

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2017

# SOUNDINGS



Unitarian Universalist  
Church of Charlotte

DISCOVER DEEPER SPIRITUAL MEANING

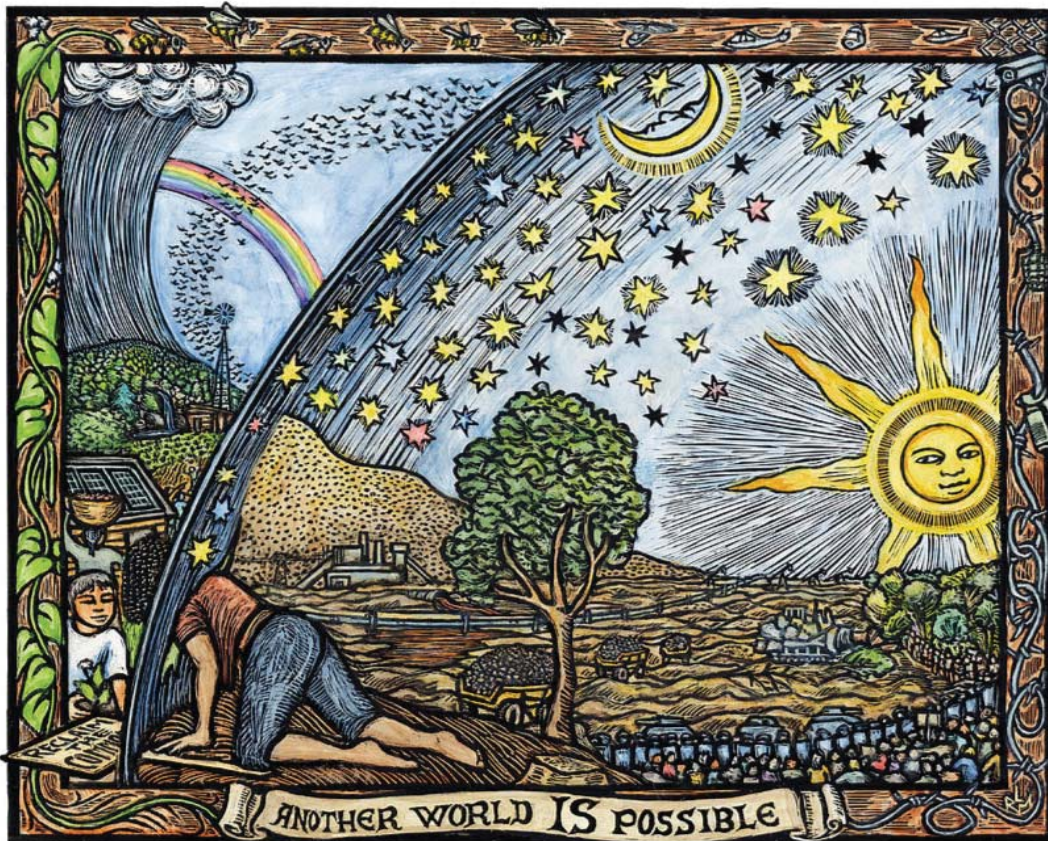
*Depth through reflection*

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*Another World is Possible* (A vision of change based on the nineteenth century Flammarian engraving) mixed media art by Ricardo Levins Morales

*... challenging each other to embrace the work of realizing our Vision ...*

—FROM THE UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CHURCH OF CHARLOTTE'S  
"CALL TO ACTION," ADOPTED BY THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES  
FEBRUARY 2017



**The Mission of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Charlotte** is to inspire children, youth and adults to discover and articulate deeper spiritual meaning evidenced in lives of integrity, compassion and stewardship of the earth.

**La mision de la iglesia Unitaria Universalista de Charlotte** es inspirar a los niños, jóvenes y adultos para que descubran y articulan un significado espiritual profundo, evidente en una vida de integridad, compasión y en el manejo de los recursos de la tierra

## ANSWERING THE CALL: OUR INITIAL STEPS

by Jay Leach



*There can be a progression to the dream; there can be steps to it. . . . everything is a step, leading you to where you need to go.*

—Ava DuVernay, film director of, among other movies, the documentary *13<sup>th</sup>*

When I was departing California to relocate to Charlotte, I descended the steps of my condominium high on a hill in Sausalito overlooking the San Francisco Bay for the last time, entered the garage, got in my overloaded car and wound my way down through the complex that had become so familiar. At the entrance to the narrow street I immediately faced a decision. Which way would I turn? Left meant winding farther up the hill and entering the freeway from a nearby ramp. Right meant descending, following the bay side road, and finding my way onto the freeway considerably farther north. It was the first of many, many options, choices of this way or that which would determine how I would ultimately find my way to our new home in North Carolina.

