

Transcript of Interview with Duncan Teague By Kit Heintzman

Interviewee: Duncan Teague

Interviewer: Kit Heintzman

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Location (Interviewee): Atlanta, Georgia

Location (Interviewer):

Transcriber: Angelica S Ramos

Some of the things we spoke about include:

Being the only Black gay man in a room. A spiritual journey from Black Baptist tradition to becoming a Unitarian Universalist. Call and response in Black faith. Being a minister of a New Unitarian Universalist church in Atlanta; the only one in the city centered on a predominantly African American community. Having met as a congregation on 1 March 2020 to celebrate, anticipating shut down, and transitioning services online. The congregation expanding after transitioning to online, future hybrid models. The relationship between public health and faith. What the American government knew at the beginning of the pandemic in contrast to what they said; government disinterest in saving people. The importance of the history of HIV for the future management of public health crises. Comparisons between Anthony Fauci in the early days of HIV and COVID-19. Pre-pandemic research plans being reorganized: focus groups about HIV pre-pandemic. Atlanta's proximity to the CDC. How being married to an epidemiologist (David Thurman) impacted COVID-19 response. The death of a friend from COVID in January 2021, Joey Traina; traveling to California to deliver the memorial. Aunt Opal Faye (officially Mrs. Opal Faye (Walker) Swindle, Smith, Allen.) who died at 96; funeral. A family member who opposed vaccination catching COVID taking Ivermectin. Setting boundaries with people arguing against vaccination; having drawn similar boundaries around. HIV/AIDS misinformation. "Heart won over head" in scientific research and the global community. Chosen family. COVID-19 safety norms and the flu. Developing relationships with neighbors. Needing a 300-year plan.

Kit Heintzman 00:00

Hello. Would you please state your name, the date, the time and your location?

Duncan Teague 00:08

My name is Duncan Teague. Also, at this point in life, Reverend Duncan Teague it is Thursday. It is September 8. Thursday. I'm here in Atlanta, Georgia in my home. And it's right now 10 minutes after 10 in the morning.

Kit Heintzman 00:40

The year is 2022.

Duncan Teague 00:42

Yes.

Kit Heintzman 00:43

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Duncan Teague 00:53

Yes.

Kit Heintzman 00:55

Thank you so much for being here with me this morning. Would you please start by introducing yourself to anyone who might find themselves listening, what would you want them to know about you?

Duncan Teague 01:04

Well, um, it's very particular to this moment that I am a minister of a new Unitarian Universalist congregation in Atlanta that we founded our four and a half years ago. So our fifth anniversary will be the same date that Mandela walked out of prison was our first official Worship Day, February 11. Some I'm really proud of that coincidence, or sacred timing, however you want to look at it. And that I was called to that. Because we will be for a while now. The only Unitarian Universalist congregation in Atlanta of the six or seven of us, who is centered in an African American community, predominantly. And yeah, and I'm proud of that. And it was myself and a group of people who wanted to see this happen. And we're not the first attempt at this, but we're the latest. Yeah, so that's going on. I also because of my being a Unitarian Universalist minister. I needed to do some things around credentialing. So I took a part time job with Dr. John Sullivan's at Emory University, and the Global Health Division of Rollins School of Public Health. And what Dr. Blevins does is he pairs public health issues with issues around faith and HIV and AIDS. And he's been working in HIV and AIDS since he was an act up as a very young man. But that's his story. I also have been working in HIV and AIDS since I was a young man, I have friends and act up I wasn't. I have very good friends in active. And it is interesting for me to have, in my mind, left the black Baptist Church gone and experienced liberal religion among a group of folks in Atlanta called existentialist and felt very free and very open and then to have watched my ministry grow there to have become a Unitarian Universalist and and really feel like that's where I'm called to serve. And to end up right back in HIV and AIDS, and in predominantly black community, this time Sub Saharan Africa and fighting some of the same fights and, and championing some of the same causes. It's not all fight this many years later. It feels very surreal at times. very surreal, because I find myself being the one openly black gay man in rooms now. Like I used to be way back in the late 80s and That's like, really? Yeah. Kind of sad actually. Kind of sad. But we're called where we're called.

