



Touchstones Project

a monthly journal of Unitarian Universalism

May 2024

Equity

Wisdom Story



ty and worthiness," a variation of our current first principle. Second, they limit equity to our communities, i.e., congregations and related institutions, structures, and gatherings. Equity as a value goes far beyond these limits.

The importance of and need for equity is expressed in our second principle from 1985, "Justice, equity, and compassion in human relations." There have been two primary publications about our principles, one from 1987, *What Unitarian Universalists Believe: Living Principles for a Living Faith*, an adult curriculum and a companion collection of essays, worship materials, and a youth curriculum, and the other from 1998, *With Purpose and Principle: Essays About the Seven Principles of Unitarian Universalism*.

In 1987, Rev. Charlotte Cowtan focused on equity as an element in the legal system. In this context, the application of equity is a means to influence legal outcomes through judicial

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The Stolen Soup Aroma

All Folk Tales

A long time ago in the village of Ipetumodu, there lived a poor woman. This woman was so poor that she did not have any soup for her eba. The eba is a starchy paste made from cassava flour and it is rather unappetizing to eat all by itself. Across the street from this



Eba

poor woman lived another woman who cooked egusi soup every day. (Egusi soup contains protein rich egusi seeds, vegetables and sometimes meat.)

One day, as the poor woman was sitting down to her only meal for the entire day, a small bowl of eba, the aroma from her neighbor's cooking wafted down through her window.

"Perhaps she will be kind enough to let me have a little soup for my eba" she thought. So she took her bowl of eba and headed over to her neighbor who was busy stirring a big pot of egusi soup.

"Please, may I have a little soup for my eba?" the poor woman asked.

The woman stirring the egusi soup looked up to see her raggedy-looking neighbor and replied, "If you can't make your own egusi soup, then you don't deserve to have any."

The poor woman went back to her own hut and sat outside her doorsteps where the aroma from her neighbor's egusi was very strong. She would scoop

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Introduction to the Theme

The UUA's Article II Study Commission has recommended replacing our 1985 principles and sources with seven values. While the Commission suggests that these values are all equal, they identify one value, love, as our purpose. In the list of those seven values, they describe equity last, writing, "We declare that every person has the right to flourish with inherent dignity and worthiness. / We covenant to use our time, wisdom, attention, and money to build and sustain fully accessible and inclusive communities." They seem to limit the application of equity in two ways. First, they propose that equity should focus on protecting our "inherent digni-

Equity & Reimagining the Common Good

Equity is often discussed in financial circles relative to investments. Regarding social justice, equity seeks to make opportunities accessible by providing support and resources to those who cannot compete equally because of discrimination, poverty, and other factors beyond their control. While equality focuses on opportunities, it is useless if someone cannot access them. By contrast, equity focuses on outcomes. When competing when disadvantaged, what does a person need to achieve an equitable outcome? Given the chasm between the haves and the have-nots, the idea that they have the same opportunity is a fiction. In many ways, equity makes a "good" a "common good" when that good is distributed to those who otherwise would not possess it. Imagine? Reimagine!

A Theme-Based Ministry Project

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Reimagining the Common Good

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some eba with her hands, inhale a big dose of egusi soup aroma while she swallowed the lump of eba.

The egusi woman, seeing this destitute neighbor eating her soup's aroma got very angry. She ran out and yelled at the woman "Stop eating the aroma from my soup!" But the poor woman did not stop, she kept inhaling the aroma from the egusi soup while she ate her eba. She found the aroma from the soup very satisfying.

Everyday, whenever the rich aroma of egusi soup wafted into the poor woman's hut, she would quickly make a little bowl of eba and go outside to inhale the pleasant aroma. The egusi woman was getting very furious and she decided to take her case to the oba, the king of their village.

"This woman steals the aroma from my egusi to eat her eba. She must be punished," the egusi woman told the oba. The oba heard the story and agreed that the poor woman should indeed be punished for stealing soup aroma and he ordered the egusi woman to carry out the punishment.

"She stole your aroma therefore you shall flog her shadow," the oba told the egusi woman. "You shall flog her shadow forty times." And she was given the big stick with which she would carry out her justice.

