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Synopsis.

For my section in the ministry manual I looked at the United Church of Christ and its history of social Justice with an emphasis on multi-cultural issues. The UCC has a long history on issues dealing with social justice and dealing with multi-cultural issues. The UCC is the conglomeration of the Congregationalist Churches from the north east and the German Reformed church. These congregations especially the Congregationalist churches have been on the forefront of issues on race and multi-culturalism. For example these churches were the first to speak out openly against slavery, and pushed for freeing of slaves prior to the declaration of emancipation as far back as the Amistad incident. This heritage has come through to the twenty and twenty-first century as well. The UCC Has always had as a part of their defining creed that all races and creeds of people are created equal and have exspressedly worked to rid the world of injustice based on race as well as sexism. The new frontier for The United Church of Christ is in integrating Gay Lesbian, Bisexual, and Trandgendered (Queer) individuals into the life of the church. This is a movement toward a new multi-culturalism, where being queer is as much of an identity, if not more so, than one's race. That being said, there continues to be a great insistence on the part of the UCC to fight for muti-racial churches and to remain a testing ground fro all people of any background to feel welcomed and at home. One only need to cull over the denominational website <http://www.ucc.org> to see the largely socially justice minded bent of the work of the UCC. The UCC

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also prides itself on doing this work through books as well with the using of their United Church Press to print works that seek to fight injustice on racial as well as in all area of inequality. This paper looks at a multi-cultural visit. True this visit too many may not seem multi cultural because it steps outside of the lines and defines being queer as a culture. The author of this paper as well as those he consulted feel overwhelmingly that being queer is indeed a cultural status. This paper also looks at an interview done by its author with two individuals, one black and one Puerto Rican, who is also a UCC member. Although it would be to far reaching to speak of their experiences as being different because of denominational affiliation, it must also not be swept under the rug that Roberto has had a much better experience in church and has found much less pain in his interaction with the church than what Kenita has. Finally there is a section on an annotated bibliography, this bibliography looks at many sources most of which are connected with the UCC, and is in no means complete. Given the confines of finding places where race was the predominate issue the books and sights deal with race. However, if multi-culturalism was the issue the sighted placed would be exponentially larger for the author would have been able to integrate the work on the part of the UCC in reference to inclusion of queer individuals.

Muti-Cultural exsperience.

For my multi-cultural exsperience I decided that I would bend the confines of multi-culturalism and speak about a culture I am aware of as being under represented that of The Gay Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgendered community. The queer community in my experience identifies for the most part across racial

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lines and ethnicity as first and foremost queer. It is my assumption that this identification is due to the concentration around the area of life that one is set apart most in. For my visit I decided to look at my home church, that of Douglass Congregational United Church of Christ. Demographically this church is approximately 40% gay. The gay men and woman in the congregation do come from cross section of different races and ethnicities and yet when I spoke to the people of the congregation who are gay I found that overwhelmingly the gay individuals in the congregation identify themselves as gay first or at least equally with ethnicity. Douglas UCC is an open and affirming congregation. Even before the statement by the UCC in 1985 to become open and affirming Douglas UCC for years had been a refuge for Queer people.

In this congregation being queer is part of the life of the church for many, not in contrast to it. The Church observes pride events like coming out day and makes a concerted effort to support organizations coming from the queer perspective.

When I asked people from the church why they attended the church the answers were pretty much all the same. They answered because I feel at home here. In this church people can just be who they are. They don't need to be afraid of hiding themselves or their sexuality; it is just seen as part of what makes them whole. Sexuality—whether it be heterosexual or homosexual—is not avoided at the church. It is spoken of as a necessary and blessed part of life. This congregation also holds families at the forefront of the congregation. The church has gay and straight families and privileges them both. It must be noted that Douglas UCC is a congregation that speaks openly about social justice in

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general and seeks to work for social justice on a local and international level so it just makes sense that sexuality and inequality would be an issue for the church.

Interview

For my interview, I interviewed two people both of a different race than mine. The individuals I interviewed were Kenita Harris, a fellow seminary student, and a friend of mine, Roberto, who is a member of the church that I work in at this time, Douglas Congregational United Church of Christ (DUCC). Kenita is of African American descent where Roberto is Puerto Rican. This essay will look at the exsperience of both of these individuals and discuss how race affected them in their respective church settings growing up.

