

## **Unto Others: The Challenge of Inclusion**



**© Rev. Carolyn L. Price**

**January 9, 2005**

**Universalist Unitarian Church of Santa Paula**

Each year at Passover, all around the world the Jewish people retell and re-live the experience of being oppressed and enslaved, and then after a long struggle in desolate land, finally finding freedom and a home of promise. The Torah, the Five Books of Moses, says over and over again: "When a stranger sojourns into your land, you shall not wrong him. You shall not oppress the alien, for you know how it feels to be an alien; you were aliens yourselves in Egypt." (Leviticus 19:33-34) In Judaism, this commandment to treat the stranger well is repeated more often than any other. The mandate of welcoming the stranger – and particularly those in need, is found in every religion and wisdom tradition in the world. It is in the founding vision of this country: *Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, the wretched refuse of your teeming shore, send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed, to me: I lift my lamp beside the golden door.*

Many of our Unitarian and our Universalist forebears came to America as strangers, as exiles from religious intolerance and persecution. John Murray, the great Universalist, arrived as an alien on our shores, penniless, and tormented not only by personal loss but by the discrimination he endured for daring to preach of a god whose love embraced everyone. And not one of us here, unless there is a Native American among us today, can trace our land of origin to this country. Not one.

And yet, here we are, in 2005, in a state where immigration – especially from our neighbors to the south – is a huge, complex and conflicted issue. Not only is it emotionally charged but it is part of a larger global economic and social system that defies easy understanding. This morning I come to this issue first and foremost as a human being, then as a Unitarian Universalist minister, woman, and mother, and a fifth

generation Californian. I will ground my thinking— and know that it is my own here — theologically, while striving to raise issues and questions we can all discuss — for those who are so inclined —this morning at 11:45, here in the sanctuary. Then next week our guest speaker will talk about housing issues faced by farm-workers here in Santa Paula and in Ventura Country, most of whom are Latino immigrants.

Our churches are part of a larger movement called the Unitarian Universalist Association, or UUA. An important achievement of the UUA in the last ten years has been to covenant to be an inclusive, anti-oppressive, anti-racist, and multicultural organization. As an association, we have agreed to work for justice in this world in ways that are also inclusive, anti-oppressive, anti-racist, and multicultural. Today as we approach this topic of immigration let us begin with a good look inward, examining our own location within the landscape that we seek to understand.

Racism is defined as prejudice plus power. Prejudice is prejudgment, that which we are aware of and that which goes unnoticed. Most of us in this room probably have some knowledge of our prejudgments about Latino immigrants, though I imagine we grow less clear when we talk about legal vs. illegal. In the definition of racism as *prejudice plus power*, power means the ability and the means to enforce prejudice. White power and economic power are just two of the forms of power prevalent in California, and the US at large. And this is complicated by the interplay of gender, class, sexual orientation, disability and more.

I have never been poor. Have you? I have never gone hungry for lack of food. I have never been turned away from a job because of the color of my skin, or asked for papers to prove my right to live and work in this country. Have you? I have never been

afraid that my children would not learn to read and write or that they would have to sell candy on the sidewalk to strangers when they were five years old. I have never been stopped by the police because I was driving on the “wrong side” of the tracks in the “wrong kind” of car. Have you? And I have never even contemplated what I read about this week in the paper, a poverty so desperate that I would try to smuggle my ten year old across the border hidden behind the dashboard of a car, so close to the engine that the heat seared her skin. Have you?

Most Unitarian Universalists are like us - located soundly within the safe zone, privileged to have not only our basic needs met, but many economic and material desires met as well. We rank consistently among the upper middle class of this country – this in a world where 800 million people are chronically undernourished. This is a world where 3 billion people live on less than \$2 per day while 1.3 billion get by on less than \$1 per day, and seventy percent of are women. With global population growing 80 million per year, World Bank President James Wolfensohn has warned that, unless we – the wealthy and powerful nations of the world – address "the challenge of inclusion," 30 years from now we will have 5 billion people on this planet trying to survive on less than \$2 a day.

As Unitarian Universalists we have a role to play in this “challenge of inclusion”. We have a role first and foremost because of our history, because we have long worked for justice and for the common good. We have a role because of who we are: an inclusive, anti-oppressive, anti-racist, and multicultural movement. Our congregations may never represent demographically and ethnically all the world’s people, but our theology can and does and should, and our hearts’ desire can and does and should. As a people of privilege, of power, we are located soundly within the axis of potential change.

One of the things a good theology does is ask hard questions – as this theology of inclusion asks us to step outside our usual ways and engage with the other – with our brothers and sisters who do not look like us, who when they come here do not act like us, but who inside are made of the same flesh and blood and bones, the same heart and brain, and most of all the same hope and dreams as our own. A theology of inclusion will lead us to challenge the way power is used in this land, and to begin to question if illegal is the same as wrong.