The egusi woman, wielding her big stick to beat the poor woman's shadow felt very foolish. She felt so foolish that she asked the poor woman for forgiveness and offered to give her real egusi soup from that day on.



Source: <https://www.uua.org/re/tapestry/youth/call/workshop7/172944.shtml>

Better Together: DEI

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion programs have been vital to advancing equity in many organizations and for countless people. Their emphasis on equity instead of equality has been transformative. Various initiatives, programs, and legislation have shaped their emergence since the 1960s. The historical challenge to their creation was the assertion that a system that benefited white males, a system enshrined in 1776 in America's *Declaration of Independence*, was fair to people of color and women. The myth of color blindness and gender blindness has sought to protect white male supremacy. This status quo has been protected by systemic discrimination, implicit bias, hostile work environments, inequitable policies and practices, gender and cultural insensitivity and exclusion, and more, all tools of the Old Boys network.

Many efforts over many years have slowly chipped away at this, as the following makes clear. The *Civil Rights Movement* of the 1950s and 1960s laid the foundation for them, partly through the *1964 Civil Rights Act*, which prohibits discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin. Provisions of the act forbade discrimination based on sex and race in hiring, promoting, and firing.

Affirmative Action programs begun in the 1960s and 1970s sought to promote opportunities for marginalized groups, particularly in education and employment. Canada launched affirmative action programs in the 1980s. While not detailed here, Canadian diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts have generally equaled or exceeded what the U.S. has done.

The creation of the *Equal Employment Opportunity Commission* (EEOC) in the U.S. in 1965 marked a significant step toward combating workplace discrimination.

The *Women's Rights Movement* of the

1960s and 1970s advocated for gender equality and challenged societal norms and practices that limited women's opportunities in education, employment, and other areas.

The *Disability Rights Movement*, which began in the 1960s to secure equal rights, resulted in the passage of the *Americans with Disabilities Act* (ADA) in 1990. Other legislation, like the *Equal Pay Act of 1963* and the *Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967*, have also sought to advance equity.

All of this led to the implementation of corporate DEI programs led by companies like IBM (1950s), Xerox (1960s), AT&T and Johnson & Johnson (1970s), and Procter & Gamble (1980s). From the 1980s forward, many corporations and institutions have implemented DEI programs.

These developments are laudable and have created opportunities that would not have otherwise existed, but there has also been opposition and challenge at every turn. As cultural anthropologist Louis Yako writes, "I have lost track of the number of times when I chatted with DEI professionals or even diversity hires of different races and backgrounds who



painfully told me that they are put in a position that makes them incapable of making any meaningful changes in their

workplace. That their job is primarily to be tokenized and make the institution look and feel good, but in reality they—and any diverse person in their workplace—feel totally paralyzed in environments that look good, but are in fact extremely controlled by the few privileged at the top."

Implementing DEI programs has been frustrated by many things, including resistance to change, implicit bias, the near invisibility of micro-aggressions, structural inequities that are almost

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Readings from the Common Bowl



Day 1: "Fairness does not mean everyone gets the same. Fairness means everyone gets what they need." Rick Riordan

Day 2: "Justice will not be served until those who are unaffected are as outraged as those who are." Benjamin Franklin

Day 3: "With you it is always the law, never equity." Rafael Sabatini

Day 4: "The reality is that most people of color learn early in America that we will have to work twice as hard to get half as far, and when we fail, no one will help us fall up." Wajahat Ali

Day 5: "Equity gives a sense of respect." Harjeet Khanduja

Day 6: "Equity is the recognition of the fact that different people have different needs and that treating them equally is not always fair." Unknown

Day 7: "True equity starts with ensuring that everyone has access to the most basic of needs." Mikki Kendall

Day 8: "Men without honor cannot build an honorable country. It is a height of hypocrisy to expect a country of equity from such men." Olawale Daniel

Day 9: "If we want there to be equity and acceptance, we must learn to trample first our own arrogance." Abhijit Naskar

Day 10: "Not everything that is faced can be changed. But nothing can be changed until it is faced." James Baldwin

