The opposite of beauty is not ugliness, it's indifference. The opposite of faith is not heresy, it's indifference. And the opposite of life is not death, but indifference between life and death.

- Elie Wiesel

It's not easy to confront parts of ourselves that we are less aware of or that are contradictory to our espoused values. It can fuel painful emotions such as guilt, shame, anger, or defensiveness. This is where [a] compassionate approach becomes important. Self-compassion helps us observe ourselves with curiosity rather than judgment. It's the salve to lessen the painful sting of our mistakes so we don't beat ourselves up. Yet it still holds us accountable. Compassion is essential; without it, we may not be able to focus our attention long enough to learn about and unlearn some bad habits about relating to others.

- Shakil Choudhury, *Deep Diversity: Overcoming Us vs. Them*



Those who profess to favour freedom, and yet deprecate agitation, are people who want crops without plowing up the ground. They want rain without thunder and lightning; they want the ocean without the awful roar of its waters. This struggle may be a moral one; or it may be both moral and physical; but it must be a struggle.

Power concedes nothing without a demand; it never did and it never will. Find out what people will submit to, and you have found out the exact amount of injustice which will be imposed upon them. The limits of tyrants are prescribed by the endurance of those whom they oppress.

- Frederick Douglass, 1818 - 1895

My friend has a plaque hanging up in her kitchen "Everyone wants a revolution; Nobody wants to do the dishes." Is there anything more true? I think my church, and my kids, and myself, I think we want to be radicals. I think we want to change. But we don't want to do the work of actually doing the thing. I think for most of my theological life I believed that was okay. I believed what really mattered was my heart. [Now, I feel that what matters is] *what we actually do in the places we are right now.*"

- Abby Norman

Ours is not the task of fixing the entire world all at once, but of stretching out to mend the part of the world that is within our reach. Any small, calm thing that one soul can do to help another soul, to assist some portion of this poor suffering world, will help immensely. It is not given to us to know which acts or by whom, will cause the critical mass to tip toward an enduring good. What is needed for dramatic change is an accumulation of acts, adding, adding to, adding more, continuing. We know that it does not take everyone on Earth to bring justice and peace, but only a small, determined group who will not give up during the first, second, or hundredth gale... When a great ship is in harbour and moored, it is safe, there can be no doubt. But that is not what great ships are built for.

- Clarissa Pinkola Estes

For nothing is fixed, forever and forever and forever, it is not fixed; the earth is always shifting, the light is always changing, the sea does not cease to grind down rock. Generations do not cease to be born, and we are responsible to them because we are the only witnesses they have. The sea rises, the light fails, lovers cling to each other, and children cling to us. The moment we cease to hold each other, the moment we break faith with one another, the sea engulfs us and the light goes out.

- James Baldwin

Our goal is to create a beloved community and this will require a qualitative change in our souls as well as a quantitative change in our lives.

- Martin Luther King, Jr.



To build community requires vigilant awareness of the work we must continually do to undermine all the socialization that leads us to behave in ways that perpetuate domination. A body of critical theory is now available that explains all the workings of white-supremacist thought and racism. But explanations alone do not bring us to the practice of beloved community. When we take the theory, the explanations, and apply them concretely to our daily lives, to our experiences, we further and deepen the practice of anti-racist transformation.

- bell hooks, *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope*

Unless one lives and loves in the trenches, it is difficult to remember that the war against dehumanization is ceaseless.

- Audre Lorde

“Oh Canada, My Country” - Gwen Pharis Ringwood

Oh Canada, My Country

Where you have failed, the fault is on my head.

Where you are ignorant or blind or cruel, I made you so.

In all your folly and strength I share,

And all your beauty is my heritage.

Go with this country in your heart.

Go with each other in hand.

Know that you are not alone.

Amen.

We all grow up with the weight of history on us. Our ancestors dwell in the attics of our brains as they do in the spiraling chains of knowledge hidden in every cell of our bodies.

- Shirley Abbott

When we are born,

we have curses and gifts from our parents and ancestors

[that] come from way back, and generation after generation,

we work on them, with them.

They are curses because there are terrible problems and hardships...

the most difficult questions of humanity, such as ‘why war?’ and ‘what is love?’

They are also gifts, because we

have the opportunity to come up with the most beautiful answers.

- Maxine Hong Kingston, *The Woman Warrior*

“Reconciliation” – Rebekah Tabobondung, of the Wasauksing First Nation

We are waking up to our history
from a forced slumber
We are breathing it into our lungs
so it will be part of us again
It will make us angry at first
because we will see how much you stole from us
and for how long you watched us suffer
we will see how you see us
and how when we copied your ways
we killed our own.
We will cry and cry and cry
because we can never be the same again
But we will go home to cry
and we will see ourselves in this huge mess
and we will gently whisper the circle back
and it will be old and it will be new
Then we will breathe our history back to you
you will feel how strong and alive it is
and you will feel yourself become a part of it
And it will shock you at first
because it is too big to see all at once
and you won't want to believe it
you will see how you see us
and all the disaster in your ways
how much we lost
And you will cry and cry and cry
because we can never be the same again
But we will cry with you
and we will see ourselves in this huge mess
and we will gently whisper the circle back
and it will be old and it will be new.

All that we are is story. From the moment we are born to the time we continue on our spirit journey, we are involved in the creation of the story of our time here. It is what we arrive with. It is all we leave behind. We are not the things we accumulate. We are not the things we deem important. We are story. All of us. What comes to matter then is the creation of the best possible story we can while we're here; you, me, us, together. When we can do that and we take the time to share those stories with each other, we get bigger inside, we see each other, we recognize our kinship—we change the world, one story at a time...

- Richard Wagamese

Optional Spiritual Exercise

From *Stay Woke: A Meditation Guide for the Rest of Us* by Justin Michael Williams

If you are usually in the majority everywhere you go, where can you go within the next thirty days where you are not the majority? Is there a community organization event, rally, or social meetup you can attend where you will feel like an outsider?

What fears arise when you think about attending such an event?

Join Us

Join a Journey Group

Journey Groups are a great way to go deeper with our monthly theme by sharing with a small group of people for a couple of hours each month. Groups meet online on Zoom and are scheduled at different times during the month.

For more information, visit our website <https://firstunitariantoronto.org/journey-groups/>, or look for the link in First Light.

Upcoming Themes

December– Blessing | January– Intention | February – Contentment | March– Money
April– Awakening | May– Beauty

Upcoming Services

Sundays at 10:30

November 7: “The Very Long Arc” Rev. Shawn Newton | October 14: “Creative Maladjustment” Rev. Shawn Newton | November 21: “What is God Was One of Us?” Rev. Shawn Newton | November 28: “Just the Planet” Rev. Lynn Harrison

New Horizons Editing Team: Wendy Peebles, Jeanne Van Bronkhorst, Margaret Kohr, Josée Thibault, Rev. Shawn Newton, Rev. Lynn Harrison

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