

Union County Interfaith Coordinating Council

NOVEMBER 2020

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RECONCILIATION

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Cranford Presbyterian Church
Cranford

About the Union County Interfaith Coordinating Council

Our Mission

The Union County Interfaith Coordinating Council works to facilitate regular interfaith meetings in order to make way for the building of bonds within the interfaith community.

We respect and encourage the inclusion and welcoming of others regardless of faith, race or disability. We strive to be proactive on social issues.

Our Goals

- To grow the network of faith-based organizations in Union County.
- To encourage representatives from all faiths to join the Interfaith Coordinated Council including those of Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, Islamic, and other faiths.
- To be engaged in:
 1. **Community Building** within faith-based organizations and the general Union County population.
 2. The advancement of **Social Justice**.
 3. The intentional **inclusion** of others regardless of gender, faith, race.
- To be active in activities that are inclusive and community building.

Our Objectives

- Sponsor regular engagement opportunities that facilitate the building of bonds within the Union County interfaith community and their congregations.
- Strengthen the Union County religious congregations through involvement, action and education in self-help.
- Build working relationships between Union County religious organizations and Community Access Unlimited that create opportunities for youth and people with disabilities and their support staff.

Potential Advantages to Joining the Interfaith Community

- Develop interfaith solidarity.
- Avail yourself of increased visibility within the interfaith community and build opportunities to share educational and community events with the group.
- Build religious membership.
- Gain exposure for you and fellow congregation members to educational opportunities regarding entitlements, housing, and other services, including but not limited to: programs for seniors, youth, people with physical and developmental disabilities, etc.
- Create full and part time employment opportunities for congregation members with CAU.

ON RECONCILIATION

By Rabbi Joel Abraham

I am currently in a Doctor of Ministry program at Drew University Theological School. In our introduction to the Doctor of Ministry course, we were invited to collaborate to create a public witness or liturgy. This public witness or liturgy had to confront a contemporary issue, give participants time to reflect, as well as provide an impetus and invitation to growth and change. With five classmates, Revs. David Clark, Laurel O'Connor, Mia Sloan, Tirzah Turner, and Ellen Witko, and myself, Rabbi Joel N. Abraham, we created a multi-faith meditation for civic healing after the national election. It was obvious to us, no matter what the results of our upcoming November election, there would be a need for healing on all sides, and we hoped to provide a template for a liturgical moment to bring people together.



We strove to not only invite voices of different faith traditions, but also to create a space that would welcome those of different political views who might have different feelings about the results. Even if there was turmoil and results were not yet finalized, the day after an election day is filled with stark contrasts. Within one national context, there are people who are mourning and people who are celebrating. There are people who are angry and people who are joyful. There are people who are confused and disillusioned and people who are feeling triumphant and victorious.

One question we asked ourselves when coming to create a multi-faith space of healing and hope was: how do we keep this service from being unbalanced? In our context, we are a mostly Christian group, with a Reform Jewish Rabbi, that does not want to appropriate other traditions' prayers without their consent or participation. But that question can be extended even further to political thought and doctrine, so I will repeat it again: how do we keep a service of healing from being unbalanced?

We want to be clear: difference isn't something to sweep under the rug in hopes of homogeneity. Whether it's politics or religion, we find hope in the fact that diversity creates a beautiful tapestry of thought and belief across our landscape.

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Our service (the text and video of which are provided in links below) began with a contemplative prayer, and included prayers from African, Jewish, Hindu, Muslim, and Christian tradition. The idea was not to be comprehensive, but to provide a model, so that other communities might bring in the prayers of their own members, or those they wished to lift up. We acknowledged at the beginning that we asked our participants to bring prayers from their own faiths. We knew that such a practice might make those of different faiths uncomfortable, but made clear that we were presenting and offering prayer, not forcing others to pray with or in the manner that we might offer. We appreciate that it is often easier and more authentic for prayer leaders to use the tropes and words of their own tradition, rather than try to find a neutral medium that avoids offending anyone, but also often fails to inspire.