Kit Heintzman 05:16

Would you tell me a story about your life during the pandemic?

Duncan Teague 05:21

Oh, wow. Okay, um, I can give you a number of them. The biggest change was that on March 1, and we shouldn't have been. Now we know we shouldn't be but but we were following the wrong advice as the rest of the country was. So on March 1, last year, we late in the calendar year, celebrated abundant loaves. That's the name of the congregation abundant love Unitarian Universalist. We celebrated our fourth and our I'm sorry, third anniversary. Yes, two years ago. Wow. And we had at Hammonds House Museum here in Atlanta. At the peak of the attendance because, you know, folks came for service, some folks stayed for dinner afterward. 70 people in a small, private museum. Well, it's open to the public, of course, but it's an African American Museum. And we were having the time of our lives. And we had a visiting minister, come. Carol Sissel, a buddy of mine, who is wonderful. And she gave a fabulous sermon. You know, we just celebrated as though we had nothing to be worried about. On the first Sunday of March 2020. That was the last time we met in public in person. Because the No, I'm sorry, the next week, I tried to hold the service, because I knew we were going to have to shut down

because the museum had to shut down. And in the course of one week, the anxiety and the fear and the reality of COVID became palatable. And I wanted one last service in case it was comforting to the members. But I wasn't using public health protocols, I was using sort of my pastoral call. Well, in the middle of a pandemic, people are not comforted by being close to each other. Or at the beginning of what. And actually, that wasn't the beginning, as we now know. But anyway, so in one week, we went from celebrating who we are, and our accomplishment as a new congregation, and having a really good time. To the next week. There was myself, my husband and the musician. Oh, and we had one person come. And the lady who brought the flowers, works for CDC. And I'll never forget the look on her face. She brought the flowers, put them on the table and said, I'll see y'all and she laughed. But boy, you talk about a message. And we weren't online at that point. So I went ahead, you know, sort of with what we could do with the four of us. And we started packing up our stuff, then we did not have service the next week because I was sort of in shock from what had happened from one. And I didn't go to seminary with the idea of being on camera. I don't mind it, but it wasn't my goal. And while I was having my little moment, several members of the congregation including my husband, David Thurman, we're planning on how we could be online and how we were going to use Zoom. And we have been using it ever since.

Duncan Teague 09:41

That's, that's the most poignant story for me from from being online. I will say that the next year when we celebrate our anniversary on Zoom. We had over 70 people come in to celebrate our anniversary again. And so I thought okay, so this is so people still believe in us. And we still believe in each other. That was it was it was really touching. And it was really beautiful to have a friend of mine come to my house to give the sermon on Zoom. Yeah, it's beautiful though. This is hard to talk about, but I have to actually, I'll be right back

Duncan Teague 10:52

You can hear me fine, right. Okay, so what I was going to get was a bookmark with Joey Traina's picture on it. And Joey Traina was there 32. And in the middle of the pandemic, I had to go to Augusta to do his memorial service. With his movie star, dood looking, fiancée. And her daughter who had started to call Joey dad, and Joey son from a previous relationship. Who is growing up in Augusta, Georgia looking just like Joey. And I want to bring Joey into this discussion, because I love him and I miss him. And in February of 2019, no, February of 2020. Yeah, February 2020. I went to Houston to preach. Joey was in our pulpit standing in for me. And not only could Joey speak very eloquently, and he was an activist and a gorgeous man. And on fire about social justice. And I think he was coming to terms also with as a lot of activists with his calling. Was it just to activism, or was it also to spirituality? And and I was so grateful that he did that. And the musician who was there the Sunday that Joey preached, when we lost Joey, he was in shock, because they were very close to the same age. And he had remembered how good the service was and how, how good Joey sang. And yeah, so Joey must have caught COVID like very early, because after he preached here in Atlanta, and he was coming, he came to Atlanta. He has a lot of friends here and a lot of social justice buddies and politicians. And he'd done some, some political work here, but a lot of his work was in Augusta. So he came here to preach hung out I think a little bit then and his son was in Augusta. So he went back to Augusta to be with family and stuff but he took a political gig of short term political big in Florida. Rightly so given what's been going on in Florida. And he got sick. And of course, we didn't have a test that soon, but most folks think it was COVID and he got over it. And we were really glad, of course, but Joey 32 big, you know, fairly happy, healthy young man. And so it's determined to move to California to be with this woman. And I didn't know who she was at the time. So we talked about it. And, and I'm checking to make sure that he's not setting himself up for a horrible, you know, breakup or something. And he assured me it

wasn't. And it wasn't, they were madly in love with each other, and planning on this great life together. So he moves to California.

