



Neighborhood Unitarian Universalist Church

A Spiritual Home for the Ages

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Home: the place of one's dwelling or nurturing, with the conditions, circumstances, and feelings which naturally attach to it and are associated with it... not merely place but also state.

- Home:**
1. A lens through which one can safely view the world
 2. A place where one's ideas, experiences, and work are seen as valuable and one's body (physical being) and identity are welcome.
 3. An ideal state of being, as much as a place, which is reimagined for each generation.

-The Oxford English Dictionary

Anita Hill is an accomplished American academic and attorney whose courageous testimony at the Clarence Thomas Supreme Court confirmation hearings will be forever remembered. Hill has since dedicated herself to advancing the leadership of women and African Americans within the legal field towards a vision of a more inclusive democracy. Her 2011 book *Reimagining Equality: Stories of Gender, Race, and Finding Home*, Hill likens the dream of home ownership to a quest for the kind of deep belonging to a place, of putting down roots and feeling sense of economic security, but also inner safety and wellbeing. Hill was born into a family of farmers in Lone Tree, Oklahoma, the youngest of thirteen children. Home for her family played the role of nurturing and bolstering a sense of worth and value when the legal system and larger culture did not yet provide that affirmation. She talks about the meals around the kitchen table and the joy of being together with generations.

Hill's premise is that home is a both an economic marker of true citizenship—of equality and belonging to the nation-- and a spiritual marker of inner freedom and security. In Hill's view, looking at the history of racism in housing discrimination and the many legal, economic and cultural barriers to attaining home ownership gives us a view into the work ahead to create a more inclusive democracy, an American dream of belonging for all, not just the wealthy, the white or the privileged.

She writes: "Through home ownership, we put a market value on the American Dream and gave little thought to the larger meaning of home in America. Can we ever restore the place of the home in the dream of our democracy? How can we make the American Dream of having a place to which we belong a dream that is inclusive and sustainable?"

We have a crisis of "home" in our nation and around the globe. We see at our borders migrants and asylum seekers longing for freedom and a home in our nation. We see a global refugee crisis of displacement, and ongoing refugee resettlement efforts. We see birthright citizenship being threatened. The question looms-- Who has the right to belong, to call this country home and who is othered? Who has a right to the American dream of home?

To move past this we must address the history of bias and discrimination which haunt our current struggles for a more inclusive democracy.

Here in Pasadena, we have to reckon with our own history of who is truly at home, and who is othered... a history of discriminatory practices played a major role in contributing to residential segregation here and in other cities nationwide in the early twentieth century. Specifically, practice of real estate developers redlining lower income minority neighborhoods and exclusionary contracts—called the unfortunate name of "covenant"

-- that prohibited the purchase of a piece of property by members of particular racial or ethnic groups. You can still see how our Pasadena and Altadena neighborhoods today are impacted.

On this Sunday when we lift up the history of our congregation, we can look at how our congregation played a role in resisting discriminatory practices in our midst. Neighborhood's minister Rev. John Baker was active in the community around issues of housing bias, I found an article in the Pasadena Star news from April of 1963 which advertised Rev. Baker speaking at the Democratic Club of Altadena as the chair of the Pasadena Chamber of Commerce Community Relations Committee. Baker studied housing patterns and discrimination in Pasadena and sought to educate not only the church, but the community on the issue.

Following Baker's lead, the congregation advocated for the 1963 Rumford Fair Housing Act, which passed the California state legislature. On the heels of this victory for fair housing, real estate developers worked to get a counterintuitive on the ballot which would amend the state constitution, known as Proposition 13. The issue activated the church and moved them to vote to take a position against Prop 13 and for fair housing in Pasadena. It also brought into question whether the church should take a specific political position on issues, a question we still struggle with today.

As it turned out, the discriminatory measure did pass, and it then took ten years and the Supreme Court's involvement to declare the measure unconstitutional under the equal protection clause. It was only then that the practice of exclusionary covenants in Pasadena, including the one here on Westmoreland place, were finally put to an end. That was 1974, not so long ago.

California is currently experiencing the worst housing crisis in decades. Real estate prices have skyrocketed and make the dream of home ownership out of reach for the average middle class person. Gentrification and corporate developing continue to push low income and working class people out of their neighborhoods with nowhere to go. Census data now shows that California has the highest poverty rate in the country with nearly a quarter of the country's homeless population.

According to a recent [Pasadena Weekly article](#):

Pasadena Housing Director William Huang reports the city's homeless senior citizen population is increasing at an alarming rate. Pasadena saw a 65 percent increase—from 153 to 253 — in homeless seniors (people 50 and older) over the past two years. The San Gabriel Valley saw a staggering 116 percent increase over the past year. The increases are largely due to economic woes as costs continue to rise at rates that make basic housing unaffordable for the middle class and poor people.

If we want to keep embodying a radically inclusive spiritual home, we are called as a congregation to get involved and become a part of the solutions to righting Pasadena's discriminatory past and creating a more inclusive future. We must keep working to reconcile the history of exclusionary covenants with a dream of our inclusive covenant, a more inclusive Pasadena, and a more inclusive America.

Neighborhood is a spiritual home for the ages, a beloved community, a place to belong. Our mission is to embody an expansive sense of home as a state of welcome, inclusion and belonging for all. Embodying home calls upon us to wish for and work for others to experience those material and spiritual comforts which we wish for ourselves- a safe place to lay one's head, the freedom to pray and to play in peace, and a community who will not only care for us, but fight for us.

Amen, and blessed be.