

Hummingbirds in a Dry Land

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Two days ago, a hummingbird danced for me. It hovered in the middle of the air, just in front of me, zipping this way and that. No flower near. Just me, this flying shrimp sprite, and a desert mountain in the distance. I asked the hummingbird, "What are you trying to tell me?" I studied the zip and zag. Maybe the hummingbird is spelling her messages with her movement.

This morning, cactus in view and olive tree behind me, a hummingbird zipped past me and sat down on a branch. I've never seen a hummingbird sit still. Did you know that when a hummingbird sits still, it looks like any other bird?

A friend of mine showed her hummingbird tattoo to me once and explained that hummingbirds are the harbinger of joy.

There are hummingbirds in the desert; harbingers of joy in the dry land.

This week, in the Sonoran Desert, 45 Christian Ministers and Social Service Providers attended an Anti-Oppression Training sponsored by the National Benevolent Association. The purpose of the training was to ground participants in a common understanding, framework and language around what it means to address racism by actively working toward being anti-racist. The trainers, Sandhya Jha and Yvonne Gilmore moved beyond a basic analysis of systemic racism in the United States, namely, but not exclusively in the church, to a deeper analysis of how systemic and institutional racism adapts and changes over time.

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45 people studied, talked about, and worked within these guiding principles:

- Race, class, and gender as systems are interdependent.
- Intersecting power relations produce complex social inequalities.
- Intersecting power relations shape individual and group experiences and normative behaviors.
- Solving Social problems require inter-sectional analysis and work.

45 people from across the country gathered to unlearn oppressive values and exchange them for accountable and responsible Anti-Racist Relationships and Values such as:

- Both/And Thinking within a bias toward action
- Abundant worldview that uses resources responsibly
- Transparent communication and decision making that guards personal integrity
- Cooperation and collaboration that nurture individual creativity

45 ministers working in fields of chaplaincy, prison & jail ministry, young adults, and social enterprise discussed identity, intersectionality, salience, systemic power, and racism. We used a working definition of racism= race prejudice + institutional & systemic power. We were reminded by Sandhya that, "In stress moments, we will default to the dominant paradigm if we have not institutionalized [incarnate] these anti-oppression values in our organizations." We used World Cafe and Open Space Social Technologies to engage this work.

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The work was hard. Sandhya reminded us, "When we are doing anti-oppression work, radical counter cultural work, we are enduring and engaging resistance...we are functioning in systems designed to kill us."

And a little bird reminded me...

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As the health and social services general ministry of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), the National Benevolent Association partners with congregations, regions, general ministries, and a variety of Disciples-related health and social service providers to create communities of compassion and care. Founded in 1887 by six women responding to the needs of the day and on their doorsteps, for more than 130 years the NBA has continued to serve "the least of these."

Learn more at www.nbacares.org.