Duncan Teague 15:52

And catches it again. And we didn't have a vaccine. And if we had Joey was only 30, something he wouldn't have been eligible. And nobody would have you know, you think 30 something year old has caught it. He's got immunity. Well, by then I'm sure there was a variant in Florida and a variant in California that were not the same or whatever. And Joey may have had some, some other stuff going on maybe? Yeah. So his fiancée took him to the hospital in the week after Christmas, and he was in the hospital, and he did not get better. And he passed away in January 2021. And in the spring, I went and did this memorial. And so I don't have a lot of tolerance for this is a government plot. This is about tracking people. I don't want to hear any of that. And I have, I am livid with the previous person playing President of the United States and not for his illegal activities since. Well, I'm a little livid about that, but more about his miss handling. And the deaths that occurred in the first year of the pandemic, when I know that he knew what was going on. And he was being advised by the most informed and most prominent people. And I'll say Dr. Fauci, I love Dr. Fauci in the midst of this, cuz I knew who Anthony Fauci was. And he is not an angel. But he he's serious about public health. And that we were following the advice of a tyrant instead of Dr. Fauci is insane. And that he led people to their deaths. I'm not saying his name, because I don't say it out loud. But everyone knows who I'm talking about. Yeah. After I lost, Joey, I, I have family members who were anti vaccine. And I told them, they couldn't talk to me about it, and they couldn't post it on my pages. And and I remember being this way about HIV, when folks said HIV doesn't cause AIDS. And I said, Well, if it doesn't, and I want all my friends back. That's simple. Yeah. Yeah. My husband also is in full disclosure, retired doctor with CDC. So I live with public health and he's still cautious and there are things we don't do. Or and and that he has chosen not to do until he gets the new vaccine. We also I also have a brother in law who is 83. And his wife is 72. And they both got it and it was not good. Margot is my sister in law. And Margo is a longtime epileptic. I don't know if they use that term anymore a person with epilepsy. And because of her medications, she couldn't get the new stuff that would help mitigate COVID. So she had to sort of suffer through it. And she got better, because she's vaccinated and all that, but but it was rough. And Bob has diabetes. And he's had a very hard time shaking it. He got better because he could take the meds and then the virus came back. So this is, you know, this is very personal for me. And I have tried from the pulpit to be as responsible as I could for folks who listen to from pulpits even, and scary things, like we're not gonna wear no mask up in this congregation. And I'm like, really? What kind of insanity are you believing? What kind of theology do you have that says that you don't care? Yeah. Anyway, I don't go to those congregations of course.

Duncan Teague 21:53

I, I wanted to say that the Traina's and I are still in relationship. Because Joey's mother wanted me to come to do the service. And the interim minister that was there was very happy to let me do that. And since that time, you know, every few months or so we check in with each other or whatever, and they'll never be the same. And, and for me, what's really, You know, he was looking he was he was at that point in life, when you've made some big decisions in your early 30s. And those decisions are the ones that take you probably a good ways, if not the whole way through. And and he and she, we're headed toward marriage and consolidating the family, or at least with respect to all the other characters involved, of course, because we have complicated families. But there's at the service, it was really clear that the two kids had become siblings. And were more bonded in their grief. Yeah. I also want to say that I was I was really grateful when we did get the vaccine. And that, that finally the scientific community gave up some of its machismo, and instead of competing with each other for who could get there first.

They decided maybe this is an opportunity for us to work together to solve something for the global good. And that get us a vaccine in in record time, which also scared people because it happened so fast. Yeah, but that that it was not about when we published it was about when we get a vaccine. And I'm, I'm grateful to that. That heart won over head, somehow. In the midst of that, I'm sure it's because we were scared to death, but yeah, whatever it takes. However, we need to get there as a global community.