Day 11: "Equity means giving everyone what they need to be successful. It's not about giving everyone the same thing." Unknown

Day 12: We have to be willing to embrace the full autonomy of people who are less privileged and understand that equity means making access to opportunity easier, not deciding which opportunities they deserve." Mikki Kendall

Day 13: "Diversity is being invited to the dance. Inclusion is being asked to Dance. Equity is allowing you to choose the Music." Cynthia Olmedo

Day 14: "Equity is the backbone of a just society, ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to thrive regardless of their circumstances." Unknown

Day 15: "I don't trust anyone who's nice to me but rude to the waiter. Because they would treat me the same way if I were in that position." Muhammad Ali

Day 16: "Equality says we treat everyone the same, regardless of headwinds or tailwinds. Equity says we give people what they need to have the same access and opportunities as others, taking into account the headwinds they face, which may mean differential treatment...." Dolly Chugh

Day 17: "Equal access to the essentials of life, is not an ism, it is the first step towards the abolition of all isms." Abhijit Naskar

Day 18: "Equality does not see color, therefore, contributes to privilege. Equity sees color, recognizes systemic forms of racism and actively provided resources to level the playing field." Sope Agbelusi

Day 19: "Justice is the state that exists when there is equity, balance, and harmony in relationships and in society. Injustice is the state that exists when unjust people do violence to peace and shalom and create inequity, imbalance, and dissonance." Ken Wytmsa

Day 20: "You can be a person with a strong passion or holy anger and be furious in a way that will make the society safer, godly, with social justice and equity." Sunday Adelaja

Day 21: "Maybe the reason why there isn't equity is because they took justness and put it on ice and it became justice. Frozen Constitutions and Fixed Legislatures." Goitsewang Mvula

Day 22: "Let me be me, or let me be." Anthony Liccione

Day 23: "Equity isn't a belief, it's the foundation of a civilized society." Abhijit Naskar

Day 24: "Housing is a human right. There can be no fairness or justice in a society in which some live in homelessness, or in the shadow of that risk, while others cannot even imagine it." Jordan Flaherty

Day 25: "I learned early on about the real meaning of equity and inclusion, and that when those guiding principles are not met, they can have devastating effects on individuals, families, and communities." Lori Lightfoot

Day 26: "Until we address the pervasive structural and interpersonal threats facing communities of color, we will remain unequipped to make equity a reality." Wayne Messam

Day 27: "When you're accustomed to privilege, parity and equity and equality may feel like oppression." Raphael Warnock

Day 28: "Justice that is not rooted in

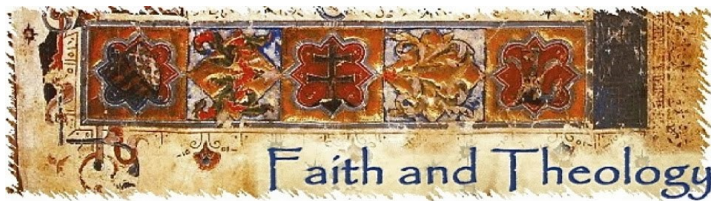
equity, in social welfare, and in community is not justice at all." DeRay Mckesson

Day 29: "Equality is leaving the door open for anyone who has the means to approach it; equity is ensuring there is a pathway to that door for those who need it." Caroline Belden

Day 30: "Equity, dignity, happiness, sustainability—these are all fundamental to our lives but absent in the GDP." Helen Clark

Day 31: "Ethics and equity and the principles of justice do not change with the calendar." D.H. Lawrence





“embrace our differences and commonalities with love, curiosity, and respect,” acknowl-

learn from the experiences and perspectives of others whose circumstances may differ greatly from ours.

Rev. Barber, a co-chair of the *Poor People's Campaign*, has, among several intersecting concerns, advocated for economic equity by calling for policies and initiatives that address systemic economic inequalities on behalf of 140 million low-income and poor people (41.1% of the U.S. population, second worst among 37 democracies.). These include calls for living wages, affordable healthcare, access to quality education, and other measures to uplift low-income and marginalized communities.