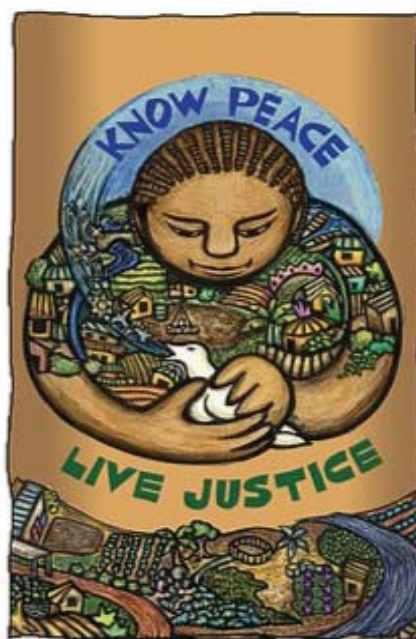
If you've ever had the opportunity to take that kind of long driving trip, you know that there's an immense amount of effort exerted long before you actually embark. Where will we go? When will we go? With whom will we go? Even in an age of GPS and Google Maps, if we're taking a long trip by car, one of the biggest questions is: By what route will we go? With so many roads between home and our farthest destination, we must determine which course will we actually follow.

In June 2016, we as a congregation decided on a destination a quarter-of-a-century into the future. We wanted to arrive at a community marked by momentous transformation—spiritual and societal and environmental transformation. We had only the most general notion of how we might get there and what it might look like when we arrived.

Now, after serious planning and careful deliberation, we've set out, leaving behind the familiar and embarking on a long journey with determination, courage, and more than a little discomfort. We've set our course guided by our Board's "Call to Action" and by the demands of our times. And this is why we are focused intently this year on deep exploration of Environmental Justice and Racial Justice.

Our programming for children, youth and adults is infused with these two emphases. Our Sunday services and Second Sunday Dialogues are offering opportunities to consider these topics. We are now two months into deep exploration by two sizeable groups in the congregation—our Environmental Justice Core Group and our Racial Justice Core Group. These groups are investing significant time and effort in listening, reflecting, and learning.

All this work for now is preparatory. We haven't rushed to "do." Rather, we are taking time to understand the systemic way in which environmental and racial *in*justice has shaped us as a congregation, a religion, a community and a nation.



*Know Peace, Live Justice*  
mixed media art by Ricardo Levins Morales

This issue of *Soundings* offers you a brief glimpse of our initial steps. You can learn more about how our children and youth are experiencing this journey. You can get a sense of the kinds of programming in which our adults are engaged. You'll read from members of our Core Groups about their personal reasons for choosing to participate.

The journey has most certainly begun . . . in earnest. We've now made our initial choices about which way we'll turn first. With decades yet to go, these are steps we're taking in hopes that they will allow us to proceed toward

our dream, a vision of transformation toward which we have now embarked.

## MOVING TOWARD TRANSFORMATION

by Martha Kniseley



*It is OK to be messy. Real dialogue, especially when it takes place across differences, will be messy—inconclusive, sometimes uncomfortable or unclear, not all ‘thought out’ or logical. Welcome the messiness as a sign of authenticity and honesty.*

*Practice bringing a spirit of compassion and flexibility to the conversation.*

—from UUA curriculum *Our Place in the Web of Life: An Introduction to Environmental Justice*

This suggestion from a group covenant serves to remind me that we need to provide safe spaces for our learning experiences this year as we will undoubtedly encounter difficult truths. We know we enter this process of learning at different levels of understanding. The Adult Religious Education & Spiritual Development Team (ARESD) is committed to providing programming that is accessible—and safe—to *all* of our members.

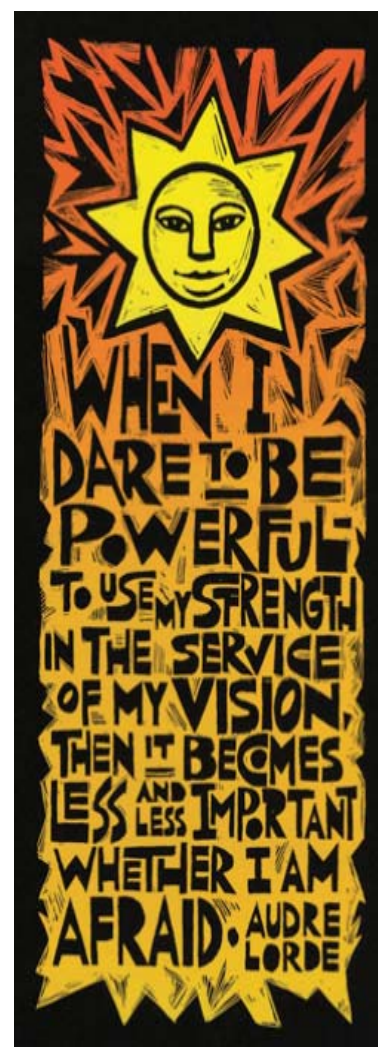
We’re discovering the challenge of understanding environmental justice as it refers to much more than environmentalism and climate change. While the Environmental Justice (EJ) Core Group is exploring the topic in depth, our members have opportunities to build on last year’s “Environmental Justice 101” course. We begin with two films about climate change and the effects on our human community. On November 3, June Blotnick facilitated the viewing and discussion of *An Inconvenient Sequel*. In early December we will screen the documentary based on Naomi Klein’s book, *This Changes Everything*, which examines how communities around the world are dealing with climate change issues and a failed economic system. In January, as we consider the repercussions of a Duke Energy rate hike, we’ll watch *From the Ashes*. A course based on a curriculum from the UU Ministry for Earth is also in the works for January.

