

2011 JUSTICE SUNDAY

Justice Is Aid
with Dignity



UUSC's Approach to Rights in Humanitarian Crises

UUSC looks at race, class, and gender to understand why certain groups get left out of the relief and recovery process. Who people are impacts how they get help. The higher up you are on the ladder of class and race, the easier it is for you to access aid and to be seen and counted by those with resources, connections, and help. This is true in your daily life and exponentially true in disasters like the earthquake in Haiti. Everyone is affected, but some people will get help much faster than others.

UUSC's unique niche is to find out who does not get help because of who they are — because of their color, their gender, their class, their religion. In Haiti, this might take the form of a young person, one of more than 9,000 people living in the houses and yards of family members who are part of the Papaye Peasant Movement (MPP). Scattered in the countryside, these earthquake survivors were invisible to the relief organizations working in the capital. The United Nations did not even put them on relief lists or provide food for them. But these survivors had lost everything — they were

just as hungry as people who stayed in the capital, but they were unserved by the major relief systems in place. UUSC and the MPP provided food and supplies to these 9,000 survivors in the Central Plateau and then arranged temporary employment for them.

UUSC works to bring the invisible survivors of disasters into the light. Disaster survivors are not created equally — and that inequality persists unless you apply the lens of justice.

Justice Sunday Worship Resources

In the following pages, you'll find what you need to organize a worship service that focuses on UUSC's work delivering aid with dignity through the Rights in Humanitarian Crises Program. With a sample sermon, resources, and suggested readings and hymns, you'll be ready to deliver a Justice Sunday that will inspire people to work for justice today and every day.



Dignity Rising A Sermon for Justice Sunday 2011 Rights in Humanitarian Crises Rev. Dr. Jan Carlsson-Bull

My guess is that just about everybody here this morning has had the hiccups. Some of us have probably had hiccups that we thought would never go away. Nothing else matters except getting rid of those persistent spasms and embarrassing "hics."

"Have you ever seen a brown cow?" asks the stranger sitting next to you on the train. "Yes!" you reply, startled. "Have you ever seen a brown and white cow?" she asks. "Sure!" you say, mildly annoyed. "Have you ever seen a black and white cow?" "Of course," you say, intrigued. "How about a black and white and purple cow?" she asks. You pause. "No, of course not!" "How about a black cow?" "Yes," you say, into it now. This can go on for awhile. Then comes the question: "Do you still have the hiccups?"

Chances are you're cured. Chances are you can't wait to try this on somebody else.

No matter how serious your malady, it's sometimes the most unconventional approach that proves effective. If only all our maladies were as mild as a stubborn case of hiccups and our cures as simple albeit unconventional as a few cow-color questions.

Darfur, Uganda, Gaza, Kenya, Pakistan, and Haiti all bring to mind maladies escalated into humanitarian crises. From Darfur to Haiti, these humanitarian crises continue to play out — disasters wrought by human folly and debilitating spasms wrought by the indifferent rhythms of our natural world. In the wake of the realities ravaging our local and global neighbors, it's the unconventional approaches that have proved most effective for ensuring relief, countering the inequities that spawn selective relief, and forging strategies for immediate and long-term needs.

Imagine you've moved from your comfy seat on a train annoyed by a sudden onset of hiccups. You've moved in time and space and identity. It's a Tuesday morning in

early January. The year is 2010. You've risen early. As a farmer just outside the capital city of Port-au-Prince, you rise early every morning. Your wife prepares the coffee, nurses your four-month-old son, calls to your two little daughters to hurry up, hurry up, or they'll be late for school. You're among the lucky in Haiti. Your children go to school. So many in your country are poor, desperately poor. You struggle to make do for your family, and your wife works hard embroidering the most exquisite wares for wealthy tourists. You're among the luckiest of families.

All day long you work alongside your neighbors. You're accustomed to working together, helping each other out. Through a local organization, the Papaye Peasant Movement (MPP), you've learned skills to help you farm the land more effectively. Rainfall is iffy. The soil doesn't cooperate. But you know the benefits of organizing locally to cut through the challenges of unpredictable weather and an equally unpredictable government. You've been inspired by the MPP's leader, Chavannes Jean-Baptiste. He keeps telling you that you can't survive alone.

It's been a long day. The sun begins to dip. You think about cleaning your tools and heading home. Then you feel the ground tremble under your feet. You shudder. The earth beneath you shudders. Suddenly everything is chaos. It's an earthquake. Oh my God, it's an earthquake! You've known earthquakes before, but your sense of the land tells you this is like nothing you've ever known. You run for home, terrified for your wife and children. You hear your baby screaming. You hear your wife wailing.