Theology of Equity

A theology of equity is a theology of fairness, of flourishing, of the least of these. It speaks truth to privilege, power, and wealth. It confronts the false god of equality of rights and opportunity, the false god of the level playing field. It is informed by theologies of liberation that view reality and aspiration from the bottom where the dispossessed dwell. Mindful of the historic struggles where equity has been secured in diverse areas and for diverse peoples, a theology of equity is clear-eyed about the challenges of maintaining gains given the assault by those who wage a zero-sum game. It is also a hopeful theology that focuses on securing equity.

Equity, within a liberal theological context, transcends the presumption of mere equality. It acknowledges and addresses systemic disparities and injustices that hinder individuals, groups, and communities from accessing equal opportunities. Equity also secures rights that were theoretical and makes them actual.

Nina Jablonski writes, “Inventing new vocabularies to deal with human diversity and inequity won’t be easy, but it must be done.” The UUA’s Article II Study Commission’s proposed values offer the start of such a vocabulary. Drawing on these values, equity seeks to dismantle structures of oppression and privilege, advocating for the empowerment of marginalized individuals and communities. These values offer important guidance.

1.) Love compels us to truly see those who have been failed by the myth that all are created equal and calls us to love our neighbor by offering our hearts and hands like a Good Samaritan.

2.) Interdependence reminds us that our profound connection with everyone, including the least of these, is a call for solidarity.

3.) Pluralism asks that we

edging, as Richard Gilbert writes, that “we are all more human otherwise” despite or because of our diversity.

4.) Justice insists that we use all of the tools available to us, including prophetic witness, advocacy, social action, legislation, coalition building, protesting, voter registration and turnout, etc., to change the system that protects the status quo that supports inequity.



5.) Transformation is a means of deep change, transformation of oneself, the opposition, and those for whom we seek equity, and, finally, transformation of the system itself.

6.) Generosity asks that we rejoice rather than resent the resources that must be provided to those who require tailored support to achieve equal outcomes.

While not explicit, the call for equity echoes across time from the Hebrew prophets to the likes of the Rev. Dr. \William Barber II.

The prophet Micah asked, “And what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with your God?” True justice involves equity. To love mercy is to be merciful, especially to the marginalized and vulnerable. Mercy requires extending grace and support to those in need, regardless of their circumstances. Finally, the call to humility is integral to the pursuit of equity because it invites us to

Another prophet is instructive in our framing of a theology of equity, and that is Jesus. The emphasis of his ministry and teachings focused on addressing inequity.

Compassion for the Marginalized: Throughout the New Testament, Jesus showed particular concern for the marginalized and oppressed members of society, including the poor, the sick, and the outcasts, women and men alike. His teachings emphasized the

importance of caring for those in need and advocating for justice on their behalf, reflecting a commitment to equity by ensuring that everyone is treated with dignity and compassion.

Equality Before God: Jesus preached equality before God, regardless of social status or wealth. He challenged societal norms and hierarchies, emphasizing that all individuals are equally valuable in the eyes of God. This notion of equity was grounded in every person’s inherent worth and dignity, regardless of their background or circumstances. This is a very different emphasis from Thomas Jefferson’s assertion that “all men are created equal” because of all those who were excluded: indigenous people, enslaved people, women, and white men who did not own property. These outcasts likely represented more than 80% of the population in 1776.

Love of Neighbor: In the *Parable of the*

(Continued on page 5)

“That’s Not Fair!” Teaching The Meaning of Fairness

Samantha Song

How many times have you heard a child say, “That’s not fair!” and when you try to explain, the inevitable back



and forth ensues, and they are nowhere closer to understanding the situation. ... As children get to around 4 years old, they are beginning to understand the concept of fairness, but will need conversations and guidance on what it means.

Helping children understand fairness is an important part of growing up and practicing empathy. When we understand what others need and perhaps what we don’t, we recognize our differences and think a little beyond ourselves. We get to step into someone else’s shoes for a moment and consider their life.

