

## **Annual Report for Conversations on Race 2022**

Over the past year our country has been living in the aftermath and lingering impact of a great racial uprising and a global pandemic. We are in a world in which division and fracture are the most prominent and defining qualities of our political discourse. There have been both continued struggles to live into this new awareness we have as a country deeply scarred by racism and a great backlash seeking to undo this full awareness of who we are as a nation.

This is the context in which Conversations on Race has persisted to provide leadership in FUMCOG'S journey toward antiracism. It has been a year of growth and challenges.

This year these efforts included leading a congregation wide discussion of the book *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents* by Isabel Wilkerson, an Adult Academy on Kay Kotan's *Being the Church in a Post-pandemic World: Game Changers for the Post-pandemic Church*, along with *Remove the Pews: Spiritual Possibilities for Sacred Spaces* by Donna Schaper. We also lead an Adult Academy on Critical Race Theory.

The *Caste* discussion consisted of a series of small groups meetings. Four groups were convened over four sessions, and participants and leaders reported inspiring and moving discussions. A culminating event was scheduled for all participants to celebrate and witness together about this moving experience. The *Caste* event provided an opportunity to deepen our understanding about American racism.

One of the results of the racial reflective audit from 2019 was that there is confusion in the church about FUMCOG'S mission. The Adult Academy on Kay Kotan's book along with Donna Schaper's book provided an opportunity to consider two tools to explore our focus and mission as a congregation.

The Adult Academy on Critical Race Theory provided background on Critical Race theory and its misuse as a tool to silence productive discussion about race. We were made aware of efforts to discredit Critical Race Theory by attaching any unpopular idea about the push for antiracism to it. We were also given ideas about how to oppose efforts to silence antiracism.

One of challenges over the past year has been how to be an ally to Janes Memorial United Methodist church. After starting a dialogue with Janes about Reconciliation the process was disrupted by a pastoral change at Janes. Despite this interruption the process has provided FUMCOG an opportunity to begin to consider issues of institutional privilege, reparations, and allyship. We have not gotten to know Janes better, but may have more of a context in which to see ourselves. Our senior pastor, Bob Coombe has provided enthusiastic and persistent leadership in our efforts to move our relationship with Janes forward. He has, in fact, been a

strong supporter of Conversations work, challenging the congregation regularly on the centrality of antiracism to our Christian faith. Bob is retiring, and we will miss his prophetic voice.

During this challenging time Conversations has continued to meet monthly, considering questions like how to sustain ourselves in this work, learning together to confront microaggressions, and how to help white folks see the benefits of committing to Antiracism.

We are also adapting to continuing our work without our dear friend, Karen Clark. Karen had been a central participant and partner in our work for 30 years until her death in March of this year. We miss her.