It's late January 2010. Your world has turned inside out. You survived. Your wife survived. Your baby survived, but not without two broken legs. He cries like he'll never stop. Your darling little girls were crushed beneath the rubble of their school, the school they were so proud of. Your wife cries like she'll never stop. You're too numb to cry. Water is scarce. You've heard that food is being hoarded by the government. You watch planes come in from so many



countries. You hear they're carrying food and medical supplies and workers to help you out. Where does it all go? you wonder. Where do those on the planes go? Your belly aches. Your head aches. Your heart aches. What can you do?

You saw a truck go by with a familiar sign on the side, one of the big relief organizations. The foreigners set up tents and talk among themselves about what to do. Why don't they ask you? Why don't they ask you and your friends in the Papaye Peasant Movement? You're the experts. You know Haiti. You know what you need. You know what you don't need. You know how to organize to get things done. You've already organized and are getting done what most immediately needs to get done.

Weeks pass. Another meeting has been called at the MPP training center, a tent raised from the upturned earth. Chavannes is there. He talks about "Haitians building Haiti." You know he means you and your neighbors. He talks about the dignity of survival. Next to him stands a woman whom Chavannes introduces as Martha. She's from an organization called the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee. Chavannes has explained that UUSC is partnering with the Papaye Peasant Movement to bring relief right away and to address the long-term needs of you and your neighbors. Martha is different from other aid workers. She asks you about your needs. She listens. Chavannes speaks of UUSC and MPP as "brothers and sisters working together."

Your grief is fierce, but you have your dignity. You tell your wife about what you're doing. You look at your baby son who's finally sleeping through the night; you know that he'll be proud of you for taking action. You're being heard.

When the earth itself has turned inside out in a cataclysmic spasm, when hundreds of thousands are left dead, injured survivors struggle to make their way, and others stare into space, when government leaders are all but mute when asked what's next, even an international flow of aid doesn't work. Thanks to well-intentioned funders, giant cargo planes filled with food and medicine stanch the flow of suffering in the short term; but our neighbors in Haiti, our neighbors in northern Uganda, our neighbors in Gaza, and our neighbors in Pakistan who are surviving humanitarian crises know whom they can rely on for the long haul — each other.

For our neighbors in Haiti, reliance on each other has served them well for generations. From the time Christopher Columbus walked ashore the island in early December 1492 and promptly called it La Isla Española ("the Spanish Island"), wave upon wave of colonial oppression followed, layered with wave upon wave of indigenous resistance. The French turned Haiti into a slave colony; the slaves revolted and, on January 1, 1804, declared independence. Haiti was the name resurrected for this new republic, an indigenous term meaning "land of mountains." When the not-quite-United States was moving through the throes of slave states and free states, decades before the Civil War, Haiti inspired abolitionists in this country while chafing the white privilege that has fueled so many shameful chapters of our history. These realities, coupled with Haiti's rich natural resources, positioned Haiti for long-term abuse by U.S. leadership, with only a few exceptions.

There are humanitarian and historic grounds for our nation to respond generously to the crisis that is Haiti. This "Land of Mountains" that is home to nine million neighbors has suffered fracture upon fracture. While independence was declared over 200 years ago and Haitians breathed hope, tyranny from abroad and incompetence from within have conspired to render Haiti among the poorest nations of the world.

Yet Haitians are resilient. The same cooperation that made indigenous resistance possible hundreds of years ago makes the most effective streams of recovery possible in the wake of what our farmer friend, his family, and millions of Haitians experienced that Tuesday afternoon of January 12, 2010, on into today. Expertise resides within Haiti — experts do not fly in; experts are already there.

Where does that leave us? With nothing to do in the continued wake of suffering known to our neighbors to the south? On the contrary, we can help by honoring the dignity of the Haitian people through the empowering model of solidarity at the heart of our Unitarian Universalist Service Committee. Remember the woman named Martha working with Chavannes Jean-Baptiste, leader of the Papaye Peasant Movement? That was Martha Thompson, manager of UUSC's Rights in Humanitarian Crises Program. Martha was one of the first UUSC staff members to venture to Haiti after the earthquake, to assess needs by consulting with indigenous groups already organized, already responding.



What followed was a thoughtful selection of additional grassroots partner organizations through which UUSC could channel funds and skills both to respond to immediate needs and cooperatively forge strategies for long-term recovery. Because of Martha and Chavannes and the farmer and his wife and women and men and, yes, the children of Haiti, we can make a difference together. Because of the funds you have given and the volunteer ventures now underway through our UUSC, we make a difference together.

