

“The Challenge of Beloved Community: Part II”

A talk by Amanda Harrington

First Unitarian Society of Minneapolis

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<https://youtu.be/zASqgaQ8t7c?t=725>

When I think of Beloved Community, I think about changing Minneapolis, or the country, or society in general. But, I'm not sure that I'm up for changing the world right now, so, how about starting with FUS? What does a UU Beloved Community look like? UUA president Rev. Susan Frederick-Gray spoke of a Beloved Community at the 2018 General Assembly. She said that it is “a community that practices radically inclusive and compassionate, anti-racist, anti-oppressive, multicultural, multigenerational faith within, and acts powerfully in partnership and solidarity for justice and liberation beyond.” That still sounds exhausting!

However, I totally support the idea behind it, which I think of as a community where every single person feels welcomed, connected, and included. It's basically equity work, and people at FUS are starting this work already. Moving Toward Equity is the FUS Diversity, Inclusion and Equity Team and we've been working on this for over a year. We've been reading and thinking and talking, and trying to figure out reasonable actions that can make FUS a Beloved Community. We want a culture shift at FUS to allow *all* people, regardless of race, gender expression, ability, or income, to feel welcomed. Not to increase the color in the pews, but because it's the right thing to do. Because that's how we live out our Humanist beliefs.

But I often wonder, do *you* want the culture at FUS to shift? It's a real question... Do you want everyone to feel connected, or is it OK if just some people feel that way? We're a democratic society after all; maybe the status quo is fine as long as the majority feel included.

I believe that almost all of us would say, “yes, we want more diversity and equity.” But let's be real, talk is cheap. It's easy to say “yes” without putting any effort into making it happen. I've seen this play out in other organizations. You probably have too. Leaders decide that their organizations must become more equitable. Classes are held. Books are read. People gather to talk about fixing the problems of racism, systemic injustices, and inherent biases.

But when it comes to taking action, they get stuck. They talk about how they're just not ready, or that it's hard to change things, or they don't know where to start. So

maybe they read another book. And they talk some more about injustice. But nothing actually changes. It doesn't cost much to read and talk. I know it's not cheap to build up your personal equity library, but that's not the kind of cost I'm talking about. I'm talking about how we pay with our hands and sweat, by changing old habits, and by giving our time.

I'm not calling anyone out. In fact, I'm calling you in, as Rev. Kelli would say. I'm asking you to join me in considering, what would it look like if FUS was a Beloved Community?

What would need to change for our congregation to be a "radically inclusive and compassionate, anti-racist, anti-oppressive, multicultural, multigenerational community"? Would it mean asking someone who you normally wouldn't talk to, someone really different from you, to join your group so you could get to know them better? Would it mean installing a wheelchair lift for the stage so that anyone can get on our stage, regardless of ability, even if it took away from how beautiful Upper Assembly Hall was? Would it mean changing assembly practices in a way that would be uncomfortable to some members initially, so that others felt more deeply engaged? Would we diversify our ministers, even if that meant losing someone we really liked and were comfortable with, so that others could see themselves and their culture reflected back from the pulpit in a tangible way?

What would need to change for our congregation to really be "in partnership and solidarity" with groups outside of FUS? Could it mean getting involved deeply with just one or two community groups instead of giving money to a variety of groups? Could it mean asking a community group what they really need us to do, and then being willing to do it, regularly, even if it was unglamorous and really hands on, like providing childcare or driving people, or washing their dishes?

So back to my original question: do you want the culture at FUS to shift? Do you want everyone to feel connected here? I don't know if anyone has asked you that before. So go ahead, take some time to think and talk. Maybe you'll talk about it at coffee hour today in a breakout room, or maybe you need more time to consider it and will talk later this week with your family.

But don't take too long, because soon, I, or someone else, will be asking you to act. Maybe we'll ask to add equity or Beloved Community to our mission statement or aspirations. We are already asking you to support the UUA's proposed 8th Principle. But let's acknowledge that both of those "actions" are still just words. We're asking

some FUS committees to consider how they recruit new members and to change their practices to prioritize diversity and honor the value in having many voices at the table. Eventually those actions may become more concrete. I hope that when you are asked to take an action that moves FUS toward a more Beloved Community that you join me, take my hand, take a step (even if it is uncomfortable), and take actions to change FUS to a community where everyone feels included and that they belong.