

NAME

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DURATION

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3 SPEAKERS

Speaker1

Speaker2

Speaker3

START OF TRANSCRIPT

[00:00:00] Speaker1

The following is a message from WellSprings congregation. Of all the things that have whoops. There you go. Of all the things that have happened in these last. Two years. Learning that song is one of the silver linings for me. And it's a good one for this month, this very long January that we're in, I think it's January sixty fourth today, right? And this is my first message with you all in this new year of 2022. But in our last message series back before the holidays. You might remember that we were talking together about all of the different ways to find joy. The accessibility of joy around us, even if we don't feel it in us. The way that joy has this ability to live right alongside loss and grief. To be with it without replacing it. To be a companion and a friend, even when the world and the winter in the year is harsh. And we talked about that necessity of fueling ourselves with joy, especially in these times. And, you know, one of the best ways that I find when I am not feeling it to refuel myself with joy is to reach out. To connect with something outside of myself with a person who is not me in that moment. And it's true that it's a risk, right? It's a gamble.

[00:01:50] Speaker1

You never know what will come your way. When you reach out to connect, you might be disappointed. You might end up frustrated. But you might not. And the best and most exciting way to make that gamble, really, is to reach out and try to connect with a stranger. Maybe talk to a neighbor that you've never talked to before. Say something nice about the shoes or the pajama pants of another parent at drop off. Talk to the person who checks you out at the grocery store, ask how their shift is going. We might be unpleasantly surprised, but especially in those initial ways when we first make a connection with a stranger. Our expectations are pretty low and so the payoff can be really good. We might actually make a new friend, but we also might just connect briefly for a moment with someone who can empathize with us. Well, someone who is experiencing what we're experiencing and get just enough. Of that feeling of, yes, me too. Same. We are not alone. And so in this message series, starting our new year, we are doing something different at WellSprings and we are doing that as a whole community. Each week, this month and next month, your preacher is going to be bringing a stranger into our congregation into a conversation about their experience of this place where we live, about being a neighbor who might see things differently than you or I see it.

[00:03:40] Speaker1

All of our guests in this series, neighbors and helpers, are connected in some way to areas of Chester County or for one week. Other UU communities. Our intern, Beth monHollen, will be doing a sermon where she talks with other youth seminarians from around the country. But these are all communities connected to us, whether by proximity or affiliation that are outside of WellSprings doors. And so each week, all you have to do is listen. Just realize that you are getting to know a new person and you are helping by listening to thread those connections between us to weave more of a net between our spiritual community here and the various communities around us, so that all of us can be better neighbors and helpers to each other. This morning, I won't be saying too much more from this stage, because rather than bring my guests here today, we actually recorded a conversation just yesterday morning and we're going to share that conversation with you in just one minute. But I want to give a little bit of an introduction before we start this week, I invited community activist and former Coatesville City Council member Nadia Graves to speak with us today.

[00:05:05] Speaker1

A heads up for all of you that Nadia uses they and them pronouns, so you'll be hearing me refer to them that way. An idea is just about my age, but they have been active in community work in Coatesville for their entire life. And in the summer of 2020, I began seeing their name everywhere. It's like, Who is this an idea? Graves? This is clearly some kind of mover and shaker. And as I looked in that summer, especially into local demonstrations, protests, community responses to the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis. I saw their name over and over. But an idea was doing community work long before that moment. And thanks to a connection to knowing the Nottingham family here at WellSprings, I was able to connect with them and extend this invitation to speak with us. So I hope you all enjoy this opportunity to hear from a neighbor, to get to know their perspective on this area and on the challenges that we've been facing in our community these past few years and what we might all be able to do if we grow our connections with each other. So I'll turn it over now to myself from yesterday in a different shirt. And Nadia Graves.

[00:06:38] Speaker2

Hey. Thank you, Nadia, for taking the time to talk with me today and for sharing your experiences with our congregation or just really happy to have you, and I'm grateful for the time. Yes, absolutely. Yeah. So at the moment, for lack of a better title, I've introduced you to our WellSprings community as a community activist in Coatesville. So I'm wondering how close I am. Is that how you see yourself as an activist or are there

[00:07:04] Speaker3

Other words that you would use to describe yourself

[00:07:07] Speaker2

Besides activist or in addition to activist?