Kit Heintzman 24:52

What was the memorial service like?

Duncan Teague 24:54

It was beautiful cuz Joey was amazing. He was he had performed in theater, which I didn't realize how much he had done until I got there. And my undergraduate degree is in theater. I didn't know how much we share in common. And so the beginnings of this really wonderful deep friendship. Also, for me were cut off and not cut off, changed. That sometimes I think Joey's manipulating some stuff for me. Yeah. It was beautiful. Surreal, a little, you know, because everybody had to wear a mask, of course. And, and, and I walked into his other life, because I knew him as somebody who came to Atlanta to enjoy abundant love and to be involved in political stuff. But you know, that's just the veneer of who a person is. Yeah. So I got thrust in the Yeah. And I was so honored to be asked to do it. Yeah.

Kit Heintzman 26:21

You've mentioned coming into the pandemic, knowing about Dr. Fauci. Would you tell us a little about about when you were first introduced to what he was doing?

Duncan Teague 26:31

Oh, we didn't like him. He was rough. And, and, you know, he wasn't trained to deal with a whole bunch of dying queens and screaming queens and, and gay men, you know, and especially powerful white gay men who were angry as hell. That's not a part of Public Health Training, or at least a buzzer. And, you know, there's their doctors, and, you know, they're supposed to have their little meetings and tell you what's going on. Well we said to hell with that. And, and to his credit, Dr. Fauci did change. And he changed about his relationship to a community of people suffering, like we were. Maybe if another Republican administration had listened to Dr. Fauci, we would have done better by HIV and AIDS. Um, yeah. Um, yeah. So I have, I have great admiration for him, and that he, is fierceness. He's willing to stand on his principles. Because you know him and that idiot didn't get along. Well, he attacked him. And they're still attacking him as though that will solve some problem. The world's one of the world's best epidemiologists, and they are attacking him to replace him with who? They don't have anybody. That just anyway, that's, that was also if there was ever a moment when the followers of that man, and by the way, I'm not talking about Trump, I'm not. I'm sorry, I am talking about that person. I don't like saying his name. I'm not talking about Biden. I'm not talking about Obama, for clarity on this recording. I'm talking about the idiot that the sinister group of people put in the presidency, knowing he was not qualified knowing he was a puppet for extremism and arrogance and, and lack of concern. Anyway. If there was ever a moment when that party could have, that political party could have shown some empathy and mercy to the American people and shown that they're willing to rise above their typical political stance, and they did not. They followed him knowing that he was taking us into ruin. Part of the reason why I say this is because David and I have many chosen children. They're they came to us as adults. And rather than just think that we were two nice old gay men, they adopted us as their parents. In one case, one of these young women who did this, and I would name her if she

had given me permission to do so. She really adopted us at a crucial time in her life, because she's the last child of a woman who was older when she had children. So her mother must have been in her 40s when she gave birth. And then she lost her husband who was older. And then she had cardiac problems and early onset dementia. So before this young lady is 30, she loses her mother to dementia and an accident in a care facility. And we're present because of the way it all unfolded. And so she sort of adopted us as her parents. Well, the reason this is relevant is because she is working in Washington DC, for an agency that credentials higher education does all sorts of special funding and things in higher education actually gave Dr. Fauci an award in December of 2019, she is the administrative assistant on a call with folks from the colleges discussing what it means for COVID to come to the United States and that it is probably here in December of 2019. So if my daughter, my adoptive daughter is an administrative assistant on a call, and she knows the threat of COVID by January of 2020, you want to tell me that the President of the United States didn't know she was already buying masks and occasionally wearing them at work and distancing. And people were laughing at her so that's why I'm like really politically upset about this, because it didn't have to go like this. But he wasn't concerned about the pandemic he was concerned about his followers and the kind of agendas that he wanted to put forward and we all suffer for it.

Kit Heintzman 33:16

Do you remember when you first heard about COVID-19?