While most of our members were not ready or able to commit a year to either the Environmental or Racial

Justice Core Group, they have demonstrated a desire for deepening their understanding. Twenty-two members began their exploration of racial justice with our course based on the Henry Louis Gates’ PBS series, *The African Americans: Many Rivers to Cross*. Each week Ann Doss Helm leads us in a discussion about “what got our attention” in the previous week’s episode. Conversations with partners continue during the week concerning our own engagement with racial plurality and the messages we received about race when we were growing up.

The UUC Charlotte People of Color group launched our racial justice film series with a viewing of *I Am Not your Negro*, which examines race in America through the words and experiences of James Baldwin. Seventy-five people attended and at least half of the audience stayed for engaging small group discussions. This month Melissa Mummert led a panel discussion following the showing of the painful documentary *13<sup>th</sup>*. The large audience listened as Ramona Brant and Kristie Williams shared their first-hand experiences with the justice system. The Rev. Mitchel Blue also spoke to the challenges of re-entry.

One of our goals is to participate in events in the Charlotte community. Fifteen of us attended the “Know Justice/Know Peace” exhibit at the Levine Museum of the New South. We were greatly impacted by the presentation given by photographer Alvin Jacobs, who relived his experiences in Charlotte and Charlottesville and shared his perspective on police shootings and the lack of responsibility taken by our major institutions.



*When I Dare*, an inspiring quote from essayist and poet Audre Lorde mixed media art by Ricardo Levins Morales

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## PREPARING OUR CHILDREN FOR THEIR “BRAVE SPACES”

by Kathleen Carpenter



Our congregation’s Call to Action challenges us to build brave spaces. These spaces require us to look inward and find our boundaries, and then to push ourselves right up to their edge. They are honest and messy and scary and require accountability. They also require trust—not just

trust in one another, but trust in transformation.

As I sit down to write this, I have just returned from my annual professional conference (LREDA—Liberal Religious Educators Association) where this year’s theme of “Brave Spaces” was dramatically put to the test. Friday evening our presenters led a brief exercise that many felt was paternalistic. Then, Saturday morning, after another exercise led by the presenters, some people of color challenged them, as did some white people. The presenters were called out as inauthentic and patronizing and several participants, mostly People of Color, demanded that they stop talking. At that point, the board suspended regular programming while the LREDA Board and the Diversity and Inclusion Team met to discuss how to continue in light of the protests.

How did I feel at that moment? Confused for the most part. I thought the programming was fine; I enjoyed the exercises. I was oblivious to the fact that the topic (Non-Violent Communication or NVC) was seen as racist by many of those present and the presenters as embodying white supremacy and patriarchy. How could I miss what others saw as so painfully obvious? I who pride myself on “getting it.” That journey we all talk about? I discovered I was not as far along on it as I thought. It was a sobering realization.

The following day, we began a day of Faith Development for LREDA as an institution and for attendees. I came away having learned a great deal about how white supremacy lives in me as well as an introduction to how it lives in the formal and informal systems of LREDA. Yet, I also am aware that the greatest learning was for white religious educators, at the expense of people of color.

If an organization comprised of religious educators, an organization that has been a leader in our Association on issues of inclusivity, can make such mistakes—we all can. For those of us who avoid conflict, it was a reminder that in order to dismantle racism, we need to say it and name it and lean into the anxiety that results. My weekend was messy and scary but it was part of my journey.

Elsewhere in this issue, you are hearing from adult leaders who share some of their work in adult programming around racial and environmental justice, as well as from one of our high school advisors. I write this to assure you that we are not forgetting our younger children. They too must find their brave spaces. They are not immune from this messy world of ours. Their days often include scary news. They sometimes find themselves faced with difficult decisions and situations.

This year our preschool and early elementary classes continue to use “SpiritPlay,” an approach to religious education that invites children to explore life’s big questions through stories. Many of the stories for the K-1st graders directly relate to racial and environmental justice.

Our elementary and middle school classes are using curriculum from the UUA’s *Tapestry of Faith* program. These curricula remind us that while in spirit we embrace the contribution of diversity, in practice we often fail to appreciate all the experiences and viewpoints in our communities as respectfully or as wholly as we might. The focus with our Middle Schoolers is specifically on justice. Their curriculum is intended to explore linked oppressions in our society and encourage participants towards personal growth in values that counteract the marginalization of others.

