

**God is Still Speaking - Through Anti-Racism Work in  
The United Church of Christ in Vermont Today!**

The cruel insults uttered too softly for teachers to hear. The scribbled threats tucked through the vents in the locker door.

From Sutton to Harwood Union to Windsor, in school systems throughout our green hills and mostly white population, students of color have faced enough racism to make them fearful and unable to focus on their studies, so much so that some have seen doctors for stress-related illness. Others are being home-schooled or have transferred to other schools at great expense to their families.

How do we raise our children to recognize stereotypes and racism? How do we empower them to stand up for the vulnerable, as we are commissioned by Christ?

The Uprooting Racism Task Force -- a working group within our Department of Mission of the Vermont Conference of the United Church of Christ -- is charged with the responsibility to help us identify and uproot, or unlearn, racism in ourselves, in our churches, and in our communities.

The task force brought together resources and inspiration to run a pilot program in St. Johnsbury in the winter of 2006, set in the combined Sunday School classes of North Congregational Church and St. Andrew's Episcopal Church and welcoming youth from other churches and from no church. Classes for preschool through grade 8 met to read and discuss stories that explored racism, to sing and do crafts that enhanced their learning, and to practice skills to be allies. The middle school youth traveled to Swanton for a field trip to visit Abenaki sacred sites and meet with elders to gain a greater understanding of the experience of the Abenaki here in Vermont today. A high school group watched a movie together and discussed racism and our response as Christians. A community-wide interfaith service of reconciliation and an inter-church "strategy café" for community discussion and planning rounded out the program.

This program was tailored to meet the needs of youth and families in a rural community with multiple churches, where it was important to bring youth together to have diverse perspectives in our

discussions and enough youth involved to really have a fun and meaningful experience.

The dream had been to get this program on our Vermont Conference web site, in a form that could be easily accessible to churches and their Christian educators throughout the state and beyond. We welcome new volunteers to help us move forward in this initiative, but in the mean time we would enthusiastically welcome the opportunity to help your community develop a pilot for racial justice education, tailored to the needs of your youth and your congregations. Our Conference Resource Center has a wide selection of books for all ages, as well as videos and other materials. Whether for a Vacation Bible School, part of your Sunday School curriculum for next year, or in another setting, these stories, discussions, and songs can enrich your children's journey of exploring how God wants us to be with each other.

We are also glad to refer you to people who can help you set up a Reading to End Racism program in your local school, Study Circles throughout your community, or anti-racism training in your church or other setting.

And when your church has an opening for a pastor, Christian educator, or organist, we encourage you to consider a person of color and "do your homework" to recruit, welcome and support the candidate's family in a predominantly European-descended community, so that God's love may truly shine through your fellowship.

- Betty Keller

For more information, contact the Conference office, 802-728-4999,  
or [vtconference@vtcucc.org](mailto:vtconference@vtcucc.org)

