

Laconia Human Relations
Regular Monthly Meeting
March 9, 2021
3PM – 4:30 via Zoom

Agenda

Welcome and Roll Call

Review and Acceptance of February 9, 2021 Meeting Minutes

Old Business

- Homeless Task Force

New Business

- Looking ahead – round table on 2021 by committee
- Community Engagement Program – Carol
- Holocaust and Genocide education – David O.
- Multicultural Festival – September 11, 2021
- Other business
- Next Meeting April 13, 2021 at 3pm via Zoom

Public Comment – Except for their names public will not be visible until called upon by the Chair.

The public is invited to offer their opinions. Initially, they will be limited to four minutes until all have had an opportunity to speak. Each person is constrained to their time period or to ask questions of the committee.

The public will be visible but muted until unmuted by the chair. Members of the public wishing to speak will use the “raise hand” option.

Everyone is expected to speak respectfully of other people’s opinion.

The Chair, at their discretion, may mute someone if they begin getting off topic or speaking disrespectfully. The meeting will end at 4:30pm.

Note: The meeting will be held online through Zoom and will begin at 3pm although people are encouraged check in early. Contact David Stamps, 387-4382 or email at dbstamps@dbstamps.com if you are having trouble connecting.

You are invited to a Zoom webinar.

When: Mar9, 2021 3:00 PM Eastern Time (US and Canada)

Topic: Human Relations Commission

Please click the link below to join the webinar:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81304412555?pwd=c0gxMUh1NTcyRTVrVlVQVknmSll0dz09>

Passcode: 517690

Or iPhone one-tap :

US: +13126266799,,81304412555#,,,,*517690# or +16465588656,,81304412555#,,,,*517690#

Or Telephone:

Dial(for higher quality, dial a number based on your current location):

US: +1 312 626 6799 or +1 646 558 8656 or +1 301 715 8592 or +1 346 248 7799 or +1 669 900 9128 or +1 253 215 8782 Webinar ID: 813 0441 2555

Passcode: 517690

International numbers available: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81304412555?pwd=c0gxMUh1NTcyRTVrVlVQVknmSll0dz09>

Phone info: *6 - Toggle mute/unmute. *9 - Raise hand.

Introduction to *Let's Talk About Democracy Letters*

Last January, the Laconia Human Relations Committee agreed to support the concept of a Community Engagement program articulated by Margaret Donnelly and Carol Pierce. Carol has taken the first step by writing four letters for publication consecutively. While they are personal narratives they are designed for people to reflect on the values and mission and work of our Committee. Our goal is to elevate the conversation and challenge others to write their own thoughts on the state of our society, country, and world.

-- David Stamps, Chair

Let's Talk About Democracy! - #1

What does democracy mean to you? For many, it has come to mean a value system for the representative democracy we live in. How we live it individually makes a difference for how we live it collectively as a nation.

We are the Laconia Human Relations Committee's asking this question of ourselves and the community. The purpose for our work over the last twenty years as a mayor's committee is: "To cultivate a community-wide climate that does not tolerate prejudice of any kind which undermines the dignity of any person". We view this as a primary value for living in a democracy.

In this spirit, we would like to encourage a community discussion for what democracy means as we live here in the Lakes Region and the U.S. We will start with four weekly columns in the Laconia Daily Sun on how we, as a group, view democracy and the responsibility we carry for our vision. We hope that others will share their visions of democratic life in the Laconia Daily Sun Letters to the Editor.

We do not feel a necessity to respond to what others write. Rather, we look to valuing an expression of ideas and ways to describe the values of democracy in what many chose to say. We are not looking for agreement or definitions.

We want to hear the deep feelings for democracy held by friends and neighbors; the many ways we think and act on our values in this nation. We observe signs of a democratic presence, but also wonder at times if we still have it and it is surviving.

We recognize that how we choose to live a democratic life is a personal choice based on how we grew up and what life experience has shown is important. Our vision starts with the values of free speech undergirded by respect for the individual. We add to this the need to be inclusive of all who live among us and the importance for sustaining a sense of community.

Historically, we see a process of democratic values gradually becoming more and more inclusive in many ways. We view democracy as a process, never finished. It calls for conscious attention to upholding democratic values each generation.

What does democracy mean to you? Was there a time in your life when you, or someone you know, suddenly said, “Thank goodness, I live in a democracy?”

Carol Pierce for the Laconia Human Relations Committee - 411 words

Let’s Talk about Democracy! - #2

It was 1947. I was about fourteen years old. It seemed that almost daily stories of the Holocaust were in newspapers, magazines, on the radio, and in theater newsreels. I was horrified thinking of Germany killing millions of defenseless people, simply slaughtering them! It greatly affected me because of my German heritage. I was not far removed from those of recent generations of kin to have been a part of this. How would I have coped with being immersed in such a society if I were there?

