

Following the Path of UUCA Founders and the Anniversary March for Jobs and Freedom

On Saturday, August 24 celebrate the journey toward freedom that is part of our Church's history. UUCA members are planning to join with colleagues of All Souls Church and Unitarians from across the country in honor of the 50th anniversary of the 1963 March on Washington's March for Jobs and Freedom. A number of UUCA early members participated in the Freedom March of August 1963 where they heard Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream Address" and were moved by his peaceful advocacy. 1963 March participants were veteran demonstrators in Virginia actions for desegregation of schools, parks, housing and alleviation of economic bias. However, the March on Washington provided the first national effort to meet, sing, pray and advocate with others from around the nation.

The event on August 24 invites us not only to rededicate ourselves to realizing the "Dream" but also to put faith into concrete action. This event will be held Saturday, August 24, at 10am at the Lincoln Memorial. Visit All Souls Church website for details of the Friday night and Saturday activities.

The UUCA's participation in the 1963 March was preceded by more than a decade of Arlington Unitarian social action and educational programs directed at reducing bias, inequality and oppression in Northern Virginia and beyond. From its inception, the Unitarian Church of Arlington was founded on a vision that emphasized social action. In 1950 the church's mission planning committee stated that: "the Church should serve the community every day of the week with social service activities; liberal, intellectual and religious discussions; education and recreation for adults and children. Furthermore the 1950 mission emphasized that the Church must be open to all interested persons, regardless of "race, nationality or personal origin." (History of the Unitarian Church of Arlington, by Ruth W. Tryon)

Throughout the 1950's, activities included: an interracial, interfaith group called the Community Council for Social Progress. It brought about collaboration between white and black leaders in such areas as eliminating segregated public seating at meetings, public housing and schools. Church members organized and were sometimes arrested for demonstrations in favor of open parks and schools. When schools became integrated, they provided mentors and tutors as well as summer schools to assist children in the transition. In 1959 a youth group, Liberal Religious Youth helped youth develop a continuum of integrated social and athletic activities. These youth activities won national recognition.

In his September 8, 1963 sermon, Rev. Edward Redman called on Unitarians and friends to join in a "Moral Revolution: toward the elimination of racial, social, and economic barriers." Redman noted: "It is wonderful to witness the extent to which leading figures from the religious denominations, Protestant, Catholic, Jewish and liberals have come forward in this time to countenance and endorse the moral necessity for establishing racial equality and undivided opportunity. I say wonderful that this is happening, because it shows a change of heart, a new sense of moral relevance, a determination to bear testimony that religious values ought to have an impact upon the social order and upon the way in which social life should be lived, and not aim only for the salvation and the immortality of the soul."

In his 1963 sermon, Rev. Redman also asked the question about what Arlington Unitarians can do to help remove the obstacles to realizing the shared dream for justice. He noted that the dream will not make change happen overnight and a march cannot “..bring to an end all of the inhibiting circumstances and vicissitudes of life, and that is where we come in. For we can work away at the details of change, and we can do it with a deeper sense of urgency and a greater sense of confidence in the chance of victory, with the passion of a song ringing in our ears: We Shall Overcome.”

For general information about the Anniversary, visit
<http://50thanniversarymarchonwashington.com/>.