

## ***We Would Be One***

### *The History of the Immigration Task Force at Mt. Diablo Unitarian Universalist Church*

The Immigration Task Force at Mt. Diablo came together in 2010 shortly after the Pacific Central District passed its resolution opposing the Arizona anti-immigration law (SB 1070). Our first public act was a resolution of our own against that law. It was the first of several instances of public advocacy by the Task Force. In every case, we have felt that, because we speak out of our faith, we need to state the religious grounds for our position. We opposed the law because “[i]t infringes on the worth and dignity of each person and justice for all persons, and it is a barrier to community among people we affirm as the goal of our common life.” We also rejected the racial profiling the law encourages, and the “enforcement-only” approach to immigration the law represents. (See our church’s web site for the full text of the letter – <http://mduuc.org/social-justice/social-justice-committees/257-immigration-task-force>.)

We wanted to encourage others to show their concern for the suffering our immigration system inflict, and we wanted to bring our faith to bear on this suffering. To that end we led a worship service in August, 2010, which revolved around the *stories* of guest speakers who were or had been undocumented. Francisca told of suffering domestic violence and having nowhere to turn. Ju recounted the dreams he had of giving back to the country he loved, dreams that were denied by his status. Marco, who was in deportation proceedings, told of his deep involvement in his community through his childrens’ school and the Guardian Angels, and how the community had rallied to his support when he was detained.

The worship service was structured around the theme, “Welcoming Our Neighbors,” highlighted by the statement of our UUA President Rev. Peter Morales, “We Are One,” and the hymn “We Would Be One” (#318). Finally, we called for a conversation in the congregation about immigration. We acknowledged that conversation might be difficult at times because people disagree about this issue, and we encouraged those for whom the question of legality was important to bring that to the conversation. But we emphasized that, because laws do not establish their own justice, the question of legality does not *end* the conversation. Further, we urged people to remember that while *conduct* may be illegal, *people* are not. Even those with questions about this issue acknowledged that the service was a powerful experience.

After the worship service we recognized the need that many people had for a broader understanding of immigration. To meet this need we held a forum on immigration in October, 2010, with speakers on: the impact of U.S. policies, especially NAFTA on the flow of immigration; the economic impact of immigration in this country; and the problems with our current system that call for reform. Well attended, this event gave people a broader context for thinking about the phenomenon of immigration. (See the web site for an audio of the forum.)

Though our events had raised the consciousness about immigration in our congregation, the *Immigration As A Moral Issue* class offered that fall did not have enough people enrolled to go forward. Clearly there was much more work to be done. Recognizing that we needed to know more about how our fellow congregants felt about immigration we initiated one-on-ones — informal, getting-to-know-you conversations with members about the question of immigration. Our goal was to *listen* to what they had to say, not to persuade them of anything. It was our way of furthering the conversation we talked about when we first began our work. These talks may have been one reason for the larger turnout for the *Immigration As A Moral Issue* class this fall, led by our Intern Minister, and the lively discussion there.

We also hosted a very effective workshop in the fall of 2010, led by the Interfaith Coalition on Immigrant Rights, on talking to the media about immigration from a faith perspective. We found that we deepened our faith when we practiced communicating it in the public square.

Early in 2011 we held a gathering of people to discuss the book *The Death of Josseline*, as part of the UUA's Common Read program. The book was powerfully written and the discussion, utilizing the UUA's discussion guide, had a significant impact on the people who participated.

Soon after we also held a workshop on the proposed Domestic Workers Bill of Rights, led by the East Bay Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice (<http://www.workingeastbay.org/>). We decided to hold this event because we recognized that immigrant rights substantially overlap with workers' rights. This is especially true of domestic workers, the majority of whom are immigrants. We hosted visitors from several other churches, both UU and others. Because a number of our members employ domestic workers, the workshop had particular relevance.

We see coalition building as an integral part of our work; pooling resources and amplifying our voice can make our work more effective. We participate in the East Bay Interfaith Immigration Coalition (EBIIC), and we are working with the Interfaith Council of Contra Costa County and EBIIC to build a county-wide interfaith coalition, exploring ways we might cooperate in the areas of service, education, advocacy, and organizing.

One interfaith event we actively participate in is the monthly vigil sponsored by EBIIC at the West Contra Costa County Detention Center in Richmond, CA. Clergy and laypersons gather once a month there to share stories and worship and to show solidarity for the detainees held in the facility. The stories are sometimes hard to hear, but the gathering gives us the strength to share the pain of those who share them, and worshipping together energizes us in this work.

Finally, several times the Task Force has taken a public stand on an issue important to us and our community. In November, 2010, we, together with others, visited the office of Representative Jerry McNerney in Pleasanton to urge his support for the DREAM (see our web site for our letter to him). In July, 2011, we wrote Department of Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano to protest the investigation of employees at a steel manufacturing company in Berkeley because of the damage this process, another example of the enforcement-only approach, would inflict on these workers, their families, their company, and their community. We denounced this investigation as an "affront to religious conscience and rational governance," and "contrary to our American values of family and community" (see our web site for our letter). Finally, in August, 2011 the Task Force approved a letter to the Regional Director of the Immigration and Custom Enforcement agency (ICE) condemning the troubled Secure Communities program for disrupting families, alienating whole communities from law enforcement, and for the deceitful and authoritarian manner in which ICE initiated and carried out the program. Our challenge was part of a national protest against this program that has resulted in a Justice Department review.

In addition to hosting the District-wide conference, the Task Force is planning further programming — perhaps a guest speaker or a movie — that will provide further lead up to Justice GA 2012. The Board of the Church has committed to raising funds to help people who want to go attend GA in Phoenix.

If you would like more information about our work, please feel free to contact us at [immigration@mduuc.org](mailto:immigration@mduuc.org).