...Equality has to do with sameness, just like in math. An equal sign tells us that both sides of the equation are exactly the same ($3 + 2 = 5$). Fair is different. Fair means everyone gets what they need, based on visible gaps in opportunity. And sometimes people will have different needs because we are unique individuals.

Some children wear glasses and some don’t. That’s not equal, but it’s fair because not everyone needs glasses to

see and learn best.

Some children may receive a different lunch in school because they have food allergies. That’s not equal, but it’s fair. It’s what that child needs to be healthy and safe.

Understanding the concept of fairness



is critical in a young person’s life.... As children become more exposed to the concept of fairness or in other words equity, they will grow to be more considerate of others’ needs and more aware of their own.

Source: <https://betterkids.education/blog/thats-not-fair-teaching-the-meaning-of-fairness>

Family Activity: Three Boxes

For children, fairness is equity. Craig Froehle created the illustration above. It illustrates the difference between equality and equity. Hide the right panel and show and describe the left panel to your children. The boys are being treated equally because each gets a box to stand on to see the baseball game. Unfortunately, the smallest boy cannot see over the fence. Ask your children, “Is this fair?” and “Why or why not?” Then, show them the right panel and ask them the same questions. Then ask, “Should the tallest boy be upset because he lost his box? Why or why not? How might the smallest boy feel? Why?”

(Continued from page 4) Faith & Theology

Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37), Jesus teaches about compassion and neighborly love. The Samaritan, traditionally seen as a social outcast by the Jewish audience, demonstrated care and generosity towards a stranger in need despite their religious and cultural differences. This parable highlights the importance of empathy and solidarity, promoting a vision of equity where everyone is treated with kindness and respect.

Critique of Injustice: Jesus often criticized the unjust social structures and practices of his time, particularly the exploitation of the poor and vulnerable by the powerful elites. His teachings challenged systems of oppression and called for a transformation of society based on principles of justice and righteousness. This critique of injustice aligns with the pursuit of equity by advocating for systemic change that promotes fairness and true equality for all.

The Kingdom of God: Jesus’s vision of the Kingdom of God embodies principles of justice, righteousness, and reconciliation. In this vision, there is a reversal of societal norms, where the last shall be first, and the first shall be last (Matthew 20:16). This vision reflects a commitment to equity by envisioning a world where power dynamics are reversed, and everyone has equal access to God’s grace and blessings.

Citing the authority of Jesus is a deliberate strategy to challenge the cultural backlash fueled by Christian nationalism. This backlash manifests in various forms, including distorting the teachings of Jesus, political rhetoric and misinformation, legislative actions, and judicial decisions that undermine efforts toward achieving equity.

Words by Frederick Douglass from 1857 are relevant now more than ever. Douglass wrote, “This struggle may be a moral one, or it may be a physical one, and it may be both moral and physical, but it must be a struggle. Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will.” May we have the hope and courage to persevere.

Source: Touchstones

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discretion, outcomes that, if left unaddressed, might be harsh or unjust given unique circumstances. Equity seeks to bring fairness into the application of justice. Typically, this application of equity involves individuals.

In 1998, in his essay on our second principle, Rev. Dick Gilbert wrote, “Equity not only demands that a society improve the conditions of its impoverished, but also calls into question the corruptions of the affluent. ...If we believe that religious values should determine how the marketplace operates rather than the other way around, equity becomes a measuring rod for social justice.” He also noted that in imagining a new society as a thought experiment, “There is a creative tension ...between absolute equality and equity as fairness.”

Since “absolute” equality is impossible, is equality possible? Thomas Jefferson thought, “Yes,” writing, “All men (sic) are created equal.” Equal only due to unalienable Rights. Unalienable is not unlike our assertion of “inherent” related to worth and dignity. Jefferson articulated three Rights. “Life” is being alive and being able to live. “Liberty” is freedom unconstrained by government and being “equal” before the law. The “pursuit of Happiness” is the right to pursue personal fulfillment and well-being without undue interference.