From the Jewish tradition, I offered two prayers. The first was *gomeil* - the prayer that is offered upon returning safely to the community by a person who has experienced a traumatic experience - such as illness, or a difficult journey. This prayer gives the one who prays the opportunity not only to give thanks, in front of the community, for having survived, but also gives the community the opportunity to echo that thanks, and share their own gratitude. The second prayer was a prayer for our country. Traditionally, this is one of the only prayers that is expected to be in the vernacular, rather than in Hebrew. The prayer is meant to be transparent - not only to the worshippers, but to the outside community, so that the congregation is known to be patriotic and loyal. This formulation (from *L'chol z'man v'eit* - the Reform Movement of Judaism's order of prayer for clergy) combines the calls for justice from the Torah ("Justice, justice shall you pursue." - Deut. 16:20 and "Proclaim liberty throughout the land." - Lev. 25:10) which are part of our American lexicon, but also words from the Declaration of Independence ("life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness") while calling for all of us to do our parts to maintain our democracy and thanking those who have risked or given their lives for those values.

The liturgy that we created was a collaborative offering - an offering to the moment that we see quite clearly in the road ahead. We do not know what will happen in November, but we do know that we face a choice about going forward. We can come together again as a nation - recognizing that we may live in different Americas, but our dream of equity and justice for all is the same, or we can continue to put our own needs over others, and segment our fragile democracy into shards of former freedom. The challenge is ours: how we decide to meet that challenge will determine not only our own futures, but those of our children, and those around the world.

As the prayer for the nation that I shared concluded: "We pray for wisdom and moral strength, that we may be guardians of these rights for ourselves and for the sake of all people, now and forever." Amen.

Rabbi Joel N. Abraham
Temple Sholom of Scotch Plains
UCICC Board Member



UNION COUNTY INTERFAITH COORDINATING COUNCIL

LET'S TALK ABOUT HUNGER



VIRTUAL SYMPOSIUM ON HUNGER REGISTRATION EVENT

NOV 18
7:00 PM

REGISTER IN ADVANCE

Roderick Spearman - RSpearman@CAUNJ.ORG

PANELISTS:

Bernadette Murphy | Executive Director, St. Joseph's Social Service- Elizabeth, NJ
Candance Ashe | Chief Executive Officer, Rahway Food for Friends- Rahway, NJ
Triada Stampas | Community Food Bank of NJ- Hillside, NJ

**AFTER REGISTERING, YOU WILL RECEIVE A CONFIRMATION
EMAIL CONTAINING ZOOM MEETING DETAILS**

Irreconcilable Differences

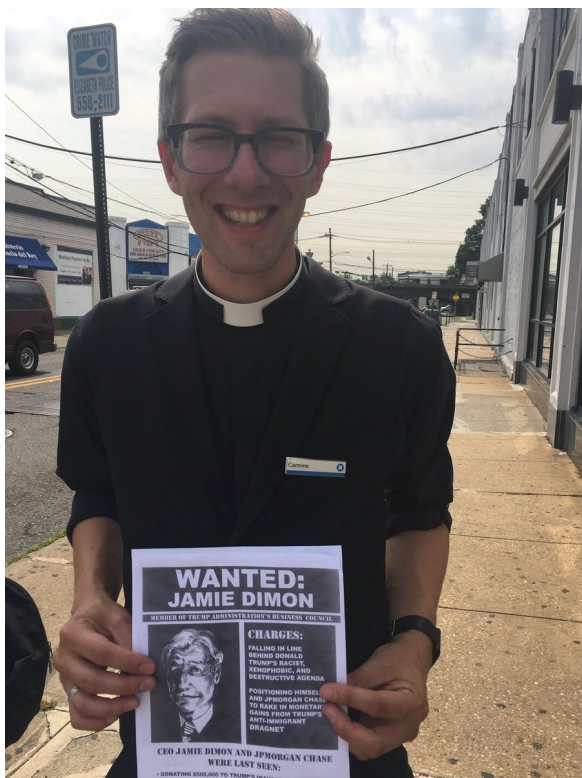
By Rev. Carmine Pernini
Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

After November 3, the day of the presidential election, it is likely that there are going to be a lot of angry folks. Some, like NJ's Department of Homeland Security, have warned of the potential for violence from militia and identity (white supremacist) groups. The president himself has signaled that he may not accept the results of the election (unless he wins of course!) We are in the middle of a pandemic, where, pitifully, wearing a mask has become a political statement. Our political divisions are hardened at this point. Kids and grandparents, hell, we all are missing parts of our lives that we will not get back. And, as I write this, I can feel the stress of our present national proclivity to frame conversations about climate change and the pandemic with the word "believe"- Do you believe in climate change? Do you believe health officials? As if hard data has taken on creedal significance.