The Unitarian minister and theologian James Luther Adams used the phrase “sufficiency” to describe the phenomena of “having enough” in life, enough so that certain basic human needs are met. He said that a primary responsibility of ethical and religious human beings is to work to ensure that all the world’s people experience “sufficiency”. This was his response to the enduring and sometimes perplexing question – does any one person, class, or country have the right to own so much that it leads to deprivation – to the absence of primary needs for others, especially for whole groups or countries of others? The answer, resounding from all the world’s religions and wisdom traditions is no.

In a vigorous sectarian rejoinder, the United Nations Development Program has calculated that an annual 4 percent levy on the world's 225 most well-to-do people would suffice to provide the following essentials for all those in developing countries: adequate food, safe water and sanitation, basic education, basic health care and reproductive health care.

I said it is important that we not turn away from the difficult issues raised by immigration. I will begin with myself. The school around the corner from my house – the

neighborhood school – is 98% Latino – filled, often over-filled, with children whose families came from Mexico or Guatemala or El Salvador and other Latin American countries. These children came to America with their families sometime between last week and several generations ago. It is a much better education system here, I am told, than in their countries of origin. That makes me am glad for the children. I believe that every person, and especially every child, has a profound and inalienable right to a good education.

But my children do not go to this school. They never have and my oldest is in the seventh grade. I looked into it, visited, spoke with teachers and parents. While there were attractive points, in the end we decided not to send our daughters there. Too many reports of gang activity, of violence – risks that we were not willing to take for our girls. Too many reports of classes negatively impacted by language issues and/or behavior problems. And so both of my children have gone to a public charter school, some 12 miles away, now increasingly diverse ethnically, but for many years a perfect portrait of a “white-flight” school.

When I was a teacher though, I taught in schools like the one in my neighborhood, even sought them out. And in Santa Barbara I am active in the CLUE group – Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice – where I support the rights of immigrants, legal and illegal, to a decent and fair life in California. I am telling you this because I want to be clear that what may seems clear from a human and especially a religiously viewpoint, can become complicated in real life. I have no easy answers.

As Unitarian Universalists we appreciate the use of reason and rational inquiry in our lives and in our theology. And so I researched long and hard for this sermon. I knew

that immigrants from the south have come to California for some time. But what I did not know (or know well) was that for as long as California has needed people to work, we have looked outward for labor, in particular for cheap labor. Our history of opening and closing our borders according to our own needs<sup>1</sup> is long, and is a long way from exemplary in terms of what it means to be a good neighbor. Let me explain.

Early on, we welcomed the Chinese, though we did not give them the easy or well paying jobs as a rule. You will remember that they built the railroad across the Sierra Nevada mountain range during two long and extraordinarily cold winters. Then we revoked our welcome with the Chinese Exclusion Act. And for a while we welcomed the Japanese. Between 1850 and 1880, 55,000 Mexican workers immigrated to the United States to work on ranches and in the fields, many of them in regions that had, until very recently, actually belonged to Mexico.

When World War I came, with many of our men overseas fighting, we really laid out the welcome mat for our southern neighbors. We gave them jobs, primarily in agriculture and mining – jobs that didn't pay well, and we didn't ask too many questions. Mexico at this time was in the aftermath of the Spanish American war, and in an economic downturn that left many jobless, and which some say Mexico has never recovered from. And thus began what is known as the *Bracero* program. Some of you may know of this program. I learned about it from the ranchers I worked with out on Santa Rosa Island. Bracero means “Strong Arm”, which was literally what US farmers, ranchers and miners were looking for – strong and able men who could do hard work for a meager wage and in generally miserable living conditions. When the war ended, most

of the braceros were shipped back to Mexico, to try to make a life there, while in this country, depression furthered American resistance to immigration.

But history has a way of changing things. When World War II depleted the source of farm labor at home again, America once more looked south. The *bracero* program was reinstated and to some extent reformed. Between 1942 and 1964 millions of Mexicans were imported into the US, many here in California, to work on farms and ranches. Then in the late 1960's there was a growing concern about the overflow of "illegal" immigrants working, as well as vast improvements in farm equipment, and so the *bracero* program was phased out. In the end this approach to welcoming the stranger had a record badly marked by decidedly un-neighborly treatment of our neighbors.

The average wage in Mexico today is under \$7 a day. While NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) was designed to improve the economy, in Mexico the results have been catastrophic. The *Maquiladora* industry – the factories – has fallen 20% as more companies move to China, where labor is even cheaper than Mexico. Thousands of Mexican companies have been put out of business because of the rising rate of imports due to NAFTA. Small farmers have been virtually wiped out by subsidized U.S. food imports.