[00:07:09] Speaker3

Yeah, I mean, I use activist to describe myself, but also I'm just like a community member. I think that like any member of a community that's willing to. Sticks to the collective and build relationships with their community, is a community member, and any shift from community member to community activists just is around like making sure the community gets to the needs, making sure you advocate for your community, get what it needs. So you can't really be a community activist without being a community member because you don't have enough power to say by yourself, Hey, my community needs this. You need to be in community and say, We all are here. All of us are saying that we need this. That's cause for more response.

[00:08:02] Speaker2

And in connection and in conversation with the other members of the community. Exactly, yeah. Yeah. And you grew up in Coatesville, right?

[00:08:09] Speaker3

Yep. Born here, raised their family family legacy here. My great grandfather came here from North Carolina after his uncle was lynched in the south to escape violence and terrorism, came to Coatesville and started working at the steel mill and has secured our life here, basically.

[00:08:34] Speaker2

When did the steel mill in Coatesville shut down? Do you know?

[00:08:39] Speaker3

I don't know, because I know it was like a kid or not paying attention enough. So I mean, I know that like when I walk by, I still smell sulfur. So there are still people doing like work. But the switch from like Lucas and the big operation to like the smaller operation. I'm not exactly sure when that happened, but that I mean, I know that it had a significant economic impact on Coatesville. That's like the information I have. But I can probably do some research and figure that out, but off the top of my head,

[00:09:13] Speaker2

I could do. I'll google it later and figure it out. Yeah, it's a it's not an uncommon story for other towns in Chester County. I live in phoenixville and I know that that has a similar story of industry that was shut down. I think in the early eighties is when the steel mill here was finally shut down. But the impact that that had in the community was huge.

[00:09:32] Speaker3

Well, Downingtown, like I have a kid of like riding by and smelling the paper I used to like, just like, love it. I'm like, Oh, it smells so good and down and down, and I will be like, Mom, what is that? She's like, Oh, is the paper mill? And like, you know, you write by and they're like, no paper mill and no like that sweet paper smell is not there anymore. Yeah. Or burning wood or whatever the smell was.

[00:09:56] Speaker2

Fireplace smells are nice that might have been at the burn wood. Well, and you talked about being a community member first. What made you want to transition from community member to activist or to take that active role in your community as you grew up?

[00:10:11] Speaker3

Well, I think the issue is just turmoil living at like multiple points of marginalization and realizing that my community is in margin like multiple points of marginalization. It's really just like I deserve to not only survive, but mainly survive, but just like thrive in a place where I, well, I deserve to live a life that I'm not always trying to recover from trauma. And and I'm just trying to figure out like, but why? Like, at some point you're like, Well, what? What is going on that's causing this repeated and relentless struggle and repeated and relentless trauma? And you're like, Oh, there is just systemic harm being like rained down a lot of times. It's like, Oh, like, pull yourself up by the bootstraps. People will be like, Oh, some people don't have boots, and I'm like, No, some people are standing on your boots, you know, and you just need to be like, Hey, get off my boots, or I just want to relax.

[00:11:21] Speaker2

Yeah. So growing up and noticing that there were barriers around around your health and your wellness and your driving, and also seeing that maybe those barriers didn't exist in other communities.

[00:11:32] Speaker3

Yeah, and now that's the thing is they exist in other communities in other ways. They exist, too. It's like too wide and too far how much they exist. I think the more we stay in silos, the more we like are like, we're battling this alone. But when you start building community, the wider and more you build your community, the more you hear your story over and over again, and the more you're like, Hmm. Like, how come this is happening to all of us? And so a lot of times even people of privilege are still sharing like common threads and stories because there's like a big a big wave that's going to sink all the boats even if you're on a ship. If you got a little boat like the impacts are going to be different by the big waves, a big wave and things like racial capitalism and heteronormative patriarchy and white supremacy are big waves.

[00:12:35] Speaker2

You know, and the more we talk to each other about them, the more we have a chance at coming together to work against them.

