



February 14, 2016

Racial Justice Sunday Message

From Rev. Edward Livingston, Assistant Pastor, Living Water UCC

As I prepare for this Lenten season, I am confronted with economies of exclusion that produce heavy burdens on people throughout the land. While these burdens impact people across the spectrum of society, African Americans and Latinos bear disproportionate hardships that result in high rates of incarceration and death, as well as barriers to health, opportunity and prosperity. For example, African Americans are six times more likely to be arrested and serve more prison time than their white counterparts for the same offenses.¹

Racial Justice Sunday is an appropriate time to fully open us to hear what God is speaking. If we truly listen, we will hear the blood of Tamir Rice, Reika Boyd and so many others crying out from the land. All lives matter...yes, and Black lives matter. Ignoring this deliberate focus invites continued racial injustice. To declare that *Black lives matter* is a fearless affirmation and a call to action to dismantle systems that destroy the lives of people of African descent.

A 2012 poll revealed that 51% of Americans expressed anti-black sentiments; a 3% increase from 2008.² Yet, we as members of the UCC have hope and believe that God is still speaking. As a united and uniting church, we are called to address the implicit bias³ and racial anxiety⁴ that divides our nation. We are called to lead our country in embracing a radical love that demonstrates the healing and reconciling power of God.

Start with prayer. Acknowledge any fears. Listen to God. Allow the Creator to empower you to help repair our world. The Holy Spirit is able to guide you in being in true relationship with people across racial lines. This is the most effective practice to dismantle the aim of racism and to create Dr. King's "Beloved Community."

United in Christ,

Rev. Edward Livingston, Assistant Pastor, Living Water UCC
Executive Director, Camden Churches Organized for People

1. U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics, *Prisoners in 2011*, 8 tbl.8 (Dec. 2012)
2. AP Poll: U.S. majority have prejudice against blacks – 2012 usat.ly/VQAkGE
3. kirwaninstitute.osu.edu/research/understanding-implicit-bias/
4. pointofinquiry.org/getting_over_racial_anxiety_with_rachel_d_godsil/

The United Church of Christ has a long history of working towards Racial Justice. Visit ucc.org/justice_racism for more information on what the UCC is doing and how YOU can get involved.

Getting to Know:

United Church of Christ at Valley Forge

45 Walker Rd, Wayne, PA 19087



Our mission at *The United Church of Christ at Valley Forge* is to follow in the Way of Jesus, deepen our relationships with God and our faith community, and in so doing, be empowered to reach out widely to our neighbors in love, justice, hospitality, healing, and hope.

We seek to nurture these deeper roots with God and each other by worshiping together, providing prayer partners who are available to pray with members of the congregation after worship, participating in and leading Christian education classes for children, youth, and adults, respectively, on Sunday mornings, as well as offering adult small groups that meet during the week to read and discuss books of the Bible. Church leadership attends an annual retreat together and we recently had a day-long prayer retreat for the congregation.

As our spiritual roots grow deeper, we are empowered to widen our connection to our local and regional communities with outreach activities like serving at the Old First Men's Shelter in Philadelphia, singing at nursing homes, planning and helping to run our annual Alternative Gift Market, sponsoring a fundraiser for LGBTQ youth, as well as participating in UCC national offerings as a "5 for 5" church.

One concern we've been currently focusing on is how to better integrate and offer activities that are available for all ages in the congregation, as part of our commitment to be a truly inclusive church. We've been experimenting with an intergenerational worship service, now offer a congregation-wide scavenger hunt on Rally Day, recently instituted an annual Saturday night talent show, and continue to look for and brainstorm about community outreach activities that are suitable for all ages.

If you have ideas for us to consider about intergenerational worship or are interested in learning more about any of the activities and ideas we've listed above, visit us online at uccvf.org to learn more and for contact information.



Prayers are requested for UCC at Valley Forge in Wayne and Rev. Michael Todd Bush.