As with the adults in our congregation, it is our hope that the lessons learned in the first part of this year will lead to opportunities for action in the winter/spring for our children and their families.

*“... I who pride myself on ‘getting it.’ That journey we all talk about? I discovered I was not as far along on it as I thought. It was a sobering realization.”*

## FOCUS ON ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

by Charles King



Having become a Charlottean only in May, and visited the UUCC for the first time in June, I was very pleased recently to be welcomed as a member of the church's new Environmental Justice (EJ) Core Group.

My awakening to the environmental movement occurred during a difficult time of separation and divorce that was brought on by religious differences. My ex-wife had a sudden religious conversion after the terrorist attacks of 9/11, and became committed to a church that I was not compatible with. I was, however, quite impressed with her new-found spiritual commitment and began to think about how I might find some meaningful spiritual expression of my own—a spiritual connection compatible with my more secular view of the world. A book I read during that time which influenced my thinking was *Ishmael* by Daniel Quinn. I came to share the author's view of environmentalism as an expression of humanity's common hopes for the future, and to see this as a concern that is essentially spiritual in nature. The intersection of spirituality and environmental stewardship is particularly interesting for me.

I am also inspired by Pope Francis, and several other religious leaders and organizations that advocate for greater environmental awareness within established religious communities. One such organization is Interfaith Power and Light, founded by the Rev. Canon Sally Bingham, a priest in the Episcopal Diocese of California. This group is responding to global warming by promoting energy conservation and renewable energy among its membership of over 2,000 congregations. We should strengthen our connections to other groups and faiths with similar goals, and work together wherever possible to act in support of environmental stewardship.

Like many other members of the UUCC that I've met, I have a deep concern for racial justice in America, and I am happy that the church champions this ideal and is active in this area. I regard the threat of environmental destruction as the greatest spiritual challenge of our

time, and I see racial justice as the greatest ethical and civic challenge we face as Americans. A focus on environmental justice covers the intersection of both concerns.

Other than participating in a series of neighborhood and riverside cleanups in Pittsburgh, where I lived for a number of years, my prior involvement in environmentalism has mostly involved support for some of the national and international environmental nonprofits. One of these is Survival International, with headquarters in London. They advocate for environmental justice in many parts of the world, often in areas where the rule of law is weak. They are frequently active in cases involving dispossession and/or environmental degradation of the land occupied by indigenous peoples or rural subsistence farmers. This

typically involves destruction of habitat and natural resources (deforestation for the development of farms or mines, degradation of freshwater supplies from mining or oil extraction, or the construction of dams or the diversion of rivers for irrigation). The common thread with environmental justice concerns closer to home is abuse and neglect of the most vulnerable by those with greater political and economic power.

Other groups that I've supported are concerned with advocating for changes in U.S. government policies, such as support for the expansion of renewable energy sources. I've been happy to support these groups, but with their large and far-reaching goals, I have often felt a bit removed from the direct effects of my efforts or donations to them. I expect that working with our EJ core group will offer opportunities for a more intimate experience, through learning about local environmental concerns. I hope that we will identify and collaborate with local groups that advocate for the people who are most likely to experience environmental degradation first hand in our own part of the world.



*Deforestation*, mixed media art  
by Ricardo Levins Morales

## A SHIFT IN VIEW

by Nancy Pierce



Although my family of origin occupied a low rung on the economic ladder, my parents did a cool thing: they led their six kids to believe that frugal, close-to-nature living was a moral choice rather than an economic necessity. As a child, I believed our family was special because we

chose camping, hiking, rock scrambling and playing in lakes over power boats, new stuff or expensive trips.

I was born a couple blocks from the Lake Superior shore and grew up in a town with more water surface than land. As a teen, I processed every crisis sitting by a lake. As an undergrad at the University of Minnesota, I trekked over the Mississippi River footbridge that bisected the campus every day for four years—whether I needed to or not.

I took for granted that public waterfronts were abundant and free. Water was a powerful balm for my soul.

At age 25, I knew nothing about Charlotte except that its newspaper editor wanted me to join the photography staff. Flying in for the interview, I was captivated by Lake Wylie below, sparkling blue in the December sun. I said aloud: “There’s a lake! I can live here.”

I took the job, then quickly discovered I had moved to a city estranged from its water. The river and its lakes were inaccessible and far from the city center, the shorelines were almost all private, and swimming off the scant bits of public shoreline was outlawed the summer after I moved here. The city’s creeks were polluted and buried under concrete. Words can’t explain how unmoored I felt without a body of water in my life.

But my career prospered in Charlotte. I left the Observer, met my husband, settled down and had two sons. As the boys grew, the water-grief became existential: how could I raise these precious children without a nearby body of water to anchor myself and them?