[00:12:40] Speaker3

Yeah, exactly. Yeah. Or you realize that no one would want to talk to people the more you get out of a shame spiral because a lot of what is things that happen to you? A lot of times we take on shame like, Oh, that you know, I feel shame because I grew up poor. I feel shame that my family had to struggle. I feel shame that I was like a victim of such and such of assault. And instead of saying like. This happened because we live in a world that prioritizes while in capitalism and concentrates its power into the one percent. This isn't only happening to me because I felt to be smart enough to be the one person. The more you stop feeling shame and start getting angry and angry, but get into action.

[00:13:30] Speaker2

Yeah, it's sort of the ugly underbelly of this idea of meritocracy that I know I was raised to believe. Like, that's a good thing. You know, you all have a chance to make it, you all. I mean, you know, you can. I remember when I was just out of college, I worked in Washington, D.C., for five years and we worked with a youth program, and it was such an eye opening conversation for me to talk with one of the other women I worked with who was a black woman. And it was the first time I was introduced to this idea that getting out might be a harmful idea, right? There was so much individual focus placed on like promise, I promise you right or at rescue. It's like getting out of these communities. And she was like, Why don't we make the community better? And I'm embarrassed that it took me twenty one years to be introduced to that idea. But that's the system that we live in. Like, nobody had asked that question to me before. Like, why? Why are we trying to get one kid here and there into a position of privilege versus supporting communities that have been disinvested in and actually making the community stronger? So nobody has to escape them like, oh, right?

[00:14:32] Speaker3

Yeah, exactly. And yeah, but it's a big like, that's the big lie, too, because not only is, meritocracy puts so much pressure on you, it's also a lot of people work hard and are smart and can't make it out. And it has nothing to do with the fact that they're not, you know, not working hard and not intelligent because plenty of people just are in and not ever. That's the thing. That's the rule for capitalism is not everybody can be at the top. That's the only way it works. It has to some people at the top and some people not. You think the people who are doing the labor, the building, the grocery store work, you know, fast food, jobs and caregiving. Those are all lower wage jobs. But those are all some of the most strenuous and emotionally laborious work. Like people, they're working hard 40 even more for 40 hours a week because we all know that people usually have two and a half jobs. People are coming home exhausted and to hear like, Oh well, you wouldn't have to live like this if you just worked hard. Like how much work? If I could work harder, I'd be a robot at this point.

[00:15:42] Speaker2

Yeah, yeah. Gosh, I look thank you for bringing that up, the idea of community connection and community work and activism also as an antidote to shame, right? As a resistance to that, that idea that tries to put shame on you for not for not doing better or for not making it. That's just a whole other level that I didn't think we were going to talk about. I'm glad we did so actually and coming back a little bit. I do want to hear a little bit more about the kinds of community work that you've been involved in. So I know that, you know, one of our congregants and I think I first saw your name online and connection to her in 2020, when I was first noticing and seeing the work of a local group called Chester County stands up, which I think is one of the groups that you are connected to. Can you tell us a little bit about Chester County stands up? What they work on, how they work, who they are?

[00:16:34] Speaker3

Yeah. So Chester County stands up as a local chapter of Pennsylvania Stands Up, which is the statewide organizing group who decided that our community is not only statewide, nationwide, worldwide, but we have more power as a state to really have some big and bold legislation than we did as individual groups. So small activist groups across the state really came under the standup umbrella so we could dedicate time to local organizing, but also to statewide organize like big campaigns. So Chester County stands up on the local level, has been working on the campaign to end cash bail and also supporting other local organizing groups too. So that has been the big, the big campaign, which is very difficult. But obviously to me, I'm a prison abolitionist, so I don't think that when community harm happens, I don't think that we saw community harm by like turning away from that, taking the person and putting them away. I think it really takes like healing and investment, which is extremely hard. It's not as easy as like putting the person away and not seeing them again for the next few years. However, if we want a thriving community number one, we need to reduce the amount of trauma that's on people that would lead them into a criminalized behavior and to we need to work on community healing and providing whatever it is because we're not going to live in a world where harm doesn't happen.