Yeah, I'm pissed off. Angry. Anxious. Sometimes depressed. Sometimes manic. Sometimes normal – for pandemic living that is.

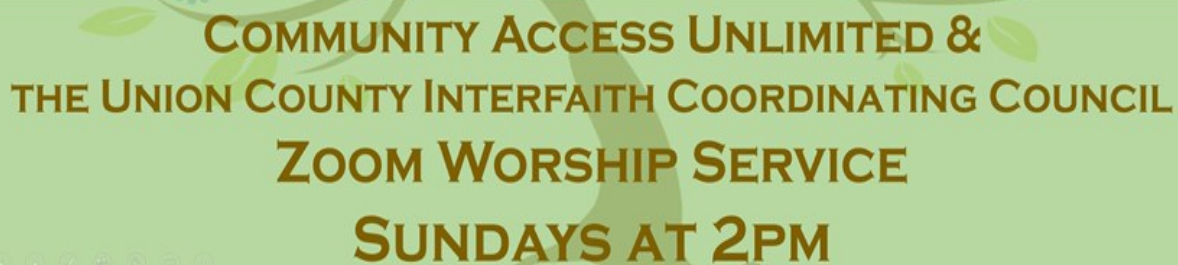
You know what I am talking about. We do not know how long our dance of death with COVID will go on along with all of its accompanying accoutrements, isolation, interrupted and blended family and work time (if we even have any), video conferencing, supply chain deficits (toilet paper?), and on and on the list goes.

Regardless of who wins the election, our lives, such as they are, will be much the same. Presidents may change, but we will have to live with one another regardless. Are our differences irreconcilable? Or, is there a way to regain affirmation of our common human dignity?



As a Christian Pastor, this is the part of the piece where I could pivot to Jesus' call for reconciliation. Jesus died on the cross so that we might be reconciled to God and thus reconciled to each other. While this is true, right now, in this historical moment, that sentiment seems pithy at best, or at worst, maybe even abusive. Abusive because declaring that we all need to hug and make up overlooks the real suffering and loss that many have gone through during the pandemic and presidency of Donald Trump.

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worship
with us



Meeting ID: 859 7233 6325

Participants are encouraged to read Scripture, sing or play a musical offering, give testimony, share stories of faith, and assume leadership roles.

With over 210,000 people dead from COVID and over 7,000,000 people infected, one third of whom will experience long term ancillary symptoms from COVID like confusion, damaged lungs, and arrhythmia – demanding we all move past it and sing “Give Peace a Chance” seems irresponsible.

Sure, we can mouth the words of forgiveness. Doing so gives the forgiver the pastiche of *holiness* and after having forgiven a perceived enemy, telling the tale becomes performative righteousness. But, truth be told, these past pandemic months have been traumatizing for a great many people, both in the actual sickness and loss of it all, as well as the confusing messaging coming from the White House about whether or not we should genuinely be concerned about the pandemic at all! It is a dual trauma in that we grieve but at the same time wonder if we should or shouldn't.

So, rather than demand forgiveness for enemies, something Jesus could do, I, not being Jesus, have a considerably smaller ask of each of you. If you are angry and possibly even traumatized by either the pandemic or the past 4 years of this administration, own your anger. Give in to it. Accept it. Heck, even use it to make the world better. But, don't deny the way you feel. We are living through a moment where it seems like democracy, if you believe we still are one, seems to be breaking apart. People are sick and dying. And there literally is no end in sight.