I remember standing in my living room and thinking, “Thank God I live in a democracy! That could never happen here!” Democracy is a very personal experience for me, as it is for everyone. It brought a focus to my life for always making sure I was inclusive of others.

We each have our own story about what living in the U.S. means to us. We speak of the many who have sacrificed themselves in so many ways for our country. The meaning of democracy and the values it holds, depends a great deal on our life-experience. Democracy brings very personal feelings about what it means to everyone.

We believe that democracy is a process of building on what has been, that each generation needs to explore and value for themselves. It becomes a shared value system that is never finished, always evolving.

In our work, as the Laconia Human Relations Committee, we have spent many years facilitating refugees from all parts of the world to begin their lives in the U.S. (Most have moved to warmer climates!) A few years ago when we were planning one of our annual Multicultural Market Days, we found over 40 countries from all parts of the world represented in the Lakes Region by first generation immigrants. Only about eight countries were represented by refugees.

We feel the importance of being or living the inclusive democracy we want to see happen. Someone has said, "That's the hard part."

How has living in a democracy affected who you are?

Carol Pierce for the Laconia Human Relations Committee - 355 words.

Let's Talk about Democracy! - #3

There was a time when the Four Freedoms were commonly spoken of as defining our democratic values. These freedoms are still held, but are being questioned as to whether everyone has shared and benefitted from them.

- Freedom of speech
- Freedom of worship
- Freedom from want
- Freedom from fear

President Roosevelt on January 6, 1941 defined these as what the nation would be fighting a war to preserve, based on defeating the tyranny of Nazi Germany and Japan. They are still basic to who we are, but now are being relooked at as to whether they are equally applied to everyone in our democratic systems and institutions of today. We have much history and experience in the 80 years since FDR's defined these Freedoms, but they seem less acknowledged, or perhaps, sufficient as guiding lights today.

Some now question as to whom they apply. The events of recent years have asked us to pay attention to the varied experiences of many as to whether they live with freedoms from *want and fear*, or ever have.

It is interesting to note that the themes of the 1939 World's Fair, still in the midst of the Great Depression, were also stated in terms of *freedoms*.

- Freedom of the press
- Freedom of assembly
- Freedom of speech
- Freedom of worship

These more clearly focus on the government's role of allowing freedom. FDR's list when facing a world war, feels more personal. As we look back,

what goes on in an historical time can change the emphasis on what gets said about democracy.

In 2021, we look for words that define democracy more personally as it is lived, such as: a sense of inclusiveness; speech based in verifiable facts and avoiding harm; trust and support for our great institutions of government; a free press; and active faith communities based in serving us personally and for the greater good of communities. We feel all are qualities of democracy that need exploration, support, and recognition of the values that undergird them. So, we ask the community, “What does democracy mean to you?”

Carol Pierce for the Laconia Human Relations Committee – 353 words

Let’s Talk about Democracy! - #4

One of the great responsibilities of citizenship in a democracy is telling the truth to our best ability. Democracy thrives on truth-telling. It is basic to sustaining it. Truth becomes clearer when described under the umbrella of the values of preserving democracy; not just in what we believe is right or wrong.

Deciding what is truth takes thought and time. Democratic society always values education. Truth-telling is based on what historians tells us happened and what scientists say is fact-based. The problem is that these are never fixed in stone. Much of history may be accepted as fact; except that new information keeps coming to light that changes how something is viewed. The same is true for science. New discoveries are constantly being made. To whom we listen becomes important.

Where we place trust matters in a world where evidence may change as understanding grows with informed critical thinking. Each of us carries the responsibility to know the values of an institution or organization well-enough to be able to believe what they say. Are they clear where their support comes from? Do they operate within democratic values of inclusiveness and appreciation for the diversity of thought that a democratic society asks of us?

Values change very little, but truth may need up-dating. Therefore, education is an ongoing process, to be sought and respected. We can't begin to understand all that we need to know about the changing world around us. Trust needs to be given with forethought for the good of the community as a whole, to those who deserve it.

What the "common good" needs, seems too often to find its opposition in the fear of the loss of personal freedom. It is easy to advocate and emphasize freedom, but as citizens we carry responsibility in many ways, such as: to balance personal freedom with the good of the community; to be as genuinely educated as possible for meaningful citizen participation; to support and respect the institutions of government; to abide by the law; to not tolerate corruption; and to refrain from a rush to judgement.

Our vision for the Laconia Human Relations Committee is based in the values of free speech undergirded by respect for the individual and the law, the need to be inclusive of all who live among us, and the importance for sustaining a sense of community.

In a democracy, each citizen is responsible for determining not just whether it survives, but how.

Carol Pierce for the Laconia Human Relations Committee – 422 words