[00:18:17] Speaker3

That's not a possibility. Even like if all the circumstances are well, people are are going to harm people. Even in your family, you cause harm. And I think we need to put more emphasis on like, how do we repair harm when we cause it more than like, you've caused harm? Now you're a bad person now. You know, we have this category of like good people and bad people when really all people cause harm and people get harmed and we need to figure out how to do that. So I think cash bail particularly criminalizes people who have cause harm or accused of causing harm and cannot afford to come home and defend themselves. You know, get a lawyer or even try to read about their case from home. You're like, you have to remain incarcerated until your trial, which means you have no time to prepare for your trial because you're just incarcerated in the only differences. I can afford to not be incarcerated, which is in clear violation of your Fourteenth Amendment right to citizenship and fair and equal protection under the law. And so that's been the big campaign of Chester County stands up. But there's other groups like the Downingtown Focus Group and Chester County Party for Socialism and Liberation, who have kind of, while Chester County stands up, has been inactive, have been really active around those campaigns. And more recently, I work full time at a nonprofit called the Prisons Association for Protection of Children, and I've been working with them as a worker who does emergency rental assistance programs, but also in a space of advocacy for fair and safe house.

[00:20:06] Speaker3

Because all those things are interconnected, likely people without housing stability are more likely to be criminalized for things that are just like not crimes are just being homeless like vagrancy. It's like, I'm just like, I'm just unhoused and I'm being arrested for sitting on a bench. But where else am I going to be because I have nowhere to be? And so some of the things I just criminalize, even some things like in ordinances about like, you can't have a shopping cart, and I'm like, Well, who has a shopping cart besides like on house people who don't have any way to transport their few belongings? Why also, like maybe you're going to like steal something, too, because you're not like. So the things that like lead you into criminalization directly are tied to like housing, directly tied to education. It's all kind of interconnected and you have to figure out like, OK, like what's what's at the top of the river here? That's like flowing in. How do we close on that or build a dam on this so we can have a safer community? But a lot of it has to do with stabilizing the community. Yeah.

[00:21:21] Speaker2

You know, I find myself in conversations a lot with people who are kind of newly understanding themselves as having a stake in social justice, trying to figure out what to do. And a lot of times people get hit in the face with overwhelmed because of seeing the big interconnectedness of the systems as they learn more and they're not sure what to do. And one of the things I talk about is that importance of community than in activism, because it's not that one person can take on everything, it's that lots of people have to be working in lots of different places working together. Yeah, so I just I see that in in what you were just saying, also the interconnectedness of issues like cash bail. Of course, somebody who is unhoused, somebody who is dealing with housing insecurity, somebody who's dealing with poverty is going to be more likely to be affected by, by, by unfair practices that keep them imprisoned, where somebody else who has the means would be able to get out and work on their kids, like you said.

[00:22:20] Speaker3

Yeah, yeah. And the important thing is like having taken the work because my thing is like, I feel like if you're an ally, then go sign the petition, you know, but you need to have like, are you going to do a voter registration drive? But like, if you can feel like where you are in it, you can feel like I need this to get done because I be safe when it is done. When we fight, the more we fight towards this, the more it increases my safety and well-being, the more you'll be in it. It'll stop like, Oh, I have ally burnout out. I'm like, What is ally burnout? And a lot of people don't realize they are like, you know, I'm like, I'm a white woman. I'm and I haven't do that. So like, this is not me. And I'm like, No, it is because your coworker makes seventy five percent more than you are thirty four percent more than you. And so it is you. And not only that, you know, there's like, you know, harmful patriarchy that it's just like on your back every day. And even then, even if you're like a middle class white man, they're still like a one percent that can change. Like Elon Musk can make us a tweet that can bankrupt your family because you put, like all your stock in cryptocurrencies like that can't happen to you either. We're all on different levels of it. But still, things like racial capitalism will sink us all if we don't fight against it.

[00:23:54] Speaker2

Yeah. Yeah, yeah, it affects us in different ways, like you said earlier, we're all in the we're all in the wave. We might be in different boats, but it's it's none of us are can escape it. And that's, I think, the. The thing that is not true, that we get told that if you achieve at a certain level or if you get to a certain place, that's how you're going to be safe as opposed to know what is community safety require. How can I make sure that my neighbors and I are all safe? And who am I thinking of as my neighbor when I ask that question to am I exactly everybody?