I would first like to look at the life of Roberto. Roberto was born in Puerto Rico and lived there for much of his life. In his late twenties he moved to New York City and became an actor for four years. He then returned to Puerto Rico for a few years. He then did a short stint in Florida, and now lives in Michigan with his Partner, Carmello. Roberto was raised Catholic and has an uncle who is a bishop in the church. When I asked Roberto to reflect on how race affected his religious exsperience he told me that race and religion was of little concern for him while he was living in Puerto Rico because he was not a minority. This was also somewhat true in New York City because the church he attended was a multi-racial congregation where there were many other Puerto Rican men and women. Roberto was much more clear that the discrimination he has faced for the most part has been because he is gay. Growing up Catholic this simply was

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not tolerated. This has been an issue of contention in the religious life of Roberto because he had strong connections to the church but ended up leaving because he could no longer reconcile the beliefs of the Puerto Rican Catholic Church with his homosexuality. This issue for Roberto was never really put to rest even when he was in New York. It was not until Roberto came to Michigan and started to attend Douglas Congregational United Church of Christ that he felt he had found a true home in the Church. Roberto is the only non-white individual at DUCG but still does not find his race to be an issue in his religious life. Roberto told me that he feels totally at home, even if he is the only minority. You see, DUCG is a place where the outcasts of the rest of the church come for safe haven. It seems to me that the way in which Roberto identifies himself may have a role in his feeling integrated into the congregation. For example the congregation of DUCG is about 30-45% gay on any given Sunday. Most of these gay individuals are in long-term committed relationships and come together to worship God with each other. The fact that Roberto over his life has received much more discrimination for being gay than he ever has for being Puerto Rican may speak to the fact that one, he feels at home in a church where many are gay and two, his race seems to be a downplayed issue.

The second interview I conducted was with a seminary friend of mine Kenita Harris. Kenita and I have been friends since her first year at Western Seminary and we have often times spoken with each other about what our respective experience with the church has been. For her, as an African American woman, she has been shaped by her race and the culture's reaction to

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her just as I have been shaped by my experience of homosexuality and the church. We often speak of what it means to be an oppressed population especially in the midst of an institution that is not ready to admit its role in oppression.

For Kenita, race has played a major role in her religious life. She attended a mostly black congregation with the exception of a few interracial relationships. Kenita told me that race for black people simply can't be separated from the church. It is a part of who they are as religion is as well. When I asked Kenita how race affects the church she gave me the example of the Joseph story of Genesis, specifically when Joseph was sold into bondage and slavery. For many blacks this story mirrors their lives and the lives of the forbearers and the history of slavery in America. I asked Kenita what it was like growing up in her home, which was very religiously oriented. She told me of how her mother grew up in Mississippi on a plantation and would tell her stories of walking long distances to school. Seeing the white children from the area riding on a school bus compounded this. For Kenita she need not look into the distant past to find the effects of slavery and Jim Crow laws on her family; she only has to talk to her mother. Kenita also told me stories she had learned from her Grandfather about a lynching he had seen and the other grotesque things that were done to black men and women, including the castration of men and then preserving their testicles in formaldehyde and putting them on display as a trophy. I specifically asked Kenita "don't you get tired" and her response to me was "yes, but I feel that it is my call to help with racial reconciliation in the church, when I get tired I

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know I need to keep going out there and telling my story and pushing people to understand through relationships.” She told me that God had wired her for this sort of thing.

Kenita told me something that seems so important: “It is time for everyone to come together and love each other like in the church in Revelations. We have so much to learn from each other. Whites can know and learn so much more about themselves by being in relationship with blacks and visa versa as well.” Kenita said she learned so much more about herself when she was in a truly multiracial setting than she ever has anywhere else.

It was interesting to see how race affects people in the church, and also how oppression in general affects people. I was also surprised at the fact that we are formed in the places we are oppressed in. For example Roberto didn't feel like race was a major issue for him but was greatly affected by the discrimination he had received at the hands of those who disagreed with his homosexuality.

