

Our Lack of Involvement in Desegregating the Hospitals and YWCA **by Dana Deane**

We like to think the North was different. Evanston was different. Our church was different. That's not always what we found in our archives.

In 1891, the seeds of our Congregation formed as a small group that later became All Souls Unitarian and then later the Unitarian Church of Evanston.

That same year, Evanston Hospital was formed and its founding documents barred black clients. St. Francis Hospital also refused services to blacks.

In fact, by that time, Segregation in Evanston was well established. Most hotels and restaurants did not serve blacks. Even the beaches were segregated, with tokens required for the white beaches and denied to black residents. Even integrated settings had Jim Crow seating, which was the norm on street cars, in theaters, and in churches. This segregation continued for decades. In fact, in 1954, Evanston was to host the World Council of Churches. UCE Rev Homer Jack was concerned that black attendees would have no place to stay and few places to dine.

In 1904, the City of Evanston even proposed a separate town for "Negros." Not Evanston.

The Evanston (now McGaw) YMCA was established in 1885 and barred black members - - implicitly at the time it opened, but explicitly in 1907 in response to a request by black minister, Rev Talley. During those years, the Y hosted at least one minstrel show.

Apparently not unusual at that time, or for years after. A "Big Coon Show" was produced at Ravinia in 1912, Oakton School had a minstrel show in 1921. And, as recently as 1963, Northwestern produced a minstrel spoof of Congress.

In response to the decision by the Evanston Y to deny admission to blacks, funding was pursued to establish a Black Y, and the Emerson Y was dedicated in 1914. The Emerson Y housed Black Northwestern students since they were excluded from the dorms.

That same year, black doctors Arthur Butler and Isabella Garnett opened Evanston Sanitarium (which evolved to Community Hospital) in Dr. Garnett's house. Rather than fight for integration of the existing hospitals, according to our archives, our congregation (along with other white Evanston churches), periodically donated to all the hospitals, including the Evanston Sanitarium "(colored)." And our women's alliance sewed garments to donate to the Sanitarium. However, by 1924, the nearest full-service hospital for black residents of Evanston was Cook County Hospital.

Over the next 25 years, efforts were made to integrate the Evanston hospitals and the Grove St Y, but our name is not among those promoting efforts at integration.

Finally, in 1948, the UCE Social Justice Committee circulated petitions seeking support for desegregating Evanston Hospital. Our minister at the time, Homer Jack, found himself conflicted about providing financial support for construction of the new Community Hospital for blacks when he believed Evanston and St Francis Hospitals were on the verge of desegregating. But he was wrong - - that took several more years.

Desegregation of these Evanston institutions began in 1954, the year Brown v Board of Ed was decided. However, our church records show no action on integration until 1961. That year, our Civil Liberties Committee sent letters in support of integration at the Y (which finally integrated in 1963. 1963! Let that sink in.). That same year our

committee on human relationships assessed hospital care at Evanston's 3 hospitals and found that, although Negro physicians could only practice at Community Hospital, Evanston's black patients could go to any of the 3 hospitals and received adequate medical care. However, since patients tend to go where their physicians can treat them, the result was continued de facto segregation until privileges were given to black doctors.

Apparently, separate but equal was still ok for UCE.

Our Open Housing Campaign **by Margaret Shaklee**

UCE sat up and took notice when Rev Dr Homer Jack came to town in 1948. Before coming to Evanston, Dr Jack spent five years developing an open housing program in Chicago. He came to UCE precisely because Evanston seemed ready to move toward racial justice through open housing, and he wanted the church to take the lead, in a principled stand against racism. He believed that racial justice in Evanston would begin with integrating the neighborhoods, and that would depend on fair housing opportunities.

A bit of history: By the time that Evanston began to seriously work on open housing, a half-century of neighborhood apartheid had woven segregation deep into the fabric of Evanston neighborhood life. In the 1910 census, Evanston's neighborhoods were integrated. But, by 1919, a rising concern around the violence in Black communities of Chicago led Evanston to establish zoning codes to contain its Black population. A vibrant Black neighborhood around Maple Street and Davis was zoned for business only, a beginning of what became Evanston's downtown. The houses of folks living there were moved west of the city in to what became the 5th ward. Zoning was followed in quick succession by redlining and housing covenants. And Evanston continued unremitting -- although not wholly unchallenged -- discrimination for thirty years.

In 1947, they went even further. Emboldened by "The Blighted Areas Redevelopment Act" of the State of Illinois, real estate developers staged an aggressive "slum clearance," targeting homes and businesses owned by Black folks for demolition. The City Council passed the Land Clearance Commission which codified this practice. "The Clearances" of 1947 finally sparked a massive response from the Black community, protesting that their property was taken with no redress or aid to relocate.

Activists in the Evanston Community, including many from the faith communities, heard the outrage of Black residents and petitioned the City Council to establish a Fair Housing Ordinance outlawing slum clearance, covenant contracts, and redlining.