[00:24:28] Speaker3

Am I seeing everyone and like, how do we make sure we're all safe? Because it's like, it's yeah. As you said, it's easy enough to like, you know, I'll be the one to make it out the hood. I'll be the first generation college student, but it doesn't do anything for your community to even do that. You just have led yourself to it's more of like instead of fighting the power structure, you want to fight to be the person who is on top of the power structure. Um. Right. We should question. Sorry.

[00:25:05] Speaker2

Yeah. Yeah. We should question, I think, personally speaking to my congregation, we should question whether that's in keeping with our values. When we really think about it, it might be what the world teaches us is what we should do. But but is that part of Unitarian universalism? Is that part of what we hope for, for not just ourselves, but for the people around us? You mentioned a community group I hadn't heard of. I think Downingtown focus, and that was my next question for you was are there other community groups working anywhere in Chester County that you think folks should know about and support?

[00:25:34] Speaker3

Yes. So Downingtown Focus and PSL have been doing great work in the community. Not only do they do rallies and uprisings, but have a big mutual aid network that help with who you can sign up for, like fresh vegetables and food drop offs to get on there, their lists and all kinds of mutual aid, which I think mutual aid is a really good practice that communities developed over COVID. But like we should always keep. And it's not just about this like I'm giving charity to you, it's about we're in a network of people who will help fulfill our needs when we need them. So if I'm in need of something, I can expect to have my needs filled. And if I'm in this position to help someone fill their needs, I can expect to fill their needs. And it's a it's more of a network of support than a like. I'm this benevolent volunteer, I'm the benevolent donor. And rather than really assessing the needs of what someone needs, it's like here I am to to bring you what I have and you should be grateful. And now I feel better about myself, which is, I think a lot of nonprofit volunteerism kind of shifts a lot of focus on like volunteer and giving them that warm, fuzzy feeling. Then like fulfilling the needs of people who are in actual need

[00:27:03] Speaker2

More of a charity model, a philanthropy model, rather than a mutual aid model of recognizing that we're connected to each other? Yeah, exactly. Yeah. And you mentioned Friends Association, is that where you work? Can you tell us a little bit about their work?

[00:27:18] Speaker3

Yeah. So Friends Association is a two hundred. This year is our two hundred year of Operation longest continuous operating nonprofit in Pennsylvania. We are a we originated as a Quaker Quaker abolitionist, given back to the community that was enslaved here by taking care of children and doing housing. And we're still, you know, doing the same thing. Sometimes I feel celebratory that we kept up with the work that was established, but sometimes I'm not even doing the same thing for two hundred years. And then, you know, things have gotten better, but things haven't.

[00:28:01] Speaker2

There's still a need still need.

[00:28:03] Speaker3

Exactly. And so as much as people like job security, I would love to to be out of work. I would love to be out of work and not to have a need to to have the kind of work we do. But we have an emergency rental assistance program, which is a program that I work at. This is a federal program that's come up over COGAT, where if you are behind in rent, you can dial two on one. You'll be connected with your friends, packed human services or open heart, and they can pay up to 15 months of rent. And so they'll pay all of your rental arrears up to 15 months, and they'll pay for three months of future prepares to qualify for that. Emergency Rental Assistance Worker can decide that or not, but that is a program that's out there. I want to make sure that everybody catches that outlook on somebody, or if you're in need of assistance, you can always get assistance from that program. And then we have the EPC, which is the eviction prevention court, which has made transformative. We're developing a white white pages for that now, but have really been transformative in the Chester County courts of Coatesville and Downingtown, which have the most evictions in Chester County really been transformative in outcomes from. Rather, the landlord gets to get possessions like we have turned over the numbers from landlord possession, settlements and withdrawals.

