

Congregation Conversation: Class and Classism

Sunday, February 21, 2021

Background: Our Congregation Responds

During the years between 2015 and 2017, the Champlain Valley Unitarian Universalist Governing Board sponsored two Class Conversation workshops, “Organizing for Change: Addressing Classism In Your Faith Community” and “Create Justice- Not Walls: Class and Race in UU Settings.” Later, the congregation sponsored the worship service, *Born on Third Base* led by Chuck Collins author of the book of the same title.

As a result congregational members examined our policies, practices and norms. For example, from the minister to the sexton, we examined the equity of what we offered our employees. Were we equitable in our wages and more importantly the benefits we offered? Was passing the “plate” an embarrassing component of the Sunday service? We noticed who was missing at our events – pay for dinners, the auction- and wondered why. .

In response, our minister Barnaby Feder with other key individuals in the congregation instituted the following change.

1. We made childcare an integral offering for every committee and small group meeting thus enabling single parents and families to attend without having to worry about childcare. This allowed them to participate in our congregational life outside of Sunday service.
2. We shared our personal stories from the pulpit of how we had moved from one class background to another e.g. working to professional middle class or vice-versa from professional class to working class. The sharing of these personal stories dispelled the myth that even though we are a largely affluent white congregation in a well respected liberal arts college town not all of us were professionals earning a comfortable income with generous benefits. Because these stories were public, it created a culture of inclusion - “there is no shame to your economic status as others share that experience with you.”
3. We moved away from charging and advertising discounts for families in order to attend communal meals and concerts. If a donation was needed to offset costs, a “free will” donation box was left to side of the entry door.
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5. Perhaps the most significant change we made was ending our annual auction fundraiser where the highest bidder wins. Instead we did a Radical Love Giveaways event. Raffle items were displayed on a table with a collection container where tickets could be deposited. Every family unit received 10 tickets to deposit wherever they wished – weekend vacations, dinners, a midnight snowshoeing event, a watercolor, etc. How did this event work as a fun-raiser? Participants were asked to give 4% of their annual pledge. But everyone received their 10 tickets and the equal chance of winning that dinner or weekend get-away regardless if they could afford that 4% or not.

Questions

For each -- worship, program, finances, building community and social action, you will note that they are a few ideas/suggestions from the 2015-2017 group work. As we explore worship, leadership and decision making, finances, building community and social action let's identify what we have done, what we might consider that is on the list (note we have not achieved it every item) and what we might to consider doing next.

Any questions before we begin?

<h2 style="margin: 0;">Worship</h2>
<p>Several ideas from previous years...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• We sometimes used “sophisticated “vocabulary, we need to make sure we define words.• Provide a context or background information for references. Don't assume everyone knows who Friedrich Nietzsche, John Lewis or Lena Horne was.• Is passing the plate embarrassing for those who can't contribute?• Diversify who participates in the service.
<p>What opportunities we might now have to address classism going forward?</p>

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Leadership and decision making

Several ideas from previous years...

- Advertise vacancies of elected positions multiple times with a simple but clear description of responsibilities/expectations.
- Are our volunteers seem to be people with leisure time. Can we attract others? How?

What opportunities we might now have to address classism going forward?

Finances

Several ideas from previous years...

- We don't make a big deal of who contributes – those who give a lot versus those who can't.
- We need to examine does our budget reflect our priorities? Are we allocating money in the right places?
- We need to involve more people in our events. Do we empathize the money part too much?

What opportunities we might now have to address classism going forward?

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Building community

Several ideas from previous years...

Have an account for Sunday refreshments. Maybe a Hannaford gift card for people to use.

Offer free meals and concerts.

Can someone volunteer and attend for free?

What opportunities we might now have to address classism going forward?

Social action

How do we move from conversation to addressing systematic classism?

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Resource information as needed

1. Website, www.uuclassconversations.org
2. Class, or classism, is a form of prejudice or discrimination. It includes individual attitudes, behaviors, systems of policies and practices that make some individuals/groups more comfortable over others and benefit some individuals/groups over others due to their wealth and status.
3. The United States has roughly six social classes (note there are multiple classification systems and no agreement)
 - Upper class
 - New money
 - Middle class
 - Working class (generally earns more than minimum wage with some benefits)
 - Working poor (minimum wage, part time, no benefits)
 - Poverty level