I wasn’t drawn to owning waterfront property, even if

we could have afforded it. Eventually it became clear why: it’s public access to water integrated within the life of the city, holding its natural soul, that I yearned for. This became a metaphor for my evolution toward a Common Good-based value system. The leap from there to environmentalism was short: “access for all to recreational water” begat “access to clean drinking water” begat “each disposable water bottle casts a vote for corporate control of water on the backs of poor people.” The resulting aversion to disposable plastic bottles begat “use less plastic” which begat “consume less stuff.”



*Earth's Waters*, mixed media art  
by Ricardo Levins Morales

Awhile back, I spotted a book on a friend’s shelf and bought it just for the title: *The Poverty of Affluence* by psychologist Paul Wachtel (1989). It turned out to be one of those jaw-dropping reads where an author put my own emerging thoughts into words with incredible precision. He wrote: “The consumer way of life is deeply flawed, both psychologically and ecologically. It fails to bring the satisfactions promised and its side effects are lethal.” In a footnote he added: “Our present way of life is unethical as well, because the fruits it provides are unevenly and unjustly distributed.”

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## POSSIBILITIES FOR TRANSFORMATION

by Karen Bringle



Becoming a member of the Liberal Religious Youth group at the First Unitarian Church of Miami in 1959, while spending summers in my mother's hometown of Shelby, NC was a combination of experiences for me that raised my consciousness on racial issues early in my life. The Jim Crow

laws in NC and the openly racist beliefs of some of my relatives were a contrast to what my parents were teaching me and what I was learning in the church. In school I chose to read writings of James Baldwin and Kenneth Clark and found opportunities out of school to work on projects with persons of color.

When I went away to college, in the late 60's, I was no longer attending church. Away from home for the first time on my own I had many distractions from my concerns about racial issues. Though I remained attuned to these issues in the news, it would be decades before I would again become focused on racial justice.

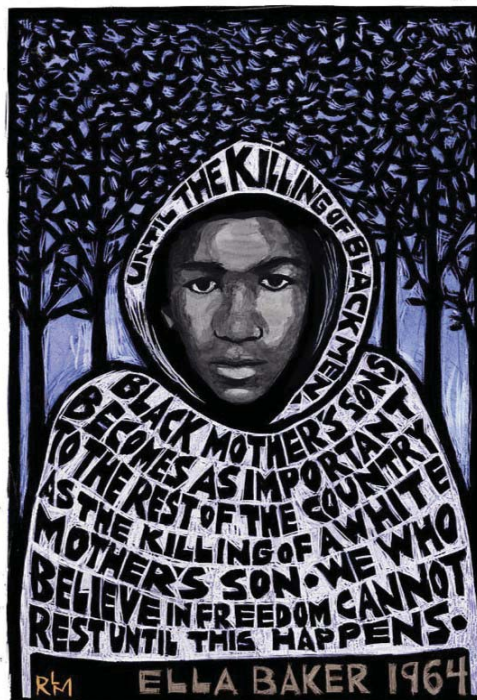
It may have been George Zimmerman's exoneration from killing Trayvon Martin that reawakened my consciousness regarding racial injustice. That verdict and the subsequent reports of so many black people killed needlessly by police all over the country made it evident that many of us had deluded ourselves regarding the progress of racial justice in this country. I began to study and inform myself of the history of black people in the U.S., the ways of our dominant white culture, and the opinions of prominent black thinkers regarding remedies for longstanding inequities.

I've long appreciated Jay and Melissa's focus on racial injustice in our church programs and in the community. I was glad to learn of the formation of the Black Lives of UU at the national level. My motivation to identify others in our congregation who were as intensely interested in this vital issue as I had become was growing. When the formation of the Racial Justice Core Group was announced, I jumped at the opportunity to join the group. To share these concerns and learning opportunities with like-minded others greatly expands the possibilities for my understanding and my transformation.

I hope to be transformed into a person who recognizes any residual biases she has toward persons of color and is able to consistently challenge these biases. I want to understand how and why systems are formed that reinforce and perpetrate racism and inequities. How these systems can be dismantled is the biggest question I want to be able to answer.

Regarding my hopes for the transformation of UUC, I would like us to transform ourselves into listeners—listening to voices of a great variety of people of color in a variety of settings on an ongoing basis. I would like a majority of our congregation to understand much of the history of how white supremacy has been instilled and maintained in our church, our country and throughout the world. And, I would like us to work with persons of color to transform systemic racism throughout our society. Ideally this would include finding means for making reparations to those without whom our nation would not exist, but who have consistently, with

rare exceptions, been treated as second class citizens throughout our history.



Trayvon Martin  
mixed media art by Ricardo Levins Morales

## RACIAL JUSTICE: A COMPELLING AND SACRED CALL

by Ann Magnuson



When the announcement came that UUCU was forming a Racial Justice Core Group and inviting us to express interest, both my heart and my mind said yes! For me this opportunity felt perfectly timed, the next right step in a multi-month process of racial justice involvements that have included Patrice Funderburg's profound

consciousness-expanding course on *The New Jim Crow*. The question of why I wanted to be part of this Racial Justice Core Group has thus for me become a broader query: "What is it that has been drawing me so strongly, even urgently, towards racial justice issues over these recent months?"