So, in 1948, the City Council passed its first Fair Housing Ordinance and established the Citizen Housing Committee to oversee the behavior of realtors and lenders. The UCE Social Action committee began working with that committee, along with social justice groups of other Evanston churches. They attended city council meetings. They

tracked realtors and collected data for the city campaign against redlining. That committee stayed active on open housing through to the mid-80's.

In 1950, in a bold move toward taking a public stand, UCE's Adult Education Committee staged a panel discussion among city leaders: "Building for the Future: A Housing Program for Evanston." They proposed: "In its housing and planning programs, Evanston must not segregate or discriminate against racial, religious or ethnic minorities."

Dr Jack wanted UCE as a church to lead the open housing effort as the strong institution of Evanston he thought we were. He brought resolutions to the annual meetings several times, but could not persuade the congregation to take a public stand. When he resigned in 1958 to move on to the United Nations, he expressed regret that UCE could not take a bolder stand.

School Segregation in Evanston and UCE's Response **by Jane Kenamore**

Evanston schools were not segregated through any city ordinance; but because Black residents were mostly restricted to housing in the 5th ward, Evanston had "de facto" segregation. Black students were "encouraged" to attend Foster Elementary School, which between 1930 and 1966 was nearly 100% Black. If they tested above a certain level, they were sometimes allowed to attend other, predominately white schools. White students, of course, did not have to test to attend the same schools.

The District did not hire Black teachers, until a protest forced them to do so in the 1940s. The few Black teachers hired were assigned only to Foster. Our former mayor Lorraine Morton finally broke the color line in 1957, when she became the first Black instructor to teach in a predominately white school -- Nichols Middle School.

It wasn't until 1966 – 12 years after Brown v. Board of Education -- that Evanston adopted a formal desegregation plan. The School Board hired Gregory Coffin as superintendent to implement the plan. Foster became a magnet school – King Lab – and was integrated with 25% Black students and 75% other races, mostly white. Black students who did not get into Foster were bused to predominately white schools; and Coffin hired more Black teachers and encouraged a culturally responsive curriculum to support the program.

There were problems with the desegregation plan, particularly concerning the lunch program. The schools at the time had no cafeterias, and white students normally walked home for lunch. Black students had to bring sandwiches and eat in a segregated space. The district developed a plan to work around the issue, and the program seemed to be progressing satisfactorily. In 1969, however, the Board voted to fire Coffin. (In an interview in the 1990s, Coffin said he thought it was because he was moving “too fast”). Some of the white community supported him, and nearly all the Black community did. Demonstrations in support of Coffin ultimately led to a boycott of the schools in April 1969, and freedom schools were established at five locations in Evanston. UCE provided space for one of those schools, which lasted until the end of that school year.

In 1979 Evanston moved King Lab out of Foster and subsequently sold the building to Family Focus. At the time several leaders of the Black community, pushed for Foster to be reverted to an attendance area school.

After more than 40 years, the District is planning to build such a school in the 5th Ward. It is scheduled to be completed in 2025, though there remains controversy over the fate of the Fleetwood-Jourdain Community Center that may be demolished to make room for the new school.

Evanston Township High School was not segregated; however, according to oral history interviews and other sources, Black students could not swim in the pool, join certain clubs, or attend proms held at segregated country clubs. Most of all, Black students suffered from low expectations. They were discouraged from taking certain advanced classes, and chances of attending college were slim.

Northwestern was not immune to racism either. Until 1964, Northwestern had a quota system. When applications came in, they were coded 1=White Protestant, 2-White Catholic, 3= Jewish, and 4= Black. Strict quotas ruled the last two categories. Until 1947, when a lawsuit forced the issue, the few Black students who were admitted could not live on campus. If they were lucky, men found rooms at the Emerson Street Y, but women were forced to find other housing in the community, a daunting task.

In summary, discrimination in education began in kindergarten and extended through the university level in Evanston. We have sparse records in our archives reflecting UCE's leadership or participation in protests against the segregation or integration plans, other than providing a site for the short-lived freedom school established in spring of 1969.

Black Empowerment Challenge to UCE and UUA
by Lee Bannor

What should our role be? *What should our role be?* This question has vexed this congregation for decades. Shortly after we moved into this building in 1958 the following resolution was presented at a congregational meeting:

“Resolved, that the Unitarian Church of Evanston endorses the principle that all persons, regardless of race, creed, or national origin, shall have equal access to all available housing; and the Unitarian Church of Evanston urges the formation of local Human Relations Commission and the use of legislation to further fair housing practices.”

This resolution failed at the congregational meeting: reasons given -- the church not to "take stands," that's not what church is about; a church is not to support legislation because such action violates our non-profit status.

