

EMMAUS ANTI-RACISM TEAM REPORT, 2008-2009

Sacred Conversations on Race

In response to a request from UCC President, Rev. John Thomas, the Emmaus Anti-Racism Team of the Minnesota Conference UCC coordinated and facilitated a series of Sacred Conversations on Race in 2008-2009. These *Conversations*, written as a curriculum by Dr. Herbert Perkins, are five interrelated dialogues supported by scripture and sociological writings. Emmaus Team members (usually a person of color paired with a white team member) co-facilitated each session.

Most of the Dialogues in 2009 were conducted as a Lenten series. Some churches offered them at other times and in formats that worked better for them. Churches doing Sacred Conversation on Race in 2009 were Mayflower Community Congregational Church, Minneapolis, Parkway UCC, Minneapolis, Minnehaha UCC, Minneapolis, Parkview UCC, White Bear Lake, Peace UCC, Duluth, Cherokee Park UCC, St. Paul, and the Congregational Church of Rochester.

About the series at Minnehaha UCC, Emmaus Team facilitator, Pat Ekstrom, reported, "We began our Sacred Conversations by building community and sharing how we connect to people who are like us, and then how we connect to others not like us. White people need to learn to stay connected to those like themselves so that they can connect to people of color and be good allies. We are laying a firm foundation for further anti-racist discussions and action."

At Peace UCC in Duluth, a series of six gatherings were held on Tuesday evening throughout the year. Emmaus Team member Lyn Clark Pegg reports, "we explored how racism has impacted us personally and spiritually, how it is embedded in the history of our community, and how it is experienced in our everyday lives. Each of the gatherings began with a soup supper, and the programs were facilitated by various members of our Dismantling Racism Team."

Rev. Donald Christensen and Wilma Lawrence co-facilitated the Sacred Conversations on Race at Parkview UCC in White Bear Lake. The sessions were held on five Wednesday evenings during Lent. The evening began with prayer and closed with prayer. A soup supper was served. Various articles selected by Dr. Herbert Perkins were presented for reading. A scripture lesson was reflected upon at each session. According to Wilma Lawrence, "the Conversations went very well, especially the sharing of life stories surfaced by the readings and the scripture study."

At Mayflower Community Congregational Church, the Sacred Conversations took place on Monday evenings during Lent. Dr. Herbert Perkins and Pat Ekstrom co-facilitated the discussions. According to Mayflower member, Wilma Lawrence, "attendance and participation were excellent. Each session began with soup supper and prayer. The articles presented as curriculum material prepared by Herbert evoked interesting comments. Issues of classism and white privilege were discussed."

In addition to the Sacred Conversations on Race, the Emmaus Team co-sponsored other Conference anti-racism programs and provided them with financial support. In November 2008, the Team helped bring Victor Lewis to Minnesota to conduct anti-racism workshops at Peace UCC in Rochester, and at Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church and Cherokee Park UCC in St. Paul. The Emmaus Team also provided scholarships to ASDIC Circles participants and financial support for an ASDIC Circles program at Peace UCC in Duluth.

Wilma Lawrence and Rev. Don Christensen
Co-Chairpersons, Emmaus Anti-Racism Team

Resolution on Indian Sesquicentennial

As a follow-up to the resolution passed at the 2008 Annual Meeting of the Minnesota Conference UCC, members of the Emmaus Anti-Racism Team drafted a second resolution on the Indian Sesquicentennial, presented for adoption by the 2009 Annual Meeting of the Conference. It was decided by the drafters that this resolution would not request that an 'apology' be made to Indian people at this time.

We feel that an education process should occur throughout the Conference so that our churches and members might better understand the injustices and discrimination that American Indians have experienced in the state of Minnesota. Education, employment, housing, church membership (or lack there-of) have impacted American Indians dramatically. Many have not been allowed to be leaders, even though they are qualified.

There needs to be transformed behavior at all levels of society. Self-education and collective education must start so that we can bring about change. Hopefully, by 2012, the 150th anniversary of the Dakota War of 1862, we can say that changes have occurred. We are at the foot of the mountain and must work collectively to reach the top. With individual repentance for what we have or have not done, as a starting place for justice to occur, things will and must change. It is our hope that American Indians can be fully welcomed as part of the Minnesota Conference UCC. Cultural diversity among us must be looked at as a cause for celebration and enrichment, not division and exclusion.

Let us journey forward together with not only education of our minds, but of our hearts as well. Starting with this annual meeting, let us continue our quest to be a multi-racial and multi-cultural conference, in solidarity in our churches and other venues for community building. Transformative behavior must happen before apologies are given. We must become agents of change.

Wilma Lawrence
Co-Chairperson, Emmaus Anti-Racism Team