So, if you have been wronged, and you have!- rather than simply say forgive your enemies, perhaps try something else. Maybe try this: Ask God for the *ability* to forgive the person or people who have wronged you. Be honest with yourself and accept who you are and how you are right now. And, instead of washing away all that has happened like the brisk baptismal water of a Sunday or Saturday service, sit with your feelings and ask God to change you.

Reconciliation is hard work, especially when pain is tangible, like the loss of a loved one, a job, or bodily or mental function. If you are angry at God, then be angry with God and join the many voices from Scripture who felt the same. But, let's not mouth the words forgiveness. I don't think we are there yet, and perhaps, for some of us, we may never be. Rather, open yourself up to asking to be different, to sit with your emotions in a new way, to humanize not your enemies, but yourself. Humans, all of us being one of them, feel emotions. Feel them. Wrestle with them. But, do not deny them by offering forgiveness when you are not or maybe never will be ready. Like everything, wherever you are is not where you will be later. Pray for God to move you closer to where you are going – towards God - but do so while fully appreciating where you are now. Pray for the ability to forgive others and, come what may, let God do with you what God will.



Reconciliation for What?

Pastor Erich Kussman

We live in some precarious times. America is so divided right now and the truth is: I do not see this country coming back together to sing “Kumbaya” around a campfire and forget all the pain inflicted upon our black and brown siblings under the regime of Trump. Reconciliation is a far off dream if there is not true repentance from those have been afflicting harm and pain with their words, signs, and actions. White nationalism and supremacy has entered the public square in ways this country has not seen since the 60’s.

No matter what opinion you may adhere to, let me tell you something: Racism is real. You cannot be wholeheartedly against racism and injustice and then wholeheartedly for the Blue Lives Matter movement. You have to choose sides. A quote attributed to the Lutheran theologian and Pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer who was martyred by the Nazi regime in WW2 says:

“Silence in the face of evil is itself evil: God will not hold us guiltless. Not to speak is to speak. Not to act is to act.”

If you are reading this article, then it is up to you to speak truth. Racism is real. And it’s wrong. Even if you claim not to have seen it doesn’t mean it doesn’t exist. Until we acknowledge the problem we can’t be part of the solution. We have to acknowledge it.

We are called to speak about this, by the way, not just in public but also at home. If we speak more about this in public or on social media more than in our very homes, we have to ask what our motivation really is.



And here’s another thing you should say. Black Lives Matter. This isn’t a statement, it’s a truth.

So many people will push back and say, “All Lives Matter, Blue Lives Matter, Unborn Lives Matter.” They do this to defer and deflect from the issue at hand. I have two kids. If one of my kids is left alone, abused, and hurting, I won’t go up to her and say your life matters as much as your brother’s. No, I would look at her and say “You Matter” because I love the individual as well as the whole. When someone is hurting, they don’t need to hear the politically correct phrase, they need to hear your voice say “Your Life Matters.”

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NEXT MEETING

Topic

UCICC Steering Committee

Time

10:00 am

Date

November 4, 2020

Login Information:

Meeting ID: 850 0260 4041

Passcode: 487524

Call In: +1 (646) 558 8656

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To those of the non-denominational and evangelical folds: There is just no way to reconcile the things Trump says with the things Jesus said. One of the biggest obstacles to Christ is Christians. **YOU**. Too often Christians act very unlike our Christ. We are better at worshipping Jesus than we are at following him.

For four centuries there has been injustice to the black community in our nation. How can we make a change now? You can't, but God can. Let us not forget that it was for four centuries that God's people, the Israelites, were enslaved to the Egyptian empire under the rule of Pharaoh. Things were progressively getting worse for the Israelite people. This is the time when God came down in a burning bush and said "I have seen the misery of my people" and "I'm coming down to rescue them." When God turns an eye toward injustice it will be defeated. It will bow down to the power of the Most High.. Injustice will not prevail in the presence of God. Evil doesn't stand a chance in the light.

God came down in a powerful way, working through human beings like Moses and Aaron, to bring deliverance to an entire race of people. He brought them out of four centuries of oppression and into a promising life with His presence.