Now, throughout the '50s our minister, Homer Jack was a long time civil rights activist. In fact at around that time he preached a sermon titled, "Putting Christ Back Into the Young Mens Christian Association". In it he took the YMCA to task for the fact that there were two in Evanston, one White and one Black. As you can imagine they were separate, but not equal. The church established a Civil Liberties Committee to support the desegregation of the YMCA, but still, it could not be an "official" church position.

It was never a matter of whether or not the overwhelming numbers in the congregation supported civil rights, it was just the "role" issue. This issue was paralleled within the Unitarian Universalist Association as well. In 1963, the General Assembly rejected a resolution that would have required congregations to drop racially discriminatory restrictions from their bylaws and adopted a resolution encouraging congregations to practice nondiscrimination and forming the Commission on Religion and Race.

In 1966, Martin Luther King delivered the Ware Lecture at GA, and at that meeting the Black Affairs Council of the UUA was formed and in 1967 "Black Unitarians for Radical Reform (BURR) was formed. But again, these organizations were within the UUA but the UUA had not adopted an official position on Black Empowerment.

In 1967 & 1968 the UCE Social Responsibility Committee was strongly involved in the Black Affairs Council, including establishing a Back Caucus within the UUA. It is not clear that the congregation approved. The record is not clear on whether the

congregation or board approved. However, a committee was formed to raise funds to support BAC.

At this time a new organization arose within the UUA. The integrated "Black and White Alternative" (BAWA) was formed, whereas the Black Affairs Council was almost exclusively Black. The UUA voted to provide financial support to BAC in the amount of \$250,000 in each of four years, and \$50,000 to BAWA. All 7 UCE delegates voted yes. However, after the first year the UUA did not continue the promised funding, causing some black delegates to walk out of GA. In addition, the relations between BAC and BAWA were not friendly. After a mediated return, a close vote funded BAC but not BAWA.

During this time here at UCE, Rev. Charles Eddis lead open housing marches with Pastor Jacob Blake of Ebenezer AME Church. Many UCE folks participated, culminating in a rally after MLK assassination. UCE members continued to march with Rev. Eddis for fair housing. Also in 1968, many black families took their children out of Evanston schools during the protests of the MLK assassination. Among other congregations, UCE opened it's doors for an alternative school. Further, UCE congregants marched in a demonstration at ETHS to implement fair practices with black students, with the leadership of Rev. Eddis.

Yet, there was still resistance to the church having an "official" position on social issues. A 1971 letter to the congregation from the Committee to Support BAC (Black Affairs Council) asking for individual contributions to BAC. The letter explains the history of the 1968 General Assembly voting to fund BAC \$1mil over 4 years. After 2 years only \$450K had been raised and so BAC decided to forgo UUA support and appeal directly to individual UU's. The next year only \$100K was raised and BAC was urged to return to affiliation with the UUA.

So as you can see, the challenge of Black Empowerment to UCE and the UUA caused a good amount of stress. But as time moved on people all across the denomination became more comfortable with the idea of the church having an official position on issues. The best example of this is the "Black Lives Matter" sign along Ridge Blvd. Plus the UUA is taking stances on important social issues. At every General Assembly for the past several years we have had an "Action of Immediate Witness", where attendees participate in a public protest. Also, annually, the UUA issues a "Statement of Conscience" on an important issue, after discussion and feedback from the congregations.

Thus the answer to the question, "What should our role be" is to nurture the human spirit for a world made whole.

The Rev Charles Eddis came to UCE in 1968, having worked from his pulpit in Montreal for open housing there. He was attracted to the campaign in Evanston and found an ally in Pastor Jacob Blake of Ebenezer AME Church; the two ministers began leading their church-goers in marches through Evanston for open housing in support of (yet another) open housing ordinance. Rev Eddis did not ask the UCE board for permission -- they approved his doing what was personally important to him and if folks followed, well, that was on them!

In fact, one spring Sunday morning in 1968, after delivering what he maintains was his only sermon about fair housing in Evanston, Rev Eddis abruptly stepped out of the pulpit, walked down the aisle toward the door, saying "I'm going to fight for fair housing NOW – are you with me?" The congregation sat puzzled for a minute, then folks gradually got up and followed him out the door, down the street to the mayor's house. And they marched again and again with Rev Eddis over the next few weeks. And still the congregation could not endorse a public statement.

When Martin Luther King Jr was assassinated in May of 1968, the city of Chicago immediately erupted in violence, fire, and mob action. The Evanston city fathers feared such action in Evanston and appealed to Revs Eddis and Blake to hold a rally in Fountain Square with prayers and singing, to give folks a way to express their anger and grief that might call up their best church behavior. The ministers bargained that if they held the rally, the city council would pass the open housing ordinance on their docket. The city agreed, the rally was held several thousand people strong, nobody rioted, and the city council met on Monday and passed the ordinance.

And still the UCE congregation could not agree to take a public stand.