Annotated Bibliography

<http://www.ucc.org/sacred-conversation/pdfs/pastlrracism.pdf>

This is an open letter on behalf of the UCC to pastors guiding them through the process of racial reconciliation. It is a main goal of the UCC to bring about discussion on race relation via the preaching of sermons that will spur on sacred conversations on race.

Beloved Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

On May 18, in United Church of Christ pulpits all across the nation, pastors will be preaching on race in the hope of inaugurating a sacred conversation in the coming months that is urgently needed in our churches, in our homes and work places, and in the halls of power. Racism remains a wound at the heart of our nation, a wound that cannot be wished away or treated carelessly. In this sacred conversation, we seek to engage one another in a deep and sustained dialogue that may be uncomfortable at times but is absolutely necessary if our nation is to find genuine healing of its past and present sins. Not only the health of our nation is at stake, but also truth-telling and racial reconciliation are crucial to our spiritual, physical, and emotional wholeness, in a “post-race” society. This reasoning denies the deep racial divisions that still exist in our country and trivializes the pervasiveness of contemporary racism. If we fail to acknowledge honestly these racial tensions or to examine their underlying causes, the anger, backlash, and misunderstanding that are resident in our communities will only go underground and fester. We will continue to be susceptible to the tactics of those who wish to keep us racially divided and distracted from addressing the issues we share in common.

As can be seen by this section from the letter the church is facing the hard question of doing the work of racial reconciliation. They have made the decision to face this head on and push forward toward an answer to this problem. For the UCC it is more than just an issue of race, also they have done initiatives on sexism as well as equality for those of different sexual orientation.

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<http://www.ucc.org/sacred-conversation/pdfs/principles-assumptions.pdf>

This document underlines the reasons for the UCC's looking at racial reconciliation as a denomination. The denomination of the UCC has a long history of dealing with Race going back to its precursor amalgamate congregations. But even in the denomination there is division. Also the Denomination understands that the work of racial reconciliation goes beyond the church walls and into the society at large. This document looks at why it is important to do the work of reconciliation, what benefits it really has, as well as why we as people of God are called to do this work.

<http://www.ucc.org/sacred-conversation/pdfs/theological-perspectives.pdf>

This document speaks to the theological underpinnings to the issues of race and the American Church as the United Church of Christ seeks to heal such division in its congregations and the world around them "The living-out of the call to antiracism occurs through mutual discernment and empowerment. Together we ask: What is the situation about us? How are we implicated? Who are we? What do we stand for? What needs to be done? What resources within and among us do we have to respond to what the situation and the vocational call of us? As communities and as individuals—as a Circle— we engage this discernment process through community- and relationship building, and through study, dialogue, truth telling, action and reflection of the Lord's favor," for Luke is the central motif of Jesus' mission. The gospel of Like as a whole and the Lucan

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Jubilee image, in particular, offer an ethic for social ministry (Yoder 1994:74).

“The Jubilee is not simply a theological concept providing insight into the nature of God; it is a guide for living which is to be observed in normal daily practice among believers. ...These Jubilee acts are not simply to be expected in the future; they are to be given concrete expression among the people of God in the present”

This section from the website looks at the theological underpinnings for the movement for racial reconciliation. The work of racial reconciliation is import work and it is work we are all called to. The UCC understands this and desires that all will come to the table and see the theological importance for this work so that all may be at home.

<http://www.ucc.org/sacred-conversation/>

This page offers many different resources about race and race relation and anti-racism for use in a congregation. Included on this page is links to litanies, blogs for posting of ideas on race conversations. This marks a major movement for The United Church of Christ as they seek to integrate all races of people into their worship. This move is an important one because for a long time the church has had a history of race relations and advocating for disenfranchised. This project seeks to bring UCC churches together and to become a worshipping body. It must be remembered that the UCC is a Congregationalist style church so it offers free association to member churches on all issues, but it also has organizations within the church such as Council for American Indian Ministries, Council for

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Hispanic Ministries, as well as ministries that deal with pacific islanders, and Black individuals as well. It is part of the life of the UCC to be multi racial as well as multi-cultural. Bringing into its doors all cultures, gay, straight, men, woman, black, white, and all cultures is the primary focus of the UCC.

