



The Unitarian Church in Westport

What IS the Story Behind TUCW and #METOO?

Our church has made a lot of progress exploring the many issues behind #MeToo since it first came on the scene in 2017 following the public accusations against movie-mogul Harvey Weinstein. Some of our work is clear to all of us, some less so, either because we are new to the church, or we have been caught up in other activities. We thought it might be helpful to recap the chronology around our central position, again.

What follows, then, is a quick chronology and overview of the #MeToo events at The Unitarian Church in Westport, from 2017 to the present:

When the #MeToo Movement exploded on social media and all across the U.S, Rev. Morehouse called together a #METOO Task Force (**Sudha Sankar, Lynda Shannon Bluestein, Janet Luongo, Cheryl Dixon Paul, Felicia Keeton and Maureen McBride**) in November of 2017. The Task Force asked to address multiple needs for healing and sharing stories in safe spaces, education for all ages, public witness and other programming within our congregation.

Plans came together quickly for a first Sunday service on this issue when Rev. John preached “*Reflections on #MeToo*” in December, and more than 100 women came forward to drop a silent grain of salt into a bowl of water symbolizing they too were #MeToo. Clearly, the #MeToo Movement reverberated within the walls of The Unitarian Church in Westport. **The TUCWomen** have let it be known that faith communities like ours should be among the first groups to stand up and say, “We as a congregation, of all places, should be getting this right!”

In January 2018 a second service dedicated to #MeToo issues, “*Our Own Voices: From Pain to Empowerment*” involved even more men and women of the congregation who expressed the desire for more education, sharing circles, and advocacy by our congregation. **Cheryl Dixon Paul and Janet**

Luongo as Worship Associates did an exceptional job designing both services.

A congregational survey, A Faithful Response to #MeToo was distributed during this service. 129 surveys were completed; 54% expressed interest in participating in programs on this issue; 57% wanted more educational programs for children and youth and 45% want education for adults on #MeToo issues; 32% wanted to see sacred healing circles begun; 20% expressed interest in journaling workshops; 47% want to see our congregation's policies reviewed to make sure they meet sexually safer congregations' criteria.

In addition to the Sunday services and survey on #MeToo, the Task Force has worked closely to provide lots of channels of communication and learning:

- **TUCWomen Group's** monthly Brown Bag Lunches provide ongoing opportunities for more discussion of this whole issue.
- Task Force Member **Janet Luongo** initiated a series of Journaling for Healing sessions that ran February through May.
- Task force member **Cheryl Dixon Paul** along with **Paul Bluestein** designed and conducted a highly successful "Walking On Eggshells" two-part sexual harassment conversation for both men and women in our congregation, which they reimagined for our OWL curricula sessions.
- **TUCW's Delegates** and our **Senior Minister Rev. John Morehouse** sponsored and conducted a Networking Session at the UUA General Assembly in 2018 on "A Faithful Response to #MeToo" to identify other partnerships and alliances across the nation.
- A Sunday service on the #MeToo topic was led in the Summer of 2018 by **Mary-Megan Marshall**.

At the Annual Meeting in June 2018, the #MeToo Task Force presented a resolution, “*A Faithful Response to the #MeToo Movement,*” and the entire congregation endorsed it. **Lynda Shannon Bluestein’s** leadership, research and outreach were exceptional in helping guide us through the resolution process. Subsequently Rev. John created the **#MeToo Council** at TUCW. This Council is now called the **Gender Equity Team** where **TUCWomen** continue in leadership roles. It is co-chaired by **Cheryl Dixon Paul** and **Sudha Sankar**. (For more on the Gender Equity Team, please click [HERE](#).)

This coming Sunday, March 8, we will address the issue again. Rev. John will lift up the sacred wisdom of the Divine Feminine and several men will speak about how the movement has changed them and how they support women. Men and others will be invited to come forward to add a thread of solidarity to a shawl presented by the Shawl Ministry and blessed by women. This shawl ritual will symbolize men who are "all in" with their support, recognizing that it takes all of us to create and maintain a safe and creative community.

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The #MeToo movement at The Unitarian Church in Westport is our congregational movement to go beyond protest and to rightfully engage our congregation and community in advocacy and liberation. Ours is a statement of conscience, an expression of our faith and values. It is our commitment to Sexual Justice issues. Our vision is to make TUCW a place and platform for women claiming their voices and their agency from those who have hurt them. Our mission is one of Healing, Education and Advocacy.