The immediate reasons are obvious and everywhere: our racially-divisive national political climate, resurgence of white supremacist ideologies, the rash of police shootings of black men and absence of accountability for these killings, mass incarcerations, our flawed criminal justice system, disparate impacts of poverty and prejudice on non-white communities. These conditions leave me and countless others concerned, heartsick, incensed, and aware of an urgent need for justice, for healing, for transformation.

I am now also more aware that my current intense interest in racial justice stems from personal history and core spiritual/human values. I was born and grew up in Louisiana in the 1940's and 1950's, in an era and place of total racial segregation. My

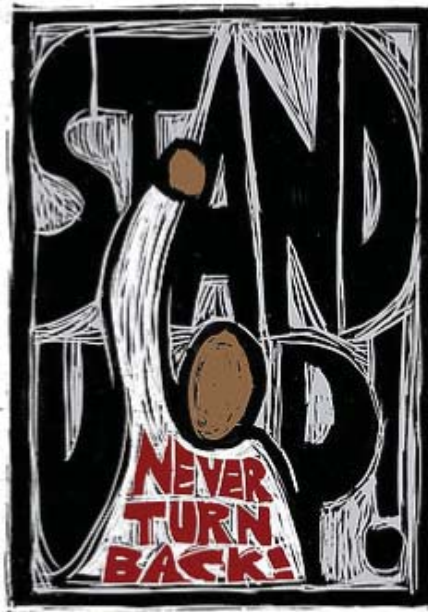
parents and Catholic school teachers taught us to treat others with kindness and respect, but paradoxically the inequitable and segregated system in which we lived was neither questioned nor critiqued. Even our Catholic church had segregated seating, and as a little girl I remember the indignant reactions of white parishioners when a black church member dared to begin sitting in the 'white' section of the church. I remember wondering why the 'yard man' came to the side door and not the front, and why adult black women were addressed by their first names, but that is about as far as I seemed to have gone as a child in questioning the system.

By my late teens I was a "liberal" and went on to become involved in many racial and social justice causes, including Dr. Martin Luther King's "Poor People's Campaign" and community development initiatives in New Orleans' poorest neighborhoods. Yet now, as I become increasingly aware of the countless ways I have benefitted from a white supremacy system that exploits and disadvantages people of color, none of this feels like enough. I am experiencing with increasing urgency the need to stand at every opportunity with others committed to this cause, to fulfill a strong current calling on my life and heart to foster racial justice, restitution, and healing. I recognize this call also as an expression of human/spiritual values that I have long held most dear: that all be lifted, embraced, affirmed and respected, and that all have the opportunities needed to develop their full capacity, to fulfill their highest aspirations, and to know their worth and beauty.

The Racial Justice Core Group provides us a sound place of beginning, an opportunity to listen, to learn, and eventually to act. I hope that this group will increase my consciousness of racial justice issues, strengthen my capacity to listen deeply to others, make me a more effective ally, and propel me to affirm at every opportunity the worth, equality, dignity, and beauty of us all.

Personally, I have seen admirable racial justice values and commitments in our UUCU congregation. My hope thus would be that

these continue to deepen, and that we will continue to learn from and partner with others in the cause of transforming our community and world.



*Stand Up*, mixed media art by Ricardo Levins Morales



## TACKLING THE SOMETIMES CONFUSING WORK OF JUSTICE

by Rachel Pepper, High School Youth Advisor



As one of the five high school advisors here at the UUCC, I was excited to see that our congregation’s Vision and subsequent “Call To Action” includes *all* ages. I’ve been working with the high school youth for about four years and have come to appreciate their passion and idealism.

The October worship service led by our youth titled, “What

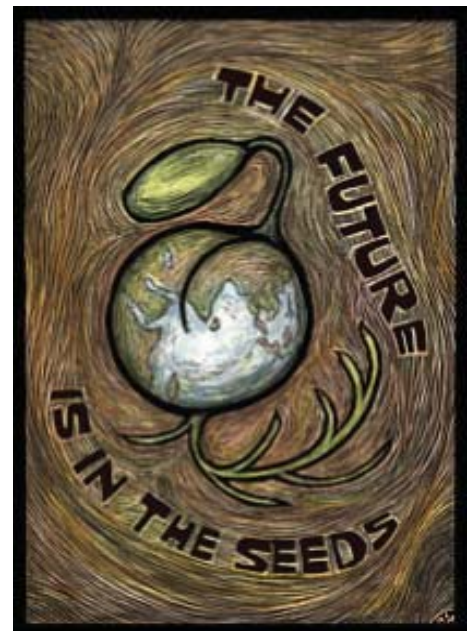
Would You Do?” was evidence that these teens view our world—their world—as an often confusing and unjust place. During their annual retreat a few weeks prior to the service, the advisors prompted them with “racial justice” and gave them a few minutes of meditation to reflect on their experiences before being invited to share. Some of the stories shared that night made it into their service as personal reflections. Like many of the adults here, they are frustrated at times, wanting to do the right thing but unsure what that means. Their service was both an admission of confusion and a call to action.