God right now is looking down at our nation. He sees those who have been hurting and oppressed for centuries. He sees those who have been hurting for just a little while. If you are trying to find where God is in all of this, look for Him to be on the side of the oppressed and the mistreated. No matter who you are, if you are hurting, oppressed, and mistreated because of the color of your skin, God sees you. He's already come down to rescue you, and God's coming again for you.

So as a white pastor in the pursuit of letting our black brothers and sisters know that their lives do matter— you cannot have reconciliation if only one party wants it, and this work does not fall on the ones who are being mistreated. Yet, to hear some white liberals, Christian evangelicals, and conservatives Christians, America needs both sides (black people and white people) to drop their weapons and forgive each other.

My question to people who proliferate that message is, what harm have Black people done to white people in America? I'm not talking about individual criminal acts. I'm asking when have Black people systematically oppressed white people in America. The correct answer is never.



Since the latest national example of white America's hatred for black people, I've witnessed faith leaders attempting to rally blacks and whites into town hall-like discussions about racial reconciliation.

Many of these faith leaders seem reserved to the notion that in order to fix what's broken about America, Black people must sit down with their abusers for a fireside chat. Such conversations are not a tried-and-true tactic for healing because the premise is that both parties share the responsibility of making the other whole.

Both parties don't need healing. Black people need healing. And we need to hear more than flaccid apologies for the slaveholder's wrongdoings or the wrongdoings of some modern-day uneducated, outlying group of white vagrants in the woods somewhere.

White people abuse Black folks in micro ways every day especially by wearing MAGA hats, flying Nazi, Confederate, and Blue Lives Matter flags. They support a president that makes racist comments, and reserve the right to micro-aggressions toward anyone whenever they deem appropriate.

These reconciliation chats are not safe spaces right now, nor are they productive when they take place from the vantage point of seeking a middle ground between abusers and the abused. There must be a genuine repentance. At the end of the day, we cannot change people's hearts, but through our prayers, our relationships, and what we say and do we can give the Holy Spirit room to change people's hearts. God is the one that changes hearts, but God invites you and I, into this work of reconciliation.



“Stand by....” Who are the Proud Boys?

By: Carmine Pernini
Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

On September 29, during the US presidential debate between President Trump and former Vice President Biden, during a segment dedicated to race, Chris Wallace, the moderator, asked Trump, "Are you willing, tonight, to condemn white supremacists and militia groups and to say that they need to stand down?" Trump tiptoed around the question and instead doubled down that "almost everything I see is from the left wing, not from the right wing." Wallace pushed back on Trump, along with former Vice President Joe Biden, and again asked him to address right-wing violence. "What do you want to call them?" Trump asked. "Proud Boys," Biden said, referring to a far-right group.



"Proud Boys, stand back and stand by," Trump responded. (BusinessInsider.com).

Who are the Proud Boys that President Trump said to “...stand back and stand by?”

The following is from the Southern Poverty Law Center (www.splcenter.org):

Established in the midst of the 2016 presidential election by *VICE* Media co-founder Gavin McInnes, the Proud Boys are self-described “western chauvinists” who adamantly deny any connection to the racist “alt-right,” insisting they are simply a fraternal group spreading an “anti-political correctness” and “anti-white guilt” agenda.

Ideology

Their disavowals of bigotry are belied by their actions: rank-and-file Proud Boys and leaders regularly spout white nationalist memes and maintain affiliations with known extremists. They are known for anti-Muslim and misogynistic rhetoric. Proud Boys have appeared alongside other hate groups at extremist gatherings like the "Unite the Right" rally in Charlottesville. Indeed, former Proud Boys member Jason Kessler helped to organize the event, which brought together Klansmen, antisemites, Southern racists, and militias. Kessler was only “expelled” from the group after the violence and near-universal condemnation of the Charlottesville rally-goers.

Other hardcore members of the so-called "alt-right" have argued that the “western chauvinist” label is just a “PR c--- term” McInnes crafted to gain mainstream acceptance. “Let’s not bullshit,” Brian Brathovd, aka Caeralus Rex, told his co-hosts on the antisemitic *The Daily Shoah* — one of the most popular alt-right podcasts.