Duncan Teague 33:19

When when the virus was making its way around the world because I listened to NPR and and there was an it had something had taken off in China. And because of our global tra travel, China couldn't have shut down soon enough. And it was it was making its way around the world. And I just remember the Italian outbreak and how difficult it was and the Italian culture is not one of distancing. And so their their very culture was putting them at risk. And then they just had to shut down completely. And and I thought there's we're sitting here watching this disease come to us while this idiot is talking about the China pox. Yeah, so I don't you said "when" I think that puts us in the late summer of 2019. I think that's when when it started to bubble up.

Kit Heintzman 34:59

What were some of your early impressions?

Duncan Teague 35:04

Um, then I was hoping somehow, it can be stopped before it reached the US which is just my own, you know, sort of, like it's almost adolescent suspension of disbelief or like, like you want to magical thinking, you know, like a virus gives a damn about borders. And we've and Yeah. And I'm an extreme extrovert. So I never imagined the idea of shutting people off from their social connections, older people from there. And we know so much more now about the consequences of that. That after a certain point in your age, you got to maintain social stuff for your survival, not just because it's nice. But, but for your mental and your physical health. You've got to be engaged with people. And we just got to do a lot better. Yeah. I remember being afraid. And in particular, for older people, and very and, and I knew the anti Vax stuff was going to, like, run rampant. Because it already. Like we have, I'm sorry, I'm not very understanding about people who don't want their children vaccinated. Just because you've had the privilege of living with the benefits of vaccines. And so you haven't seen, you know, scores of children, or your own loss of children and pregnancies from childhood diseases. And so now you that you have this privilege, you're going to turn around and say we don't want it because it works. It's such a sign of our piss poor educational system that people could be so twisted in their thinking and by such Idiocracy. That's

just this should be eighth grade biology. But what eighth grade classes have biology? We don't know. Yeah. Um, really feeling.

Kit Heintzman 38:25

You've mentioned setting boundaries with friends and family members who were opposed to the vaccine. What were those, what were those conversations like, how did you go about doing that?

Duncan Teague 38:37

Um, I started out with the phrase because I am a minister and I do love them. And so I said, I love you. But and it was after Joey's death. And I said, and I can't hear any of this and sometimes I would say my husband's an epidemiologist, but I knew they had dismissed that. Anyway. I just I just let them know that you know, I really cannot hear it. I don't want to hear it. I'm not in the same place with you. I love you. And and I hope you understand. Oh, and by the way, one of them got COVID and was unable to attend his mother's funeral, thank God it was later in the epidemic and and, and he's pretty big. Oh, but he decided to take the damn horse medicine and almost killed him. I'm not mentioning a name there because I don't want to embarrass my family. But this is crazy and and my side of the family, we were like, really? We just couldn't believe, you know, yeah. And I think that I was angered by that also, because I believe that the time that person's spiritual leader was promoting that crap. Yeah.

Kit Heintzman 40:31

What are some of the roles you see of spiritual leaders in a public health crisis?

Duncan Teague 40:37

Get informed. And don't use a cell phone and then try to take us to the Bronze Age about pandemics. If you've got an iPhone 45, or whatever the hell it is right now, that where you can do more on your phone than NASA could do in 1960 something. Why wouldn't you then all of a sudden, when it comes to a pandemic, or an epidemic or backwards in your mind, and you have a responsibility as a leader of any type where people will listen to you. At least to like some of the old ministers who would just say, you know, that's not my area. I'm here about spirituality. That's the safer out then giving people miss the information. Um, yeah. And, and also for me, because I usually don't give my age, so I'm not because you can figure it out. We went through the same thing with HIV. Remember how people treated Ryan White? And how, because Ryan had AIDS because he was hemophiliac, they didn't want him in the school. Not in the building. And we knew how you contracted HIV back then. The same heartlessness the same, let's rule everything by fear. It's insane. Just insane, and the same ignorance by spiritual leaders

Kit Heintzman 43:03

What are some of the other similarities you've noticed between witnessing the HIV pandemic from it sort of beginning to this one?