Two weeks after the service, I took six of our teens to a weekend-long leadership conference at the Greenville UU Fellowship (SC), which included a focus on racial justice. I was blown away by the ideas, thoughts, and opinions these teens were eagerly sharing. The weekend was a not an easy one. Two experiences were particularly challenging.

The first was an exercise on marginalization. Two youth were selected, at random, right before lunch. As we all stood in line for lunch, one of the facilitators called out to them, “Hey you, get to the back of the line!” They were then told where to sit for lunch and when we were finished, told to stay behind and clean up. It was very hard to just watch. A few of our youth confronted the facilitator about how it wasn’t fair. Instead of going back downstairs for free time, they decided to help the “marginalized” youth clean the kitchen. They got it.

The second experience was a presentation by two members of the Greenville congregation who spoke about the prejudice they experience as a interracial couple. Looking around at the youth, I could tell that they were deeply affected, at a loss as to what to say, or how to react. My hope is that the work we are doing over the next few years will help them learn how to handle these situations as they crop up in their lives. It’s important to have empathy, but what we’re teaching them is how to become advocates, how to stand up and use their voices.

I recently graduated from Queens University where Dr. Daina Nathaniel teaches an intercultural communications course that I was lucky enough to attend. At my request, Dr. Nathaniel came to our Children and Youth Religious Education (CYRE) class and led an interactive discussion around



*The Future is in the Seeds*  
mixed media art by Ricardo Levins Morales

language and how it is misconstrued and perceived across different cultures. I believe the youth left with a deeper understanding of words, and how *what* we say, and *how* we say it can affect those around us.

Our youth group is typically more racially diverse than the congregation as a whole. Are the white youth always as inclusive and open to listening to their classmates of color as they claim to be? No, not always. They are young and they don’t always live up to their own ideals. My hope is that after this year, they will be able to put action behind their words, both in their personal interactions and in the larger world. Regardless of their imperfections, I’m proud of them and I’m hopeful that they will share their love wherever they go and lead by example.

## “Moving Toward Transformation”

*continued from page 3*

We also invested in the Racial Justice Advocacy Program a series sponsored by the Stan Greenspon Center for Peace and Social Justice at Queens University. A dozen of our members attended the panel discussions which explored our community’s history and present struggles with race and racism. One of the sessions was particularly emotional as we listened to three mothers talk about the loss of their sons at the hands of police, giving a human face to events we have seen through the lens of the media.

*“Throughout the long arc of this year, I will be listening to the conversations we’re having as we delve deeper into the issues of environmental and racial justice. Regardless of the level of knowledge we arrive with, I don’t think any of us will walk away unaffected.”*

The ARES D Team wants to be responsive to the needs of the congregation. We’ll continue engaging in community discussions, along with our own film series, book discussion groups and a new EJ curriculum. Our goal is to move together toward a common understanding of the issues. Then we’ll be ready to answer the question: What does transformation look like?

The ARES D Team has a special interest in exploring how spirituality informs activism, and how activism informs spirituality. In a recent workshop attended by 40 members, our visiting minister Kathleen McTigue emphasized our need to be grounded in our values as we prepare for our work in the community. An additional course offering in January will provide ongoing support for spiritually-based activism. Throughout the long arc of this year, I will be listening to the conversations we’re having as we delve deeper into the issues of environmental and racial justice. Regardless of the level of knowledge we arrive with, I don’t think any of us will walk away unaffected.

## “A Shift in View”

*continued from page 6*

Charlotte has been my city for 39 years. I still miss the accessible lakes of my childhood. But I’ve made peace with where I am. I got involved with the county’s greenway program and documented the seven-year daylighting and restoration of Little Sugar Creek’s metro section. I led a successful effort to restore a flood plain and create Briar Creek access for my neighbors. For 25 years I’ve volunteered for the Catawba Lands Conservancy and other organizations that protect land and waterways from development forever. It turns out that activism for the Common Good is a balm for the soul too.

I joined the Environmental Justice Core Group as a familiar side door into what is an uncomfortable space for me—racial justice (but that’s another story). I seek a shift in my thinking, clarification of, and the ability to articulate my views. I am also looking for reconnection after ten years of scant participation in the life of the UUCC.



*Environmental Justice*  
mixed media art by Ricardo Levins Morales

## THIS ISSUE'S CONTRIBUTORS:



### **Karen Bringle**

Karen is a lifelong UU who has retired as a clinical social worker. She aspires to beginning a "second act" as a community social worker/educator. Her favorite things at this time in her life are her cats, playing bridge with persons of many colors, and learning how to dismantle racism.