The inference is that “we” had equality of opportunity. But who was “we?” “All men” was not a universal term. It did not extend to women, enslaved people, Native Americans, or white men who did not own property, i.e., the poor and indentured. In fact, it only applied to the privileged and powerful white men who owned land. And what percentage of the total population did these men represent? Less than 20% of the total population, if that, were deemed equal and had unalienable

rights. To universalize this concept of equality is barbaric, given the hundreds of years of struggle that were necessary to secure rights, a struggle that is ongoing in so many ways.



While we still cannot speak of equality in any meaningful way because of the continuing concentration of power, privilege, and wealth, especially of the 1% or even the one-tenth of 1%, the expansion of rights over time has been

significant. A precious gift born of struggle, of a centuries-long pursuit of equity. As Shafin Verani correctly writes, “We must first ensure equity before we can enjoy equality.”

Equity involves fairness and impartiality in distributing resources, opportunities, and privileges. Unlike equality, equity recognizes that people have different needs and starting points and seeks to address those differences. Equity involves giving everyone what they need to be successful, even if it means providing various levels of support or resources to different individuals or groups. Achieving equity often requires proactive measures to mitigate systemic barriers for marginalized or disadvantaged groups, aiming for equal outcomes rather than just equal treatment.

A well-known and effective example of equity based on outcomes is affirmative action. It began in the U.S. in the 1960s and 1970s to provide support in education and employment for groups that did not have equal opportunities. It sought to address historical discrimination, promote diversity and inclusion, level the playing field, compensate for structural bias, and foster social mobility. Canada launched affirmative action programs in the 1980s.

Still, the idea of everyone having equal opportunity persists in the U.S. despite significant inequality experienced by certain communities and

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impossible to dismantle, cultural differences, limited resources, the challenge of measuring impact, and legal and compliance risks. At the head of this list is a lack of leadership buy-in, resistance from dominant groups, and tokenism. When DEI is viewed as a zero-sum game, change becomes very difficult.

Nonetheless, DEI programs are considered very beneficial in some quarters. In 2021, the nonprofit American Council on Education said, “Diversity brings with it a number of educational benefits, including improved racial and cultural awareness, enhanced critical thinking, higher levels of service to community and a more educated citizenry.”

Unfortunately, since 2021-22, a growing effort has emerged to dismantle DEI programs in academia in Texas, Florida, and some other states and to begin to undermine such programs in other institutions and corporations under claims that DEI promotes wokeism and socialist agendas. According to the ultra-conservative *Texas Public Policy Foundation*, “Americans oppose DEI because it promulgates a race-based ideology that pits students—and all Americans—against each other based on their ancestors. It creates guilt in those who have done no wrong and exonerates others from responsibility for their lives.” In 2023 and 2024, 84 bills targeting diversity programs have been introduced, according to *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. So far, 12 have become law, and 13 are awaiting signatures from governors.

It seems that biblically-based Chick-fil-A did not get the memo. While former CEO Dan Cathy, son of founder S. Truett Cathy, was public about his opposition to marriage equality in 2012, he has been staunchly anti-racist. Chick-fil-A appointed Erick McReynolds as Executive Director, Diversity, Equity & Inclusion in July 2020. In September 2021, Andrew Truett Cathy, son of Dan Cathy, became the CEO. In November 2021, McReynolds was promoted to Vice-President, Diversity, Equity & Inclusion. In May 2023, some conservatives learned about McReynolds and called for a boycott. They were late to the party. The 2020 Chick

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What Would Jesus Do?

Brian D. McLaren

McLaren, a provocative theologian in the emerging church movement, is complimentary of Unitarian Universalism.

To confront the global equity crisis, Jesus might speak of God's unterror movement. The societal machine becomes suicidal when ...some seek profit that will make others poor. They seek security that will make others insecure. They seek equity for themselves but are insensitive to the plight of others. Their pleasure inflicts pain on others. Their gain means loss for others. They seek and use power and freedom in ways that will injure, dehumanize, reduce, or oppress others. The impoverished, oppressed, reduced, and aggrieved respond by seeking revenge, redress, and opportunity, often through crime, immigration (legal or illegal), and acts of terrorism — adding to the growing toxins of pain and destruction, distorting God's beautiful dream further and further into a terrifying nightmare.