[00:29:40] Speaker3

And so that's the eviction prevention court where the the court coordinator goes to court every time that there's eviction court. So Thursdays and Downingtown and Tuesdays and Coatesville stands in courts observe. And we also bring in attorneys. So everybody going into court for eviction gets to meet the attorney and court coordinator, and we immediately start to provide them services to make sure that they don't get evicted. And outcomes have been incredible. We have a project in the works called a house where we have rented a home in Coatesville for people coming home from incarceration to reconnect with their children in a place where there's programs, organic garden and free living expenses to help them get stabilized before they go into their home and reconnect with their other. A lot of times when you have a long time away from your children, you are. You know, I'm connected in in a way that you can just work on rebuilding what was lost over the time, and then we have a homeless prevention case management where people who just need a little extra for organizing their lifestyle budgeting has a person, a case manager who works with them on block to really make sure that they have all their affairs in order to prevent them from becoming homeless. And I believe that is all of our programs.

[00:31:23] Speaker2

Thank you. That's a great description. Are they friends association in Coatesville or are they in Westchester,

[00:31:31] Speaker3

There in Westchester? I thought so.

[00:31:32] Speaker2

Ok, yeah. When you said historic Quaker, things are often in Westchester or Delco, I noticed. So yeah.

[00:31:40] Speaker3

Okay.

[00:31:43] Speaker2

And then in addition to your work at Friends Association, the other thing I know about you from the internet is that you recently served a term on Coatesville City Council. Yeah. And and, you know, sometimes I think people experience or they imagine that the relationship between organizers or activists and public officials is an adversarial one. So I'm really curious to hear what it was like for you to serve in local government. What was that experience like? Would you do it again? Those kinds of questions?

[00:32:11] Speaker3

Yeah. So I definitely would serve in public office again. I will say that when you're organizing, you should be prepared to put whatever level of pressure you need to put on to a public official in whatever level of accountability you need to put on to a public official as necessary. So I don't think it needs to be an adversarial relationship, but I do think you need to go forward and fighting for your community the way you need to. So if you can schedule a meeting with your local official and they can start working for you to provide support that are honest with you about what they can and can't do in their role and what kind of support they you can negotiate that you need for them. So it's like, OK, you can't pass this along. But can you publicly say that you support this? Yes. But you can also turn up the heat, too. You can, you know, you can do an email campaign. You can have everybody in the congregation, send a strongly worded email if that doesn't work. You know, you can. I mean, protest is pretty, pretty high level of escalation, but you should always feel like you need to put whatever pressure on a politician because they're a public servant and the entire public is saying, I need you to do this, then they can't be saying no, they shouldn't say no.

[00:33:36] Speaker3

Within that range, they shouldn't say to me, I don't think you should put politics and say, Well, the party's not ready for this or you don't want to like if the community is a need, that's the priority to me. Um. Within and there is like there certainly are things that like when I was an activist, I felt that a politician can do that when you're there. Your power is small and dependent on your colleagues and depending on those books. And so as long I think I mean, politicians will be pretty transparent, like, Hey, this is out of like what I can do, but also, you know, I think it's a cop out to be like, Oh, I can't do anything. I don't have anything. I don't have anybody who agrees with me and I just can't do anything. I think that there's other ways that you can support, like you signing on to a campaign by a group of organizers is doing as a politician does give it more legitimacy in the eyes of the politicians who can get it done. You should, and you can and should do that.

[00:34:44] Speaker2

Yeah. And it sounds like one of the things I'm hearing and what you're saying is is maybe for all of us to remember that it's not an all or nothing model of power like that, that politicians, people in public office have a different seat in power. And so it's appropriate to hold them accountable for that. And also perhaps the experience of doing it yourself makes you realize like, it's not like I have absolute power to change everything just because I've been elected

[00:35:07] Speaker3

To public office. Yeah, yeah, for sure. Yeah, for sure. You definitely don't.

[00:35:13] Speaker2

Yeah. A few members of our congregation, about six of us, took a couple of months long course that was an organizing school offered by our denomination. It was sort of the basics of organizing. And one of the things that was a light bulb moment for me was talking about that adversarial relationship and realizing that sometimes politicians might really be glad that the activists are knocking down their door or send an email campaign because there might be something that the person in office really wants to do. But they don't feel like they have the public support that they can use to say, like, Look, this is what my constituents constituency wants, and I can relate to that as a minister because sometimes in my congregation, I'm thinking about the whole. And one person says to me, we should really do this as a sermon, and I'm like, Well, that's a good idea, but I don't know if it would have broad support, right? And so if 20 people come to me. It's not adversarial. It's like, Oh, now I know that there's a lot of people in our community who want this. So that was a really helpful shift for me, too.