McInnes himself has ties to the racist right and has contributed to hate sites like *VDare.com* and *American Renaissance*, both of which publish the work of white supremacists and so-called “race realists.” He even used *Taki’s Magazine* — a far-right publication whose contributors include Richard Spencer and Jared Taylor — to announce the founding of the Proud Boys. McInnes plays a duplicitous rhetorical game: rejecting white nationalism and, in particular, the term “alt-right” while espousing some of its central tenets. For example, McInnes has himself said it is fair to call him Islamophobic.

STRUGGLING FOR RECONCILIATION IN DIFFICULT TIMES

By: Skip Winter
First Presbyterian Church of Cranford

At the beginning of every year, our Union County Interfaith Coordinating Council Newsletter Team looks to put together topics for our monthly newsletter. With the presidential election coming up in November of 2020, we decided that reconciliation would be a great topic to write about. All elections often pit friends versus friends, family versus family and coworkers versus coworkers. Presidential elections tend to be more difficult for people to navigate, as in almost all cases, the consequences tend to be greater. We figured 2020 would not be any different where, depending on the results, strained relationships would have to be repaired and people would have to accept the results and look as best they could toward the future.

Man....were we wrong ! The rhetoric, messaging and practices this year have probably been among the most divisive in history, which have left many family, friends, neighbors and coworkers barely on speaking terms.

Yet, if you believe in history repeating itself as I do, one only has to look back over the last 244 years and see that nothing has really changed. Let's talk about the American Revolution for starters. Tories and Loyalists versus Patriots looking for independence from England. Though the Declaration of Independence was signed in 1776, loyalties amongst families started long before that. People came to the colonies for many different reasons; religious freedom, freedom from debt in England, those looking to make money and those looking to start a new life free from British rule. It was only a matter of time before people who came to the colonies began to clash as their different visions for the future developed. Those looking and working for independence clashed with those who remained loyal to the British Crown. Differences developed as new faith traditions emerged, with many of the working class Patriot folk disagreeing with the trade and business merchants who made their money from Britain. Families became divided, many over the issues of slavery. One only has to look no further than when Benjamin Franklin, a true Patriot and leader of the colonies, never reconciled with his son, William Franklin, who was the loyalist governor of New Jersey.

Fast forward to the Civil War fought from 1860 to 1865. Many families, especially amongst border states such as Maryland, Delaware, Kentucky, Tennessee and Southern Pennsylvania, had brothers fighting brothers and fathers fighting sons, depending on which side they favored; essentially slave states or free states. My sense is that when the Civil War was concluded, reconciliation was more difficult because when the fighting was concluded, those who survived had to go back home, with many having to live within the same family unit they had left when the war started. At the same time, the Southern states that had left the Union had to learn to work once again in cooperation within the United States of America.

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Moving more than 100 years forward to the Vietnam era, the dynamics for reconciliation were entirely different than those struggles of the American Revolution and the Civil War. Fighting in the American Revolution and the Civil War, participants basically had only to choose sides; Loyalist or Tory vs. Patriot and whether to wear a blue or grey uniform in the Civil War. Vietnam was different, because there were those who believed in fighting in Southeast Asia, or did not have a choice to fight as they were looking for a job, versus those who believed that the war was immoral and either went into hiding, moved to Canada or sought student deferments. Many who disagreed with the war, and did not have student deferments, or had a low draft number starting in 1972, did not have a choice and were forced to serve. In the 1960s and early 1970s, the war was more real to citizens in the United States as films of battles were broadcast on the news every night. Many persons, especially young people, demonstrated and rallied in the streets and on college campuses, often clashing with construction workers and other members of the silent majority. Women also became more involved in expressing their feelings about the war.

Here we are in November of 2020. The internet and social media has created an entirely new medium for immediate discussions and arguments, especially on platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Zoom. This year's presidential election is dividing family and friend like no other. Thanksgiving dinners are going to be very difficult for many families this year.