Today in Mexico, approximately 40 percent of the population lives below the poverty line. But here in the United States, even undocumented workers make an average of 10 times the daily wage in Mexico, or US \$70. You know how Christians ask "What would Jesus do?" Well I think we all know what Jesus would do under these circumstances. But what if today we take a moment to imagine that each of us was born into a country where, no matter what we tried, we could not earn enough to decently

house our family, or feed them – what if today we ask ourselves, “what would *I* do?” This money sent from Mexican immigrants in the US to their families back home is the second highest source of income in Mexico, after oil, surpassing even the tourism industry. In 2003 it totaled over \$13 billion<sup>2</sup>.

To add to the complexity of this situation, a well known practice, one that our own country participates in, is for rich countries to find ways to take the resources of poorer countries in an attempt to re-stabilize their own. In Mexico, people are that resource. “The average immigrant (from Mexico and other Latin countries) has more than twice the years of schooling than the non-immigrant.<sup>3</sup>” The departure of these more educated people leads ultimately to a loss of innovation, creativity, and tax revenues.

We know that illegal immigrants come here lured by the possibility of a better life, and of steady, better paying work. Less known is that many come with this work already arranged – set up by individuals and corporations who deal directly with coyotes or smugglers, who bring in large numbers of illegal Mexican and Latin American workers at meager pay and often in inhumane conditions<sup>4</sup>. Less known is the unwillingness or inability from the Mexican government to change the economic wasteland of that country. From Time Magazine, this last October: “The chronic reason (for illegal immigration) is a Mexican economy unable to provide jobs with a living wage to a growing population.<sup>5</sup>” And while we all know that our borders are not secure, less known is the intense and persistent lobbying pressure from agriculture and corporations to keep the flow of immigrants – legal *and* illegal – coming into this country.

The story goes round that immigrants, especially the illegal ones, take more than they receive. But statistics show that the average immigrant contributes \$1800 more in

taxes than he or she receives in benefits and services provided by the government<sup>6</sup>.

Undocumented immigrants are not eligible for public assistance. And not often publicized is the existence of a social security fund, called the Suspense Fund, where all the money goes that is paid in by those who have used false social security number, largely illegal migrants. This fund has been called the “migrant windfall<sup>7</sup>” of social security because that money is eventually rolled over into the social security fund, where it is used to finance American pensions.

In November 2004<sup>8</sup> the United Nations reported that despite widespread negative attitudes about immigration in the industrialized world, migrants do not in fact drive wages down significantly or raise unemployment rates in the countries they go to. Immigrants “add to the gross national product and generally contribute more to government coffers than they take out”, according to the recent (2004) World Economic and Social Survey. UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan has stated that “We cannot ignore the real policy difficulties posed by migration, but neither should we lose sight of its immense potential to benefit migrants, the countries they leave and those to which they migrate.<sup>9</sup>” Above all, he said “we must ensure that in our approach to this issue, we uphold the values of tolerance and respect for human rights.”

This is where we come in as Unitarian Universalists, as people who well know how to do as the Rabbi Hillel taught so long ago, which we heard about in the story this morning – how to stand on one foot and say clearly the central teaching of what it is to be a religious person: *Do unto others as you would have done unto you*. And as Unitarian Universalists, we well know that welcoming the stranger is part of who we have been, who we are, and who we seek – always – to become.

*Who is my neighbor?*, Jesus was asked some two thousand years ago. Turns out my neighbor is every man and woman and child. Do you remember how, in the story of the Good Samaritan, only one person was able to be a good neighbor to the man lying injured in the road? I am sorry to say it was not the Rabbi, or the high ranking official of the temple. These two men crossed to the other side of the road and walked right by their neighbor. Only when a foreigner from Samaria, a people estranged from Jerusalem, came upon the scene, did someone stop on that dusty road to help the injured man, a man who by all rights was a stranger, a foe, and someone he should fear.

Perhaps he was afraid, but the man from Samaria did not let that stop him. Perhaps he was unsure if he should help, because the person lying on the ground was different and reviled by most Samaritans. Perhaps he was angry, because of bad blood between their people. Or he just had other things to do, and a world of problems of his own. But whatever he felt that might have turned him away, he did not turn away. He stayed and he helped. Moved, the author of the gospel of Luke tells us, by compassion, he helped the stranger, this man whose own people had walked right by him.

We cannot walk by. Not here, where our church is in a town that is mostly made up of Latino immigrants, who comprise nearly half the population of our state, and who to this day do hard work for meager pay. Not here, where on a good day, we can still feel the exhilarating force of the founding vision of this country as a land of freedom and promise for all. Not here, where we sit beneath that glorious window each Sunday, with those timeless words ever-echoing above us: *Beloved, let us love one another*. Not here, where so many walk by.