Mathews, Donald Henry. Can This Church Live?: A Congregation, Its Neighborhood, And Social Transformation, (United Church Press, Cleveland, 2004)

'Can This Church Live?' is the true story of a church that had an opportunity to thrive in the midst of a community that greatly changed its demographics. The author sheds insight on a problem facing many congregations today: What do we do when our church is dying and the area around us has changed demographically? The question becomes do we take in the people around us and integrate them into our congregation or as far too many churches have begun to do: Do we move the church else where? Also this book using H. R. Niebuhr's famous text Christ and Culture utilizes the categories used by Niebuhr. to analyze churches in crisis: 1) Christ against Culture; 2) Christ of Culture; 3) Christ above Culture; 4) Christ and Culture in Paradox; and 5) Christ the Transformer of Culture. This book is helpful to both Clergy but also lay leaders in churches that may be facing the same issue and will help them to understand the situation they find themselves in, the situation of the world around them

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changing. This book will help them to discern what can and must be done when the neighborhood your church is in is no longer the place you remember it to be.

Aghahowa, Brenda Eatman. Praising in Black and White: Unity and Diversity in Christian Worship. (United Church Press, Cleveland. 1996)

This book is a case study in two forms of worship in African American churches; one form is ecstatic or expressive in nature while the other retains a much more liturgical form of worship. This book looks at what these forms can learn from each other. It is helpful because far too often Black churches are seen as being of the Pentecostal bent so finding and reading about the experiences of a High liturgies Black church can be very insightful. Also one of the main contentions in the integration of different race groups in into worship is differing styles this book furthers discussion on blending styles and comes with a survey system to help congregant discuss the styles of worship they prefer and how they could come to learn from other forms of worship.

Zikmund, Barbara Brown, The Living Theological Heritage of the United Church of Christ: Outreach And Diversity, (The Pilgrim Press, Cleveland, 2001)

This is volume five in a set but this looks specifically at the birth and growth of the United Church of Christ through the years. Special attention should be paid to the section on race relations. The UCC church and its earlier amalgamates have a long history of race relations going as far back as fighting for abolition of

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slavery. The precursors to the United Church of Christ even ordained the first African American and freed slave in 1785. This book is part of a seven volume set chronicling the UCC from its roots in the Congregationalist churches of the Northeast and the German reformed church. This specific book is important to see some of the struggles felt by the church in its first years through the decisions being made today. It is helpful to read open letters written by members against slavery as well as letters written by freed slaves themselves, then moving into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries to see the struggle for suffrage as well as the current struggle for the denomination to become open and affirming

Robinson, Anthony B., Wall Robert W. Called to Be Church: The Book of Acts For A New Day. (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. Grand Rapids, MI 2006)

This book walks through the book of acts and asks what the message is for today's church. In this book we find reference to multi-racial congregation, how these congregations are formed in the word and the importance of such congregations in today's world. What does it mean to be a congregation that lives and worships together? What does it mean to be a congregation where all races and creeds of people are accepted and integrated? This book looks at issues of the worshiping community on a gamut of levels as it tries to seek how to live out the book of acts. It looks to the original church as seen in our world through the struggles and difficulties that the Acts church had and then helps us through the work of looking at Acts to see our church life differently.

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A final resource that can be used from the UCC is surrounding their campaign of God is Still Speaking. It is held in the UCC that scripture is not dead but is open to and must be reinterpreted. The UCC has a long history of doing just that.

There are many different study guides for example, Shine God's People: Study Guide for celebrating 50 years of the United Church of Christ, Ed. By Sidney Fowler. This guide walks through the life and history of the church looking at movements that have taken place and discussing them through scripture. There is a section on race relation and the important of racial reconciliation. Also there is another bible study called Stillspeaking Bible Study in this piece different people come together and write on different passages that have something to say about the issues facing today's church, of interest is the section on Cornelius and the section dealing with there being no more separation between Jew and gentile. The work of reconciliation is so important to the UCC that they are actively engaging in conversation and anti-discrimination efforts through these books but also as seen above through preaching initiatives and calling for reconciliation in the church and the wider society. All of these resources for the still speaking campaign are available from the UCC website <http://www.UCC.org>