Yet, for many generations, individuals have looked toward the writings of their faith traditions to seek reconciliation during times of struggle. Reconciliation is one of the more difficult ideas to navigate because it is so personal. Coming from the Reformed, Protestant Presbyterian tradition as I do, the Bible, especially the New Testament, specifically the Apostle Paul's letters and the letters of others, bring reconciliation to the forefront of our teachings.

In Paul's letter to the Ephesians, (Ephesians 4:32) he states: "Be Kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you."

In a letter to the Hebrews, an unknown author, possibly Apollos or Barnabas, (Hebrews 12:14), the writer says: "Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; without holiness, no one will see the Lord."

Finally, in (2nd Corinthians 5:18-19), the Apostle Paul writes to the church in Corinth: "All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation. That God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation."

In these trying times, I urge everyone to reconcile with all of those who you have disagreed with, not only during these recent times, but also with disagreements that have arisen in the past. Struggling over differences of opinions is not anything new and will most certainly raise its ugly head in the future. History has shown that to be true. Yet, take a few minutes to study the writings of the authors of your own faith traditions to seek guidance on how to reconcile with those who you need to make peace with.



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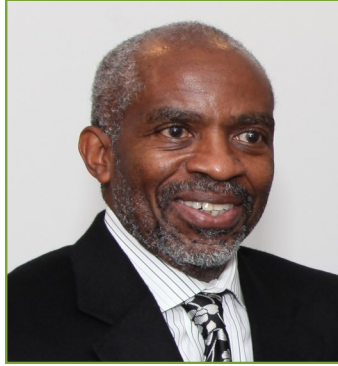
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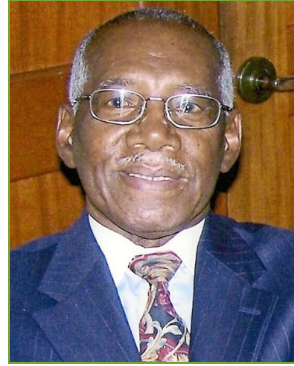
UCICC Outreach Coordinating Team



*Sidney Blanchard,
Associate Executive Director
Community Relations
Community Access Unlimited
sblanchard@caunj.org*



*Roderick (Rod) Spearman
UCICC Interfaith Coordinator
rspearman@caunj.org*



*Pastor Howard A. Bryant,
UCICC Interfaith Coordinator
hbryant@caunj.org*



*Pastor Carmine Pernini
UCICC Interfaith Coordinator
cpernini@caunj.org*



*AH 'Skip' Winter
UCICC Steering
Committee Member*



*Rebecca Kasen
Director of Advocacy
Community Access Unlimited
rkasen@caunj.org*

Join & Be Active Today!

- Attend monthly meetings.
- Invite other community leaders to attend our meetings and events.
- Support or host fundraising programs to support the Record Expungement Grant Program.
- Sign up for our mailing list.
- Share useful information about your organization.

Contact Rod Spearman at
908-354-3040 x 4324
for more information on becoming
a member

Advertise in the UCICC Newsletter!

Have an exciting event or program happening?

Reach out and build bonds with members of the interfaith community in Union County by advertising in this newsletter!

Please send all print-ready ads to Rod Spearman at rspearman@caunj.org by the **13th** of every month to save a space!



Union County Interfaith Coordinating Council c/o Community Access Unlimited
80 West Grand Street, Elizabeth, NJ 07202
Phone: (908) 354-3040 x4324 • Email: UCInterfaith@caunj.org

www.facebook.com/UnionCountyInterfaithCoordinatingCouncil



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Elizabeth, NJ 07202
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Fax: 908-354-2665 www.caunj.org

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Elizabeth, NJ

Community Access Unlimited's Mission: *To provide community access through effective and comprehensive support services for people with disabilities and at-risk youth, giving them the opportunity to live independently and to lead normal and productive lives in the community.*

UCICC & STEERING COMMITTEE UPCOMING EVENTS

UCICC Steering Committee
November 4 2020 at 10 am

UCICC continues to hold virtual events during the
COVID-19 crisis.

Look out for future events on voting, housing, and food
security

Please stay safe during the COVID 19 crisis.



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