Duncan Teague 43:19

Um, a lack of understanding about well, and initially, it was our ignorance about how is this contracted? But I knew it was airborne. Because it was it was spreading too fast. And it did take intimate contact to get it. And so that means it's got to be spreading through the air or some. And I'm remembering that idiot again saying oh, you know, light kills it. And so in the summer, it's gonna go down. Yeah, sure. Thank you so much. Um so ignorance

around how viruses are spread. And, and, and we, and we ignored even some of the like, plain Oh, epidemiology that was occurring, the flu went down to nothing. Because we were all wearing masks, we were all socially distancing, which maybe we should have been doing every flu season. Like when we would look at people in Hong Kong or I think it's Hong Kong, and in some of the East Asian countries who would wear masks, and we'd look at them like poor souls. We don't have to do that here. Yeah, cuz we just spread stuff. Similarities, the reaction was way too similar. And but one of the knots of similar things was the willingness on behalf of the scientific community to get off their behinds and work very quickly to come up with solutions. Because I know for a fact that initially, it was killing gay men, and they didn't care. So at least we got that far along. Now. Yeah.

Kit Heintzman 45:45

Pre pandemic, what was your day to day life looking like?

Duncan Teague 45:49

Oh, my goodness. It was prior to my taking my job with Emory. And I was every, I mean, you know, I'm a minister. And so, and I'm a minister, who does not live in the exact community that we've located the church. And the option of possibly doing that was sorta on the table for a little bit. But I like the idea that I have to drive to work. And that means I can leave work. I'm somewhat, there's a part of ministry that you can never unplug from but but as much as you'd logically care for our own mental health sector, I want to say that out loud for people who don't understand that sometimes the minister needs to kick back have a glass of wine and watch a stupid movie. Like everybody else. Trust me, your minister needs it. I'm so and I'm an extrovert. Oh, one of the things that got me in the pandemic was on Sunday afternoons, after church, David and I would go to sweet Melissa's in downtown Decatur, wonderful cafe. They only did breakfast and lunch. And David and I have lived in this house now. 21/22 years. I moved in and 89 He bought the house and 80. I'm sorry. 98, or 98 is when David bought the house. I've moved in and 99. So and then a year later, the ladies across the street adopted a daughter. And that's how I know how long we've been here. Because I kept asking you how How's the baby doing? And at one point, they said, Well, you Duncan, you know the baby's 16. And I said, Oh, really. And now the baby is grown and in graduate school in DC. So that's how long we've lived here. And that's how long we've been going to Sweet Melissas. And they had it was a really good place. And it was a good place to work. And so we have had servers who have served us for 20 some years, certainly 15 years. And know us and to lose going into your favorite place. And knowing when the server that's bringing you your omelet, or in David's case is hobos rancheros with the warm salsa because they know he likes it warm. No, those aren't family members. And they're not exactly close friends, but they are important to you. As they you tell them who they are. And they tell you who you are. In that moment when you're together. And to lose that over and over again, during the pandemic when we were shut down. It was very hard. And then the owner, not I don't think it was because of COVID but COVID didn't help. He's always wanted to live in Florida and I could just choke him he sold sweet Melissa's. And I'm like, no, no, you. What do you mean? So we came out of the pandemic and we couldn't go back because it's in transition. So when we go back, it's not gonna be the same. And our servers, of course have gone on to whatever else they needed to do a Oh. And I missed them. And I started to understand that I was missing I had to go to the post office so I was loving that I got to stay in touch with some of the people who work there. But those kinds of relationships that define your everyday life going to the post office go into Sweet Melissas going to go shopping and saying hi to the lady that you know knows how to get to a sale or for the 40 times trying to get you to get a credit card they and you say no, and she says, I know you don't want it but I gotta ask.

Kit Heintzman 50:51

What did your day to day look like once locked down started?

