

Sheet Cake

Unitarian Universalist Church of Olinda

Rev. Rodrigo Emilio Solano-Quesnel

13 June, 2021



A Spire-ing Shadow © 2021 Rod E.S.Q.

There is a story of legendary status about the rock band *Van Halen*. Their show “rider” – the list they gave to each prospective venue, with instructions on how to prepare the stage and backstage – had a very particular requirement: to have a bowl of M&Ms backstage... with all the brown M&Ms removed. For a long time, this was seen as the famous rockers playing the prima donna card.

It was eventually revealed that this apparently petty requirement was a test, to see if they could trust the venue to have followed all of their other instructions closely. *Van Halen* had a lot of complicated – and potentially dangerous – equipment requirements, and a bowl that still had

brown M&Ms was an indication to them that the venue had not followed their exacting technical requirements closely enough, therefore putting people and equipment at risk.

In a *Story of Sheet Cake*, offered by Rev. Brian Ferguson (and shared with his blessing), he describes what may well be a similar test to see if his congregation could follow the leadership of people of colour. When his fellowship’s social justice chair asked an organizer for a Martin Luther King Jr. Day rally how their UU congregation might support them, they were asked to bring sheet cake. The board’s instinct had been to offer something more – pie or other baked goods, which they were very good at doing – but Rev. Ferguson wondered if they should just do what had been asked of them.

They did just that, and brought the sheet cake – nothing else. At the rally, an organizer recognized Rev. Ferguson as the minister at the fellowship that had offered the sheet cake, and then invited him to offer the benediction at the rally. Rev. Ferguson was the only White speaker. And he doesn't know for certain, but he often wonders if bringing the sheet cake – as requested, and nothing else – was a test of sorts, to see if the predominantly White congregation would engage in the *followship* from the leadership of people of colour.

Over the past couple months, Canadian Unitarian Universalists have been paying closer attention to how we might address racism and oppression in our congregations and in society at large. It's not a new conversation, but it has picked up steam as we consider adding an 8th Principle that explicitly outlines our commitment to dismantle racism and other oppressions.

As we've done some groundwork over the past several years, including truth, healing, and reconciliation work, you may have heard an adage that is often cited when marginalized communities relate to historically dominant communities – *nothing for us, without us*.

That's to say, anything that is done for the sake of beginning, restoring, or supporting relationships with marginalized groups, is better done if it takes the initiative and the input from the very groups that are asking for support. It is tempting to offer something else... what would-be supporters consider best from their point of view, but which might not necessarily be the support that is most helpful, or wanted – and may in fact be harmful.

This month of June, there is plenty to consider in supporting people that have often been put in the margins. June is National Indigenous History Month in Canada, with Indigenous People's Day coming up on June 21.

June is also Pride month in many places, although the festivities – and protests – to affirm the worth and dignity of 2SLGBTQ+ peoples often

carries on at other times during the summer, as is the case in the Windsor area.

There are also some important commemorations in Black history. Many are U.S. based, but as we've learned, that history often extends to Canada's history – and so do many of the lessons.

Next Saturday is the U.S. holiday Juneteenth, when enslaved people in Texas got the news of emancipation on June 19th, 1865... three years after emancipation had been declared. And even then, slavery hadn't been fully abolished U.S.-wide, until later, with the ratification of the 13th amendment.

And as we know, the legacy of slavery and subjugation of Black people has continued long after. At the beginning of the month, we recognized 100 years since the Tulsa Race Massacre, which included the burning of Black Wall Street. And there is still living memory about that event, as 106-year-old Lessie Benningfield ("Mother Randle") recently testified to the U.S. congress.

A similar... not quite holiday – but celebration – is Loving Day, observed yesterday on June 12. This recognizes a US Supreme Court ruling in *Loving vs. Virginia* striking down "anti-miscegenation" laws which were still applicable in some states. Striking down those laws allowed interracial marriages U.S.-wide in 1967. And there is living memory of those who were affected by those laws that were only so recently struck down. Many among you were alive when laws against interracial marriages were still a legal reality.

In Canada, we've recently been using our newest \$10 bill, featuring Viola Desmond, who was convicted of tax evasion (1 cent) as a result of a movie theatre's discriminatory practice that didn't allow her to sit where she wanted, in 1946 – even though segregation wasn't exactly legal where she lived, other institutional means were used to oppress Black people like Viola Desmond. Desmond's sister keeps that living

memory, and was around to see the unveiling of this new banknote a few years ago. This is not ancient history.

Just a couple weeks ago, the finding of the remains of 215 children found at the Kamloops Indian Residential School highlighted the ongoing legacy of systemic harm on the Indigenous peoples of this land. Survivors abound. This is not ancient history.

The mass murder of the Afzaal family in London, Ontario, this very week, shows that Islamophobia, often based on racialized prejudice, lives in our communities. This past week is not ancient history.

All of this history, some more recent than others, but all of it recent enough, reminds many of us of the urgency to act. And when we act, we keep in mind – *nothing for us, without us*.

Many of you have expressed enthusiasm for a land acknowledgment at the beginning of our services. And some of you are wondering why we still don't have one. It is not because this practice of land acknowledgement isn't worthwhile, but simply because we haven't been asked to do it.

When I was beginning to build a relationship with the Caldwell First Nation, I eventually asked one of their leaders about land acknowledgments, and I was assured that there is a template for this, which they offer to churches and schools – when asked for it. But when I specifically asked if *they* would *want* us to have a land acknowledgement, the answer I got was that they were not requesting that from us.

Ever since then, we have – intentionally – done without a land acknowledgement, following the lead from a leader among the people we are building a relationship with.

This could change. A different leader might give me a different answer, or the same leader who previously declined might give a different answer now. We can stick to *followship* as we follow their lead.

It also doesn't mean that we can't acknowledge – and build upon – the relationship. This morning, I acknowledged that the space our church building is in, is near the traditional home of the Caldwell First Nation, which is Point Pelee and its surroundings. This is our own recognition of part of our relationship with the land and people we are among. We do something similar when we recognize local communities of faith every week, from the Leamington Ministerial weekly prayer schedule.

This is something we can do for our sake, my friends, out of our own agency, while respecting the agency of the people we are in relationship with, and how they would like us to relate with them.

Recognizing the *relationships* is also a practice that Indigenous leaders have often invited us to take on.

My friends, we have also been invited to *continue* the relationship in other ways. We have been invited to attend teachings, and cultural events. This past week, some among us have visited the days-long vigil near the Caldwell First Nation offices in Leamington, as they acknowledge 215 children over 215 hours. That was an invitation extended to the community, and one we were welcome to take up. They did not require anything else, other than to show up, and perhaps offer some tobacco on the fire, upon invitation.

My friends, there are times when going above-and-beyond what we've been asked can have a place. And as trust is built in a relationship, those times and places become clearer, more intuitive, and open to be received. In the process of building those relationships, we can trust the leadership of those who call us to support them, to let us know precisely what they need, and nothing more.

May we continue to build these relationships, and may we remain in
fellowship of the lead of those who ask for support.

So may it be,
In Solidarity, in Love, and in Peace
Amen

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Opening Hymn #148 Let Freedom Span Both East and West

Words: Anonymous

~)| Music: Betsy Jo Angebrandt, 1931- , © 1992 Unitarian Universalist Association

CHRISTMAS HYMN

Closing Hymn #1008 When Our Heart Is in a Holy Place

~)| Words & Music: Joyce Poley, 1941- © Songstyle Music (SOCAN)

keyboard arr. Lorne Kellett, 1950-