

JUNETEENTH DAY

As we celebrate our national independence on July 4th with parades and picnics, and by ringing our church bell in Thetford, many African Americans also celebrate Juneteenth Day with religious ceremonies followed by parades and barbecues. "Juneteenth" commemorates the date, June 19, 1865, when the last enslaved peoples received the news of their freedom, during the fall of Galveston to the Union Army. Although President Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation became official on January 1, 1863, word of the Proclamation took 2 1/2 years to reach slaves in Texas. To ensure continued freedom of former slaves, the Thirteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution outlawing any form of slavery or involuntary servitude was ratified on December 6, 1865.

Observation of the Juneteenth holiday waned over time, but took on new life in the late 1960s. In 1968, during the Poor People's March on Washington, civil rights leader Rev. Ralph Abernathy used the occasion to call for people of all races, creeds, and economic levels to come and show support for the poor. As a result, many states and communities, including Burlington Vermont, gave official recognition to Juneteenth Day.

The Vermont Legislature passed Joint Resolutions for several years designating June 19

as Juneteenth Day in the state. The Uprooting Racism Task Force of the Department of Mission, Vermont Conference, UCC, was active in supporting the passage of these Resolutions.

In 2008, the Legislature set the third Saturday of June as an annual State Holiday.

One of the ways in which "God Is Still Speaking" in the UCC is manifest in the work of the URTF, whose mission is "To uproot racism in ourselves, our churches, and our communities."

Helen MacLam



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