The equity gap that separates rich from poor renders them enemies rather than neighbors, so everyone is caught up in the ultimate vicious cycle of terror and counterterror, violence and counter-violence, hate and counter-hate. We can only escape by defecting from this whole vicious, suicidal system ...walking away from the king in Rome, walking away from the armed rebels who dream of overthrowing him, and following a weaponless prophet in Galilee.

...That's why if Jesus were here today, I imagine he would speak frequently of the new global love economy of God — not an industrial economy, and not an information economy, and not even an experience economy, but a wise relational economy that measures success in terms of gross national affection and global community, that seeks to amass the appreciating capital of wise judgment, profound fore-thought, and deepening virtue for the sake of rich relationships.

Source: *Everything Must Change: Jesus, Global Crises, and a Revolution of Hope* by Brian D. McLaren

Worth, Dignity, and Equity

The UUA's Article II Study Commission linked worth and dignity to equity, connecting our first and second principles. Worth and dignity are intrinsic values, while equity is an instrumental value necessary to secure, defend, and extend those intrinsic values. One word you will not find in our existing principles and sources, nor the Commission's articulation of their proposed values, is equality.

In a society marked by discrimination, oppression, marginalization, exclusion, poverty, and more, the insistence that people have equal rights and opportunities is a fiction that is compounded when the dispossessed are blamed, despite the odds, for not living up to their potential. The absence of equality is marked by racism, sexism, classism, homophobia and transphobia, ableism, and more, all of which intersect and further oppress many.

What good is inherent worth and dignity if a society conspires against certain individuals and groups so their worth and dignity are never made manifest? Just because a person has worth and dignity does not mean they will experience or act upon it.

Equity takes a playing field with walls, chasms, glass shards, dead ends, barbed wire, and more and levels it. Actually, equity goes further, providing ramps, lifts, handrails, and other accommodations to foster success. Equity seeks to both honor and make manifest a people's inherent worth and dignity so that they are not the least of these but people who, operating from a sense of wholeness and competence, are good enough.

This is a world of Special Olympics where everyone is special, where a runner falls down, and two other runners stop and go back to help that athlete up and then support her as they cross the finish line together. Equity is not necessarily winning, but it is being able to cross the finish line. That is what worth and dignity are all about. That is what makes the race fair.

Source: Touchstones

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populations, which results from a mixture of systemic discrimination, income inequality, educational disparities, healthcare disparities, housing segregation and redlining, criminal justice inequities, racial and cultural stereotypes and bias, the digital divide, and political and legal barriers.

These challenges are daunting in themselves, but the pursuit of equity faces several new obstacles in the U.S.

1.) There is significant anxiety about declining opportunities. The assumption of equality of opportunity has been replaced with a pessimism that one's children will be less well-off due to declining social mobility. The increase in a cup-half-empty mentality decreases a willingness to entertain equity on behalf of others.

2.) There are growing claims of reverse discrimination due to using equity on behalf of the truly disadvantaged. This zero-sum mentality asserts that if some get equitable support, others are, by definition, being treated unequally. A recent U.S. Supreme Court ruling effectively ended using race-conscious affirmative action in college admissions programs. This ruling has led to attacks on diversity, equity, and inclusion programs in academia and corporations.

3.) There is ongoing conservative cultural backlash. The reversal of *Roe vs. Wade* was about anti-abortion, but it was also an attack against feminism, bodily autonomy, reproductive rights, and non-traditional gender roles.

4.) A dysfunctional political system is incapable of passing equitable legislation. This enables conservative courts to legislate through rulings that Congress cannot redress, like rulings that weakened the Voting Rights Act.

Separately, these four challenges undermine equity, but collectively, they roll back advances in equity and make it more difficult to promote equity for those most disadvantaged. Given these realities, keeping equity as a value to guide our faith in the future is vital.

Small Group Discussion Guide

Theme for Discussion

Equity

Preparation prior to Gathering: (Read this issue of the journal and *Living the Questions* in the next column.)

Business: Deal with any housekeeping items (e.g., scheduling the next gathering).