It's an unconventional approach, linking with indigenous partner organizations for immediate and long-term responses to the travesty that is poverty and the devastation wreaked by the rhythms of nature. It's an approach that works. Local organizations that have already earned the trust of the local populace can reach Haitians bypassed by larger relief organizations that deny the fault lines of race, class, and gender and fail to consult with the real experts.

Imagine you're a young woman, just 20 years old. You're at school, learning the principles of accounting. It's late afternoon on an otherwise ho-hum Tuesday. Class is almost over. Suddenly the walls shake. The floor shakes. You hear screams. Yours is one of them. You're on the third floor. You jump off the balcony and somehow are not hurt. Many of your friends are not so lucky. You spend the night on the street, then walk for six hours to get home, praying beyond prayer that you might have a home and a family. Along the way, all is rubble. You reach home, and amazingly your parents are there crying at the sight of you, still terrified that they would never see you again. Your home is a shambles. You pray a lot; you cry a lot.

You move with your parents to a resettlement camp, one of over a thousand such camps. You wake in the night with anxiety. You get headaches and stomachaches. You can't turn to your parents for comfort. They're experiencing what you're experiencing. You join a group of other young women for social support. Together you meet with a woman you recognize as a local leader. She explains that your anxiety and other ailments are normal in the face of what you've experienced and teaches you coping strategies. She reminds you that you are survivors. She talks about the Trauma Resource Institute and how you can learn to teach others what she is teaching you. Through the Trauma Resource Institute, another grassroots partner of the Unitarian

Universalist Service Committee, Haitians learn from Haitians about trauma response and coping strategies. Dignity rises.

Life can be beautiful. The sun still rises in the east. The water off your island nation shimmers in the moonlight. The warm breezes bring cherished memories. The glance of a loved one is radiance itself. The smile of a little one brings a smile from your soul. Life can be beautiful, radiant even. And life can be cruel. When race and class and gender become cause for determining who gets what — from food and shelter to protection from harm — life is cruel. When the earth erupts and wreaks havoc on your home and your nation, life is cruel. When cruelty visits, radiance is blocked. In the words of Rev. Dr. William F. Schulz, president of the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee, the job of UUSC, "with your help and on your behalf, is to combat cruelty in order to set radiance free."

This happens through the unconventional approach of partnership, of solidarity, of honoring rights in humanitarian crises, of honoring the dignity of survival. It happens through you. It happens through you and I providing funds and sometimes volunteer support. It happens through you and I supporting partnerships with indigenous groups who hold the expertise overlooked by mainstream relief organizations. It happens through each and all of us affirming the truth proclaimed by Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., just four days before he was murdered: "We are tied together in the single garment of destiny, caught in an inescapable network of mutuality. And whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly."

Not so different from the word lyrics of Cecily Taylor sung earlier in today's service: "Our world is one world: what touches one affects us all."

The operative word is partnership. Through UUSC's Rights in Humanitarian Crises work, we can continue to partner with grassroots groups worldwide, including here at home. Through the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee, we can advance justice and the dignity that it carries. We can walk the walk of this faith that we share.

Since its founding in the bleakest hours of World War II, the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee, then the Unitarian Service Committee, has resisted cruelty and fueled hope, as



courageous women and men fought Nazism and ushered Jews and gypsies and gay people to freedom. Our flaming chalice was born during that time as a readily recognized symbol of sanctuary to those who had every reason to suspect the motives of strangers who promised a way out. The radiance that lived through the actions of women and men risking their lives is freed again and again when rights are honored and dignity rises amid the most horrific of humanitarian crises.

Have you ever seen a black and white and purple cow?

Absolutely!

Amen.

Consider the words of the prophet Micah, who lived and wrote in the eighth century BCE: "What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" Loosely rendered, this means: "What does Life require of you but to do justice, to love compassion, and to walk humbly with that which you deem sacred?" No wonder prophets didn't win popularity contests! This is tough stuff.

Honoring the rights and dignity of all who survive humanitarian crises is tough stuff. Justice Sunday is a stop on the road. Justice badgers us Sunday after Sunday and all week long throughout our lives. Opportunities abound to make it happen. It's up to you. It's up to us. We give; we receive; we partner. This applies equally when we undertake local outreach. Consider the partnership model. Consider who the experts are. Consider consulting with them until "them" becomes "us." Consider not taking action until we can proceed hand in hand.

Consider the prayer of Mother Theresa: "May God break my heart so completely that the whole world falls in."

We usually don't pray for a broken heart; but when so many lives are broken, how can our hearts not break? And if our hearts break, let's fill the fault line not with pity, not with one-shot charity, but with a lived proclamation of human rights amid the deepest rubble. From such rubble, dignity rises.