We cannot walk by. We do not have to agree on what is true or right or best to do. We do not have to become activists overnight. But as Unitarian Universalists, as a religious people who have covenanted to affirm and promote the challenge of inclusion, we cannot walk by. Not here, not now, and most of all, not us. For – let us never forget – we too were strangers once.

Paz a ustedes y a todo el mundo.

Peace to you and to all the world.

Amen and Shalom

---

<sup>1</sup> [www.pbs.org/kpbs/theborder/history/timeline/17.html](http://www.pbs.org/kpbs/theborder/history/timeline/17.html) and <http://www.pbs.org/frontlineworld/stories/mexico/facts.html>.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.pbs.org/frontlineworld/stories/mexico/facts.html>

<sup>3</sup> As noted in the *Arizona Daily Star*, November 20, 2004.

<http://www.dailystar.com/dailystar/printDS/50310.php>

<sup>4</sup> See Donald L. Bartlett, James B. Steel, *America's Borders: Special Investigation*, Time Magazine, Sept. 20, 2004.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid*

<sup>6</sup> National Immigration Forum, Wash DC.

<sup>7</sup> Mark Stevenson, *Social Security's Migrant Windfall*, *Arizona Daily Star*, August 31, 2004.

<sup>8</sup> As noted in the *Arizona Daily Star*, November 20, 2004.

<http://www.dailystar.com/dailystar/printDS/50310.php>

<sup>9</sup> *ibid*

### **Selected Bibliography**

“Ethics and Social Action” from the *Free Church in a Changing World* (Boston: UUA, 1963)

*Who Left the Door Open?*

Donald L. Bartlett, James B. Steel, *America's Borders: Special Investigation*, Time Magazine, Sept. 20, 2004.

*Taking Justice to the Community: The Unitarian Universalist Service Committee's Just Works Program*, Kimberly French, UUA World, Sept/Oct 2002.

Kimberly French, *The Products of Slavery*, UU World, Nov/Dec 2004, VOL XVIII NO 6.

### **UU Resources**

#### **Unitarian Universalist Migrant Ministry**

Contact: Rev. Kenneth Brown

---

(818) 760-2932  
UUREV@aol.com

The Unitarian Universalist Migrant Ministry works for human rights by assisting migrant workers and immigrants in the United States. The Migrant Ministry is the Unitarian Universalist affiliate of the National Farm Worker Ministry and it supports labor union organizing

### **Unitarian Universalists for a just Economic Community**

John Gilmore  
16 Ashland Street  
Haverhill, MA 01830  
(617) 542-0643  
uujec@earthlink.net  
<http://www.uujec.org>

Over 1,000 UUs have created a grassroots network to foster systemic change, encouraging UU Congregations to work toward economic justice. Our vision is of small democratic communities of solidarity, resistance, action, and reflection, moving toward global justice and sustainability. We foster that vision with: a six-session adult RE curriculum, youth curriculum, newsletter, web site, annual conference, presence at General Assembly, pulpit programs, chapters and organizers linked by list serves and ongoing relationships. Three major current areas of concern: (1) Working Family Agenda, seeking to establish labor/interfaith coalitions, advocacy, "Worker Memorial Day" in the church calendar, and social services designed to end poverty; (2) Media & Democracy, addressing corporate control of the media and its effects on freedom of speech and democracy, activist training; (3) Globalization, dialog and cross-border solidarity.

### **LUUNA (Latina/o UU Networking Association)**

C/O Rev. Jose Ballester  
46 Greentree Lane #13  
South Weymouth, MA 02190  
[luunaysol@aol.com](mailto:luunaysol@aol.com)

LUUNA is multicultural continental association of Unitarian Universalists dedicated to:

- 1) Attracting more Latina/os to our Unitarian Universalist tradition and for enhancing their participation within it by providing support, guidance, fellowship and advocacy.
- 2) Educating the larger Unitarian Universalist community about Latina/o history, culture and diversity; and facilitating Unitarian Universalist involvement in current issues that affect the various Latina/o communities.
- 3) Sharing aspects of Latina/o spiritual heritage, personal journeys and emerging UU Latina/o Liberation Theology with the larger Unitarian Universalist community thus enriching the worship, mission, and spirituality of our chosen faith.

---

4) Interacting with the Unitarian Universalist Association and other Unitarian Universalist organizations in order to enhance the justice-making abilities of LUUNA and the aforementioned organizations.

5) Interacting with other justice-making and multicultural organizations in order to bring about effective social change within our Unitarian Universalist movement so that it can truly become multicultural and empowering of traditionally marginalized and under-represented communities.

Membership in LUUNA is not restricted to Latina/os; it is open to all persons who are in sympathy with the aforementioned purposes, without regard to race, color, sex, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, ethnic or national origin, marital status, physical or mental disability, citizenship, political affiliation and shall not require any adherence to any particular interpretation of religion or to any particular religious belief or creed.