

social witness



UU-inspired group marks decade of success

The Interracial Interfaith Community (IIC) in Savannah, Georgia, which has Unitarian Universalist roots, is organizing a series of health fairs to educate low-income citizens on the availability of health-care services. The fairs, which are being organized in conjunction with twelve other community organizations, are the latest in a string of projects designed to promote interracial dialogue.

IIC was the immediate offshoot of an interfaith conference on race organized by the Unitarian Universalist Church of Savannah in 1993. Immediately after the conference, several clergy expressed an interest in continuing the dialogue begun at the conference.

Several members of the Savannah church were instrumental in starting the group, including its minister, the Rev. Audrey Vincent.

IIC has been responsible for several notable projects. In 1995 it organized a series of workshops called "Can We Talk? A Conference on Multicultural Issues" dedicated to promoting interracial dialogue on a number of local issues. It was especially effective coming after the O.J. Simpson trial when racial tensions were running high. IIC also organized a "Parent University" in Savannah that teaches teenage parents how best to support their children at school. The Parent University has been in operation since 1999.

IIC scored another success when it supported the African American community in its quest for a monument memorializing the contribution of Savannah's slaves. None of the city's many monuments featured African Americans. After writing letters and appearing at city council meetings, IIC was able to get the issue onto the city's agenda. A monument was dedicated in 2001.

What has contributed to the group's longevity? Vincent credits shared leadership as a key ingredient to the group's success. IIC has always had two presidents: one African American and one white. The group also meets at a white church one year, and a black church the next. Another factor which longtime member Martha Fay emphasizes is the fact that each of the monthly meetings starts with a meal. "Food facilitates fellowship," she says. Member Lee Alexander concurs. "It's by sharing a meal and just talking that people have come to feel more comfortable with one another."

Participation in IIC has paid off for the Savannah church. "Indirectly it has increased our visibility in the community," says Vincent. "People get to know us as doers."



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