Duncan Teague 50:54

It was hard. Um, like I said, my husband's a public health doctor. So he he got us all locked down. He only went to the grocery store early in the morning and not on senior day. What made me nervous was in. Okay, so we live less than three miles from CDC headquarters. And Emory School of Public Health is across the street there's whole lot of public health and CDC right here in this neighborhood. And so in our neighborhood we, and the, the, the way we develop relationships across the streets, and with our mask on and walking in the neighborhood, and that part was good. Because we weren't suburbanites anymore. We were small town people who had who were checking on each other. I remember watching a kid on one of our walks about 16, maybe he's No, he wasn't 17 he was 16. And he ran and got in the car. And I said, Oh my God. I cannot imagine being in that point in your life, when your whole thing is getting away from the family. Now, maybe for some of these kids, that means going in the room and getting on their high something around. But for me it was getting out of the house and getting with my friends. And not being able to do that or trying to create these bubbles of whatever. And like the mayor of Atlanta having to argue with her 17 year old about if you go then gone ahead and stay out there because you aint coming back it with it. And him, you know trying to assert his you know, young adulthood in a pandemic really felt for it. I felt so sick. Yeah. And you can't even go to school. And there's no way I'da done my graduate degree online. I needed to be looking at somebody who says their professor and listening to them and arguing with them. Yeah. And then having colleagues who are going through the same thing, commiserate in the halls or are at a place where there might serve some adult grape juice. Yeah.

Kit Heintzman 54:23

What happened was services in your congregation?

Duncan Teague 54:27

We went online and the congregation groups because we're a really liberal congregation. Unitarian Universalism is a very liberal faith or faith movement. And so it appeals to a particular kind of person, right. And all of a sudden, we weren't hidden away in buildings. Where you had to figure out where we were and how to park and what to wear. And we were, oh, just go here and click. And I don't have to get dressed to go. I mean, you got to put on clothes but and coffee hour became a ministry in and of itself is not just gossiping or whatever after church it was its own ministry, because people could relax and tell us how they're doing and what's going on. So, so our daily, our Sunday attendance went up. And, and this is what we're trying to cope with now is that they come in from Chicago, from Jackson, Mississippi, from Asheville, looking for this particular kind of African American centered worship, that is also Unitarian Universalism. And there aren't hundreds of us out there. And so they have found us on Zoom, and now we're going to re transition to being in person, but we don't want to say good bye to the people on Zoom. So we got to do hybrid. And I, I wonder, collectively how big we're going to be in person and on Zoom. I'm curious about.

Kit Heintzman 56:33

What was it like seeing the congregation grow?

Duncan Teague 56:38

Amazing. And it was like a, and for an extreme extrovert. It was medicine. Like this is safe. And it changed the way I ministered. Because there are things you can do in person that you don't translate well online. And you got

to speak to the fact that we're online, that we're not in the same room. But we are together. So the machine became part of the ministry. Which I'd never imagined. I'm, I'm I used yea imma say this, and I'm gonna get in trouble. And it's okay. I used to think that computer games were for children who had problems. And people who were who had social issues. I, I never, I never learned how to play computer games, because I thought well, I don't need that I have real friends. I've and I know that there's a whole generation who thinks oh, he's really crazy, but an I maybe. But that's, that's how I looked at that, that it was a substitute for real socialization. And so I'd never even learned how to play computer games. So when I had to become a zoom minister, it was a lot. It was a lot for our movement. And there were some who didn't make it. But this is when also my other life. And, and you never know when you're what you did. And another point in your life is going to come back and you need it. And I mean washing windows at a damn shoe store. You never know when it's going to be necessary. My undergraduate degree was in theater. Well, some part of church is theater, whether we admit it or not. But when you go on camera, and you don't have the in person interaction, which is part of black faith is the call and response and you can't rely on it you can't look over and make sure nobody's asleep or whatever. You You got to work the camera in a different way and trust the camera and preach important point not to sister so and so who you rely on every Sunday to be with you. But to this thing. So so my my theatrical training and on camera training was helpful. crucial. I think.

Kit Heintzman 59:44

I wanted to check about time do I remember that you need to be out by noon?

Duncan Teague 59:51

Yes. What time is it? It's 11:30. Wow. Okay, so yeah, okay. And I knew I had a big mouth so.

Kit Heintzman 1:00:01

You had wanted me to make sure that we talked about some of the research that you were doing?