May the offering taken this morning be one that we continue to give and receive all year long. May it be an offering of money, yes, and of heart and soul and mind and strength, of loving our neighbor as we love ourselves, knowing that each and every creature, each and every survivor, is our neighbor.



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Justice Sunday – Unitarian Universalist Service Committee Sample Sermon Prepared by Rev. Dr. Jan Carlsson-Bull

Suggested hymns

"When Our Heart Is in a Holy Place," words and music: Joyce Paley, in *Singing the Journey: A Supplement to Singing the Living Tradition*, Unitarian Universalist Association, Boston, 2005, 1008.

"Our World Is One World," words and music: Cecily Taylor, in *Singing the Living Tradition*, The Unitarian Universalist Association, Beacon Press, Boston, 1993, 134.

Suggested readings

"A Network of Mutuality," Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., in *Singing the Living Tradition*, The Unitarian Universalist Association, Beacon Press, Boston, 1993, 584.

"Fault Line," Robert R. Walsh, from *Noisy Stones: A Meditation Manual*, Skinner House Books, 1992, p. 15 (used by permission of Robert R. Walsh, obtained November 18, 2010).

Did you ever think there might be a fault line passing underneath your living room: A place in which your life is lived in meeting and in separating, wondering and telling, unaware that just beneath you is the unseen seam of great plates that strain through time? And that your life, already spilling over the brim, could be invaded, sent off in a new direction, turned aside by forces you were warned about but not prepared for? Shelves could be spilled out, the level floor set at an angle in some seconds' shaking. You would have to take your losses, do whatever must be done next.

When the great plates slip and the earth shivers and the flaw is seen to lie in what you trusted most, look not to more solidity, to weighty slabs of concrete poured or strength of cantilevered beam to save the fractured order. Trust more the tensile strands of love that bend and stretch to hold you in the web of life that's often torn but always healing. There's your

strength. The shifting plates, the restive earth, your room, your precious life, they all proceed from love, the ground on which we walk together.

Moment for All Ages: A Holy Place

Note: Speaker's words are in bold.

Invite the children to come to the front of the sanctuary. Have a portable microphone available.

How many of you have had good things happen to you?
[Show of hands]

And how many of you have had bad things happen to you? [Show of hands]

It looks like you all know what it's like to have good and bad things happen to you. Imagine that you're just home from school, and you're bursting with pride that you got an A on a test or you're so excited because your teacher announced that the whole class is going to the circus next week. What do you do with your good news?

Hear responses. To ensure that each child is audible, use a portable microphone or repeat what you've heard. It's likely that more than a few children will say they want to tell their good news to somebody they care about, like a parent or a grandparent or a sitter or a friend who's not in their class.

And how about when something bad happens? Imagine that a bully threatened you on the playground or a friend of yours broke her leg in an accident. What do you do with your bad news?

Hear responses. Again, it's likely that children will say they want to tell their story to somebody. If not, ask them how it would feel to tell their story and what they would want from the person they tell. Some youngsters might talk about sitting in the lap of a loved one or about somebody they trust listening to their whole story or even about being given milk and cookies as comfort.



Good and bad things happen to all of us. Some things feel better than others, and some things feel “badder than bad.” For some kids in our world, “badder than bad” things happen — like a storm that hurts their homes or the kind of storm that happens when people don’t get along and start to hurt each other. I wonder if they want to talk about it to somebody they trust. What do you think?

More responses.

Remember the song we sang earlier, “When Our Heart Is in a Holy Place”? Remember the words: “When we tell our story from deep inside, / And we listen with a loving mind.”

I’ll bet there are times when the listener is you. When we listen “with a loving mind,” that’s the first step in doing justice.

Today we’re talking about people’s rights when bad things happen. When any of us tell our story “from deep inside” and somebody we trust “listen[s] with a loving mind,” we honor human rights. We honor the right to tell our story and be listened to.

I wonder, can each of you listen hard the next time something bad happens to a friend or a neighbor or even somebody who lives far away?

Hear responses.

You might wonder how we listen to somebody who lives far away. When we’re not there, we can help make sure others are there to listen for us. This is what our Unitarian Universalist Service Committee does when really bad things happen to kids and their parents in places all over the world. They listen, and once they listen hard, then they all know what to do to make things better together. If we can listen hard together, then justice can happen and our hearts are in a holy place.

Benediction

As we go forth, may the flame of our chalice rise within us; may the light of that flame shine through us; may the radiance of that light be freed by the justice we do, the compassion we love, and the walk that we walk with grace, humility, and joy.

Amen.

