



The CommUUnicator

Newsletter of the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Waynesboro

A Model for Promoting Our Values

A few weeks ago, UUFW member Linda Shallash witnessed an event in downtown Staunton that caused her to write to city council. Her good friend then followed up with her own letter to the council about the event, which reads like a manifesto about ableism as an equity issue. This letter was written by Jennifer Trippier.

To the City Council, Staunton, VA

A close friend witnessed a disabled person needing to abandon their mobility scooter to gain access to a business this past Friday. She took pictures and shared it with the city manager who alerted the persons responsible,



and it is reported that action was taken.

I have witnessed and been affected by the insensitive actions of the able bodied for several decades now.

Examples are: A store that offers a wheelchair for its patrons but it is a pediatric size; snow plowed into the handicap spot; clothing racks so close together that someone in a wheelchair or using a walker can't get by, much less shop the goods available; stairs that are the sole entrance (even one step or a small rise where the door is can prevent access). Heavy doors to a public building with no automatic switch

prevents access, then telling someone they can go around the building, down a hill to access at door that has a switch is creating another assault on the disabled. And for the last example, closing off an entire street for an entire weekend with no added accessibility options is a new barrier for those who may want to dine or shop.

The heart of the issue is that there are many people, mostly invisible to the general public, who deserve access without special accommodation. Imagine if accessibility was de rigueur? You don't have to need a rollator or a cane or a wheelchair to benefit from "special accommodations" for your health. You may have vision, hearing or cognitive impairments. An individual may have cardiac or respiratory issues that impact how far they can walk.

A focus on diversity, equity and inclusion would bring awareness to this plight that affects 25% of the population. And it should not require the energy and input from someone negatively impacted by an unaware public or its leadership. Must the disabled community wait until leadership is directly impacted to facilitate change that embraces all its citizenry? Why don't they engage with the disabled community? Go to a nursing home, for example. Better yet, go to an apartment building that is solely for seniors. They'd appreciate someone listening and learning of the frustrations they face daily due to accessibility issues. Meet the short little school

bus of kids who are disabled. Talk with their parents and see through their eyes all the things they are challenged by. Talk with those at Virginia School for the Deaf and Blind. We, the disabled, are part of this community, too. We want to be engaged. We want a voice.

Computer access to information or communication isn't the answer, either. Some landlords now insist that rent be paid online. For some, using a smart phone is too great a burden, and beyond their capabilities. Expecting the citizens to be able to access and navigate the city website to gain information or to communicate with officials is also unrealistic for many.

I ask the City Council to set up a commission or a small subcommittee to investigate accessibility issues in this city. Reach out to us, let's work together and make a positive change!

The Social Justice Team has sent the Staunton City Council and the City Manager a letter endorsing Jennifer's letter, noting that it aligns with the UUFW and UUA value of Equity. Ableism as an equity issue is the focus of the Social Justice Team this month.

NAACP Annual Banquet

On August third, a group of UUFW members and a friend attended the NAACP (Staunton Branch) Annual Banquet at Hotel 24 in Staunton. Cynthia Thompson, Linda Shallash, Linda Revis, and Stephen & Kristin Maxwell all reported that this uplifting event, as always, was filled with meaningful speeches and recognitions (and a wonderful meal). Next year, to more strongly demonstrate our

support of the mission and vision of this important organization, we hope to fill all eight seats at the UUFW-sponsored table.



UUFW Garden Club

By Carla Throckmorton

The Morning Glories, organized by Joe Good, and with the help of a dedicated group of volunteers, has been establishing and taking care of the gardens at UUFW. After Joe and I talked, we morphed the Morning Glories into the Garden Club. I will be facilitating the group. Joe and Diane will still be active members. I enthusiastically thank them and the members of the Morning Glories for their dedication and work.

On Sunday, September 22, I am planning to provide lunch for Garden Club members and anyone interested in hearing more about the Garden Club and what plans we have for the gardens. Lunch will be at 12:00 p.m. in Chalice House. We will eat, talk and plot. I look forward to seeing you. Please contact me with any questions or food restrictions.