Opening Words: “Your water is in the bottles, and my water is in the bucket, but we are brothers? I am collecting garbage, and you are in the bed, but we are sisters? My fingers are broken, and your hands are so soft, but we are family? Your God is like an angel, and my God is like an evil, but we are equal? My stomach is empty, and your stomach is so big, but we are humans?”
M.F. Moonzajer

Chalice Lighting (James Vila Blake) adapted (In unison) *Love is the spirit of this church, and service is its law. This is our covenant: to dwell together in peace, to seek the truth in love, to serve human need, and to help one another.*

Check-In: How is it with your spirit? What do you need to leave behind in order to be fully present here and now? (2-3 sentences)

Claim Time for Deeper Listening: This comes at the end of the gathering where you can be listened to uninterrupted for more time if needed. You are encouraged to claim time ranging between 3-5 minutes, and to honor the limit of the time that you claim.

Read the Wisdom Story: Take turns reading aloud parts of the wisdom story on page 1.

Readings from the Common Bowl: Group members read selections from *Readings from the Common Bowl* (page 3). Leave a few moments of silence after each to invite reflection on the meaning of the words.

Sitting In Silence: Sit in silence together, allowing the *Readings from the Common Bowl* to resonate. Cultivate a sense of calm and attention to the readings and the discussion that follows (*Living the Questions*).

Reading: “Rapid growth in wealth inequality results in the inevitable isolation of a very small, very rich, very privileged section of the community from the material experiences of everyone else. And when this out-of-touch minority group is

enfranchised to make the decisions on behalf of people they don’t know, can’t see, have no wish to understand, and think of entirely in dehumanized, transactional, abstract terms, the results for the rest of us are devastating.” *Sally McManus*

Living the Questions: Explore as many of these questions as time allows. Fully explore one question before moving on.

1. What does equity mean to you, and how does it differ from equality?
2. In what ways has Jefferson’s assertion that “all men are created equal” served as a protection of power and privilege? What value, if any, does his assertion retain?
3. What role do privilege and power dynamics play in perpetuating inequities within society?
4. How can we ensure that marginalized communities have sufficient (not equal) access to resources and opportunities?
5. How do historical injustices continue to impact equity in society today, and what steps can be taken to address them?
6. Why is DEI important? Why is it under attack in some quarters? How can these attacks be confronted?
7. What are the potential drawbacks or challenges of pursuing equity, and how can they be addressed?
8. How was Jesus a proponent of equity? How would he act in today’s society?
9. How can pursuing equity protect and help manifest inherent worth and dignity?
10. How would you compare our seven principles with the proposed seven values?
11. In what ways does the Common Good depend on advancing equity for the marginalized?
12. How does a zero-sum game undermine the pursuit of equity?

The facilitator or group members are invited to propose additional questions that they would like to explore.

Deeper Listening: If time was claimed by individuals, the group listens without interruption to each person who claimed time.

Checking-Out: One sentence about where you are now as a result of the time spent together exploring the theme.

Stop being a chicken

(Continued from page 6) **Better Together**

-fil-A® Corporate Social Responsibility Report outlines their anti-racism work, which is also embedded in their DEI work. McReynolds writes, “We are committed to ensuring mutual respect, understanding and dignity everywhere we do business.” According to their website, “One of our core values at Chick-fil-A, Inc. is that we are better together. ... We understand that getting Better at Together means we learn better, care better, grow better and serve better. ... To do this means embedding Diversity, Equity & Inclusion in everything we do. To achieve this, we focus on: ensuring equal access, valuing differences, and creating a culture of belonging.”

Koch Industries and Walmart, also founded by conservatives, have strong DEI programs. In the struggle to expand diversity, advance equity, and promote inclusion, we need all the allies we can get because DEI is a struggle for the future. They will not be forever allies, but on the issue of equity, they know what is fair.

Source: Touchstones

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Extinguishing Chalice (Elizabeth Selle Jones) (In unison) *We extinguish this flame but not the light of truth, the warmth of community, or the fire of commitment. These we carry in our hearts until we are together again.*

Closing Words \Rev. Philip R. Giles (In unison) *May the quality of our lives be our benediction and a blessing to all we touch.*