

Listen and Learn: Uplifting the Black Voices of Our Community

Demian Dunkley
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As thousands of people protest racial discrimination in cities across the U.S. after [the death of George Floyd](#), recent events have sparked conversations everywhere, involving people of all races. Unificationists are also sharing their thoughts and experiences as leaders encourage everyone to listen and learn.

"We represent the microcosm of God's work on earth, and therefore the responsibility to resolve conflicts lies first with us," said Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (FFWPU) USA President Rev. Demian Dunkley. "It is essential that we learn to be compassionate with one another, and that means we need to learn to listen to one another."

Inspired to have open conversation, Rev. Catherine Ono, pastor of the Boston Family Church and FFWPU-USA state leader of Massachusetts, hosted a local online Sunday service discussion on June 7 called 'Let's Talk About Race.' Rev. Ono, a longtime Unificationist blessed in marriage with a Japanese husband, said she believes the conversation is an important step toward understanding and ultimately healing the racial divide among people. "This is an opportunity for the voiceless to have a voice, and for those who have not been seen to be seen," said Rev. Ono. "There has to be dialogue with people of color, conversations about how they have been treated and what they have experienced."

Chigo Ahunanya, a young black Unificationist from Malta blessed in marriage with an Asian-American wife, was one of four speakers invited to share their personal experiences during the Boston community discussion. "I think there are certain biases, and people of color have experiences where we have felt lesser because of the color of our skin," said Ahunanya. "It's something that manifests in many communities, but I think what's happening right now is a wake up call for a lot of people."

"I feel so grateful to those who have taken the time over the last several days to reflect, reach out to one another and listen to one another," said Rev. Dunkley. "I hope we can all learn from and join those initiatives."

Nearly 70 people from around the U.S. and Canada participated in the hour-long Zoom call, which included breakout discussion groups. "This is a way of connecting in heart with one another, but there is still a lot to learn," said Rev. Ono. "A lot of black people are being provided with a voice and space to share what they have to say and for people to take it to heart," added Ahunanya. "I think this can make our movement stronger."

The Unification movement, founded in 1954 by Rev. Dr. Sun Myung Moon and his wife Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon, has championed bringing together people of all races and backgrounds through its holy Marriage Blessing Ceremony, thereby uniting enemy races and nations to establish world peace. However, systemic racism in society has continued to bubble to the surface.

"The current social climate is compelling us to reflect specifically on racial discrimination toward the black community and the role we need to take in working toward its resolution," said Rev. Dunkley. "Their struggles provide the opportunity to reflect whether we have ever even unwittingly committed abuses of the heart. I think this is the first healthy step we need to take toward healing our nation on the individual and family levels."

This time of reflection has inspired multiple Unificationist communities to also host candid discussions online. "We will be talking about race, healing, and how to take action during this time," said Stephanie Dias, assistant pastor of Family Church of New York City (FCNYC). "We want to talk about things that might be uncomfortable, but we need to talk about it in order to start the healing process." Dias said a statewide forum, scheduled for Friday, June 12 on Zoom, will have an open discussion among participants with a moderator. "It is very clear that both the older and younger generations need to come together, so we are encouraging families to participate," said Dias. "We want to hear how people have been impacted by race in this community and in general. This will educate us and help us toward creating actionable steps."

Meanwhile, Unificationists in Bridgeport, Connecticut, and Dallas are also organizing a community discussion, both separately scheduled for Sunday, June 14 on Zoom. "I think our primary mission with this program is to listen and to learn," said Rev. John Jackson, FFWPU-USA southwest regional director in Dallas. "It is important to know how people of color within our movement have felt over the years so we can reform in that area."

"In the Unification movement, we talk about uniting the world and that everyone is a child of God, so I think it is critical to address the issue of racism directly," added Brianna Schneider, Youth and Young Adult Ministry (YAYAM) southwest regional coordinator and one of the discussion organizers in Dallas. "I have seen a lot of pain in the community and it has always been important for me to be a supporter of people and to hear their hearts and take action."

The Dallas program will feature guest speakers, including Dr. Luonne Rouse, national co-chairman of the American Clergy Leadership Conference (ACLC). "We have noticed that the protests of this time have more white, black, hispanic, and people of all races standing together on the issue of racism than there have been in the past," said Rev. Jackson. "We see a much broader spectrum on that level and I think our souls are yearning for something better. There is a lot to learn through the wisdom of people who have gone through incredible struggle."

"Protests come and go," added Ahunanya. "But I think this is a really unique time in history where for the first time black people truly feel they can open up. Essentially, though, we need to remember that we are a heavenly community and the only thing each person can really change is themselves."

Unificationist leaders said they hope to provide the opportunity for people of color to freely express their hearts moving forward and foster healthy, loving race relations. "When I hear the painful stories of my brothers and sisters, I cannot stop my heart from growing," said Rev. Dunkley. "Once we have cleansed our own thoughts and actions in these areas, we will be ready in heart to move toward healing our relationships between other cultures and nationalities. I can promise that every step we climb internally will benefit the world externally."

For more information on how you can join the NYC, Bridgeport, or Dallas community Zoom discussions, please contact your FFWPU-USA regional director. Stay tuned for a follow-up story sharing the experiences of interracial Unificationist couples.