

Task Force on Theology of Social Justice Advocacy
Meeting Minutes
May 10, 2019

Present: Sarah Lawton, Brant Lee, Dora Mbuwayesango, Reuben Varghese, Ruth Frey, Jose Rodriguez-Sanjuro, Lallie Lloyd. Absent: Prince Singh, Andrew Dietsche, Anne Hodges-Copple, Guy Leemhuis, Susanne Watson Epting,

Opening Prayer: Reuben offered opening prayer

Housekeeping:

- Basecamp: Set-up on Basecamp is still pending. This is a better platform for posting links outside the extranet. Hopefully, this will be set up by our next meeting.
- Lallie asked if there is funding available for us to gather in person. Sarah reported funds are not designated for a meeting, however we could make another request to see if the financial situation might have changed. Lallie noted it is difficult to do this work without meeting at least one time.

Sharing/Discussion:

At this meeting, Sarah offered her reflections.

As a layperson in the church, Sarah sees herself as an active practitioner. Her ancestors were Puritan Quakers and Baptists from New England who came from Holland and England to the U.S. to create a commonwealth of God. They believed in holding things in common, created public schools, were abolitionists, and supported suffrage. They were also intolerant of others who did not interpret the Bible as they did, believing themselves to be the saints, the elect. They contributed to wiping out the Native American community; were deeply anti-Catholic and anti-immigrant.

Sarah's parents met at Bates College, one of the first race and gender integrated institutions of higher learning. Both joined the civil rights movement and became Anglo-Catholic Episcopalians. Her father went to ETS and her parents traveled to Selma after Bloody Sunday. Sarah's mother was one of the people who convinced Jonathan Daniels to travel to the South to work on integration.

Sarah was born Western Massachusetts and raised in Worcester; a factory town. At her school, many of the students were from ethnically driven Catholic communities. Worcester was a union town and honoring strikes was important. Over time, the community became more Latino and Cambodian and tension arose around this influx of new residents.

Sarah was involved in the 80's South African anti-apartheid and the Central American refugee movements. She served for 17 years as an organizer and fundraiser and then moved to labor work. Currently she works on issues such as minimum wage and healthcare. Her office is very secular environment.

Her spiritual formation is influenced by the Catholic Worker Movement, the Jesuits and Central American liberation theology with its focus on the preferential option for the poor. Sarah's husband works in the labor movement and Asian American politics. They live in San Francisco and are part of a small Anglo-Catholic neighborhood church. The church community responds to the issues around them including the AIDS crisis in the 80's, and now homelessness and immigration. The congregation offers a place to sleep for the homeless and serves as a sanctuary church for those in the asylum process.

Sarah sees her life and work as consistent with each other. Yet questions linger. How is she living out the baptismal vow to seek and serve Christ in every person? Is it more effective to work for justice within a system or outside of it? She is influenced by people who chose truth over power (MLK, Romero, Dorothy Day, Frances Perkins). People like Perkins lived out the "insider strategy" working as Secretary of Labor. While people such as Daniel Berrigan questioned from the outside. How do we hold the Gospel understanding that we are all loved, and we are to seek and serve God in everyone, yet so many of our systems are evil? How do we take radical gospel action? She noted that she struggles with the theology of social justice. There is no "one way." "Civil Conversation" seems often to be code for "not rocking the boat." Yet tension can elevate ideas for discussion.

Responses from the Taskforce Members:

- Reuben: We tend to fall back on social "niceties" at the expense of calling out the truth. We need to be "color brave" rather than "color blind." Relationships can be too civil and not call people out. How do we help people to become more comfortable with discomfort?
- Dora: We don't read the prophets the way we should. Micah and Amos were not "likable."
- Lallie: The church has created "Sacred Ground" curriculum, which addresses White Fragility. How do we speak truth and make room for pastoral love?
- Sarah: We need to acknowledge our histories. We can say the "lost cause" is wrong, but it is still a narrative that has power.
- Jose: We need to look at places where our church needs to change, especially where people of color are still repressed by a colonial ancestry. The right way to do things is often the "white way" to do things. He observed the Diocese of Honduras really struggling at General Convention.
- Lallie noted how much she appreciates the framework Sarah used to tell her story today: Looking at the legacy of her ancestors and how they shaped her. And thinking about what she wants to hold on to and what she wants to let go of. Naming our points of origin and frame of reference allows us - as a team - to create space in our center that is free, open and not occupied by anyone. She recommended that each taskforce member consider using this framework when they tell their story.

Closing Prayer and Next Meeting: Rueben offered the closing prayer. At the June meeting, Jose will offer prayers and Brant will take the minutes.