### **Charles King**

Charles is semi-retired from a career with high tech start-up companies, with a focus on electrical engineering and management, specializing in reliability testing. He comes from a military family, and has moved over twenty times, between Europe and many different states. He has an avid interest in environmental activism.



### **Anne Magnuson**

Anne and husband Evan moved from Louisiana to Charlotte in 2015 to be near their first grandchildren, twins who are now two. The couple and daughter Laura are UCC members and attend regularly, joined by son Matt when he is in town. Anne majored in international studies, and her career involved public policy

planning, community development, and work with homeless and disadvantaged communities. She enjoys volunteering with children and has had a decades-long interest in spiritual studies, including, since 2010, the Diamond Approach.



### **Ricardo Levins Morales**

Earlier this year we discovered Ricardo's artwork online and contacted him about using it to promote the social justice work we're pursuing here at the UCC. You'll see his engravings and mixed media pieces reproduced throughout this issue of *Soundings*. Ricardo was born in the coffee growing

mountains of western Puerto Rico and moved to the US in 1967. His art has grown up inseparably entwined with his activism and sense of community. For Ricardo, art is "a collection of medicinal herbs and nutrients that can help individuals, communities and societies overcome the cultural toxins that keep them from making needed changes." He lives in Minneapolis, MN, where he works out of a storefront studio. Visit [www.rlmartstudio.com](http://www.rlmartstudio.com) for more information about Ricardo and his art.

### **Nancy Pierce**

Nancy Pierce has worked as a documentary photographer all her adult life. Her client list reflects her interests in land and water protection, sustainable communities, active transportation, social justice and the common good. She has photographed General Assembly for the Unitarian Universalist Association every year since 1993. Nancy and her husband Mickey Shaver raised two sons in the UCC.



### **Rachel Pepper**

Rachel is a Charlotte native and lifelong UU. She attended the Open Door School and has been active in our congregation's Children and Youth Religious Education Program practically since birth, including her current role as a Youth Advisor. She is a Queens University graduate

as of May 2017. She describes herself as: babysitter, daughter, photographer, cat mom, and friend.

# SOUNDINGS

## CHURCH OFFICE HOURS:

MONDAY-FRIDAY, 9 AM - 5 PM

PHONE 704-366-8623 | FAX 704-366-8812

EMAIL: [UCC@UCCCHARLOTTE.ORG](mailto:UCC@UCCCHARLOTTE.ORG)

WEBSITE: [WWW.UCCCHARLOTTE.ORG](http://WWW.UCCCHARLOTTE.ORG)

## UCC PROFESSIONAL STAFF

**Unitarian Universalist**  
Church of Charlotte



**Kathleen Carpenter**, Director of Religious Education for Children & Youth  
704-366-8623, ext. 6034  
[kathleen@uuccharlotte.org](mailto:kathleen@uuccharlotte.org)  
*Children and Youth Religious Education (CYRE),  
Denominational Connections, Young Adult Group (YAG)*

**Donna Fisher**, Children's Choir Director  
[donnfish@bellsouth.net](mailto:donnfish@bellsouth.net)  
*Children's Choir*

**Kelly Greene**, Membership Coordinator  
704-366-8623, ext. 6039  
[kelly@uuccharlotte.org](mailto:kelly@uuccharlotte.org)  
*Membership Team, New Members,  
Stewardship, Visitors, Volunteer Coordination*

**John Herrick**, Director of Music  
704-366-8623, ext. 6037  
[john@uuccharlotte.org](mailto:john@uuccharlotte.org)  
*Music, Stewardship, Worship*

**Alesia Hutto**, Office Administrator  
704-366-8623, ext. 6030  
[alesia@uuccharlotte.org](mailto:alesia@uuccharlotte.org)  
*Administrative Support, Communications*

**Martha Kniseley**, Adult Programming Coordinator  
704-366-8623, ext. 6036  
[martha@uuccharlotte.org](mailto:martha@uuccharlotte.org)  
*Adult Religious Education and Spiritual Development (ARESD),  
Community Building, Congregational Care, Environmental  
Transformation*

**Jay Leach**, Senior Minister  
704-366-8623, ext. 6032  
[jay@uuccharlotte.org](mailto:jay@uuccharlotte.org)  
*Chief of Staff, Coordinating Team, Social Justice, Worship*

**Belinda Parry**, Administrative Assistant  
704-366-8623, ext. 6033  
[belinda@uuccharlotte.org](mailto:belinda@uuccharlotte.org)  
*Part-time Administrative Support, CYRE Support*

**Doug Swaim**, Director of Administration  
704-366-8623, ext. 6031  
[doug@uuccharlotte.org](mailto:doug@uuccharlotte.org)  
*Building & Grounds, Communications, Coordinating Team, Environmental Transformation, Finance, Memorial Endowment Trust, Open Door School, Security*