[00:36:14] Speaker3

Yeah, yeah. And like, I ran a local politician, I don't know what the schedule of like a state level or U.S. federal level is, but I also don't think that you should just sit in your office and wait for folks to come to you like you need to be out in the community, having town halls, doing canvasses and figuring out like what? What is it that folks need?

[00:36:37] Speaker2

Yeah, yeah, because that's your job. It's not their job necessarily to come to you. Yeah. Yeah, yeah. Um, let's see, I have a couple more questions I don't want to talk for forever and keep you away from your house and your life and your people. But let me just look here. So, you know, one of the things I did want to ask you about because it was such a big part, I think of the conversations about social justice in our and about race in particular in our congregation. Now, almost two years ago, back in twenty twenty, when we were mostly locked down as a society and we saw this huge new wave of protests and uprisings and national attention around racial justice around the Black Lives Matter movement after George Floyd was murdered in Minneapolis. And because you, from your perspective, I guess, in your community and your activism, what did you notice? Did you notice anything change at that time in your work here locally? And how about since then? Has it changed again since then?

[00:37:42] Speaker3

Yes. So I was working on prison abolition in the cash belt campaign and actually did start before that in twenty nineteen. Chester County stands up at least some groundwork to. I really do want a one on one with community members and start to build out our organization, and we launched our cash bail campaign at the beginning of 2020. One thing that you notice is that in 2020, with everybody being locked down, their time to respond because everybody when you go out and talk to your neighbors for a long time, the people that you and talk to, I mean, have been saying the same thing. The criminal justice system does not work well for us. Doesn't favor us. It's dangerous to us. And we already seen so many people die at the hands of the police. Like we didn't need to see George Floyd or Taylor or Amod Arbery die to know that, to know that this happens. We already knew and it happens to us. It happened in Coatesville twice or three times, so we didn't need to see that we already knew. But I think that the time that we had not working and not doing anything else that occupies our time, it keeps us too busy to respond to community trauma. We have the time to really say, you know what, we need to get together and do something about this. But there's been other times and other folks in other movements happening. They they always are happy for the better part of four hundred years since we got to this continent. These movements are in work happily. And I think there's just more visibility.

[00:39:48] Speaker2

Yeah. So the work was here before for 20 20, and it's certainly here after 2020.

[00:39:53] Speaker3

Absolutely.

[00:39:54] Speaker2

Yeah. Yeah. And the ways to get connected to it are here, even if maybe it's not on the TV and the headlines in the same way as it always is, it's still here.

[00:40:03] Speaker3

It's I'm telling you, it's just as easy as like getting out and being like, what's going on in this community, knocking on your neighbor's doors and then telling your neighbor, come knock on doors with you the next time. And that's how you you build movements figuring out like, I wonder what's going on with this person? I wonder. What's going on with my neighbor who hasn't been outside for the last week? Let's check. Let's see. That's how you start to build a movement because then you're like, OK, we're all together, we're all making sure we're safe. We have a pod. But also, how do we get the needs, our needs? And you can have a small campaign like, you know, our trash man keeps missing the block. Let's make sure we go to City Hall and make sure we got our trash something as small as that, something as big as systemic issues you can do as long as you work together. Yeah.

[00:40:57] Speaker2

Well, I have a feeling your answer might play into to my second the last question here, which is kind of about how we start to make change. But just wanted to name that one of the things I think is often talked about when we think about Chester County as our community is that it's the wealthiest county in the state. But of course, that doesn't tell the whole story. We know that there are our areas of our county, including Coatesville, including Downingtown. Some of these post-industrial areas, some of the rural areas where where most of the residents are not sharing in that prosperity of the average wealth in the county. And and it's a big question I realize. So maybe, maybe your answer is more about the organizing level and connecting with your neighbors. But when you think about how we might change some of the socioeconomic inequality in our county, where where do you see us? Where where do you see a good place to start?

[00:41:50] Speaker3

Well, number one, we need fair, we need fair housing and mixed income housing. The wealth disparity has much to do with outcomes, siloing low income communities together and not giving like mixed income to help bring up the community, but also take taking away like corporate investment and limiting the amount of freedom that corporate investors have to like. Buy up all the property and raise up all the rent and keep people who are ready for home ownership just on the cusp. You're not like a high earner or you're like a moderate earner, but you're ready to buy a house. But. Are corporate investors are always going to buy you out because you could put your offer in and somebody could see your offer and say, I'll give you six months up front and then I mean, I'll be Instinet with Brant. And so. No, why we need to put regulations on what corporations can do to when you have to stop having such like. Disparity, especially around school districting and things like that, where they put all folks from one economic status into a school where, you know, the tax burden becomes so high and things like that, so number one, we need to just stop doing predatory and disinvestment into communities and to we need to honor communities that are already established. Let communities be what they are because I school is in the state of trying to revitalize. And you hear things that, like Trickett to me, trigger things, and I'm like, Oh, oh, we got to bring new people in. We want to have a community of working people. We want to have a community of homeowners, and I'm like, There are going to be people who are always going to be content, and there's nothing wrong with the community as it exists. Besides the divestment. And so instead of trying to invest in the community that different people want to live in. Invest in the community that the folks who are living here want to live. That instead of pricing us out of this community and getting us to move along to whatever low income community because we have our community established here.

[00:44:20] Speaker2

Yeah, yeah. And there are ways to do that kind of development that does not require that you replace the people who are there in order to develop the area. Like you said, there are ways to create, create regulations on on companies and corporate interests and developers for how they would do their development work so that it doesn't displace people

[00:44:41] Speaker3

And also have community benefits. Agreement with developers where like, if you want to come, develop like you, do you meet all these requirements for the community? And then if not, then no, then if and like also that's. Because of the way our capitalist society set up community members who really have to like. Negotiate with people who own properties and be like, look, we don't want this. What can we like? You're part of this community. Don't sell your property to this person if they're doing this right. But on the flip side of that, people are in such economic strengths. It's like, Well, they're offering me \$300000, and I'm probably never going to have another opportunity to earn three thousand dollars. And so. I mean, that's just like a giant civic issues.

[00:45:36] Speaker2

Yeah. Yet another reason it takes all of us working together that that one, so that can't do it on its own. Yeah. Yeah, exactly. On Nadia, my last question for you is kind of a future one, just as somebody who is so connected and involved. Born and raised in Coatesville and however you define your community, whether that's coastal and not or not, what what is your deepest hope for your community moving forward?

[00:46:01] Speaker3

To me, my deepest hope is a life with less trauma, a life with like, I mean, there's not going to be a life and no trauma that doesn't exist. But as close as we can get to like no trauma as possible. That's the that's what I was trying to do is to not keep having to recover from traumatic. Experiences relentless trauma. I just want everyone to be healthy and safe.

[00:46:35] Speaker2

Yeah, I want that to. Yeah. Thank you so much. Thank you so much for this time, I really appreciate it.

[00:46:43] Speaker3

Oh, thank you. I felt I feel very honored to have done this for you and for the congregation. It's sounds really great. It's amazing. So thank you. You're welcome.

[00:46:58] Speaker2

Hey.

[00:46:59] Speaker1

Thank you, Nadia, for taking. But you all, whether here or at home. To join me in the spirit of prayer. And my prayer today. Is one of gratitude. For this community. And for this tradition. Our universalist ancestors. Who remind us that all of us need all of us. That salvation is not personal, that it's a collective project. And for the community that we have here. For all of the people who we see on Sundays, whether in body or as a little name on a screen right now. We know them. We know each other. And that presence in each other's lives reminds us of the truth. Of our tradition. That each of us is needed. And each of us is beloved. And so for these prayers that I've spoken and for whatever prayers you're carrying on your heart this morning. Together we say Amen. If you enjoy this message and would like to support the mission of WellSprings. Go to our web site WellSpringsUU.org, that's WellSprings the letters u u dot ORG.

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