Duncan Teague 1:00:06

Oh my god, yes. Okay, so, and this is through the congregation because it was with Dr. Bill Evans, who I now work for, but they were doing some HIV and AIDS work through a mini grant that nurse Dan Geller, doctor nurse, Dan Geller, he's a nurse with a doctorate. I don't know how you say that. I love Dan. He's crazy. But he got a mini grant with Dr. Blevins to talk to black gay men, about HIV and HIV prevention and faith community stuff today. Now, way back when, but today, in the 20, late 2018 19 We're gonna have groups of men get together and have focus groups. We're going to interview them, and, and use the power of the in person focus group to work this stuff, right. And I'm like, I'm supporting it from outside and inside, like, I want to see this happen. I want to see the groups that guys get together. And then we had to revamp the entire study. And I applaud Awa Kony and Dr. Mimic Heiser, who over two weeks took that you know, studies and how thick they can be and protocol and rewrote the protocol for zoom in two weeks, and came back and said, Let's try this. And I believe I'm like, Hey, nobody gonna sit on Zoom. Because the focus group was gonna be like, half a day long. And in person with snacks, and instead, I'm sure you can do that. But I thought nobody's gonna sit on Zoom for three or four hours looking at the little that I called Dead Hollywood Squares. They just not gonna do it. Well, they did. The guys still valued the word value, their input, valued what they were doing. And there was one group that started at like, 9:30 on a Saturday morning and went almost to four. And the guys hung in there the whole time. They were active. They were Yeah. And I think we got two groups like that. But the pandemic also changed us. And that over time, because that was early on, in the pandemic, after we had cleaned out the garage, remember that? When we were

going to clean out everything, we were going to do these things, because in two months, this is gonna be over. And it wasn't, and you started putting stuff back in the garage No. Or I did to my husband's dismay. And it also affected how long people were willing to be on Zoom. Because initially with nothing to do you stuck at home, you might as well you know, engage with some folks on Zoom In a study that wasn't a problem. I think it was I think we conducted like three groups like that. And then as the world started to open up again, just before Omracron, the guys were they couldn't hang and they weren't interested in doing it. So it it caused the change. In the end, we weren't ready to have focus groups yet. Not in person. So it really it really twisted our work. And, and I never I didn't feel bad about anybody except the guy who was obviously not paying attention to the study and was just doing it for the insentive and at one point he was upside down in his computer, and I was like really, and you know and sort of as a minister, I wanted to say, you know, you could leave. But of course, the other people at the study would have to have agreed and we didn't have a protocol for that. So I had to keep my mouth shut. But but that really annoyed me that part because it was disrespecting us and the other people participating. But aside from him, I really admired how the community responded and admired how the team you know, took a step back and regrouped.

Kit Heintzman 1:05:43

Would you say something about the importance of continuing to work on other diseases like HIV, while this pandemic has been happening?

Duncan Teague 1:05:54

Um, we got so much further ahead. On COVID, and on any infection now, because of the research that was done on HIV. Had it not been for HIV COVID would still be running rampant, or some part of it would. Because we know more about the immune system now than we ever did before. And more about how viruses specifically attack the immune system and what what responses work what don't across the board, and, and COVID came out of the SARS thing, I think, I think it is part of SARS, the SARS viruses, whatever. And and so we we do have to work on other pandemics other things, not just for the virology of it, but also for our knowledge about people and what works about getting messages to people. And when you ask people to change their lives, what are you asking? And and I'm not, I'm not one who puts the economy before people, but also the economic cost. And that may be some of the blanket things that were done. We needed to have mitigated like, like if you're already living two miles from everybody. Maybe you don't need to shut down in the same way that New York City had to maybe maybe there was other kinds of precautions that we could have given to the rural and xx xx Serbs, that would have been different than those of us who live in very close proximity to each other. And like it, I want to say that we don't want to live seven miles from every I don't no, I just adore the penthouse view. Darling I love you, but give me Park Avenue anyway. That's from Green Acres for all of you millennials and under. Yeah. Yeah, I think and we want to, and we want to get to a point where we have eradicated a lot of diseases that are still killing people, and so we have to work on them. And heaven forbid that we spread them or bring polio back. Really? No, that isn't necessary, that isn't necessary. And if I were to be so bold, some part of that is sinful. And I know that's not in agreement with some of you years, but I'm gonna say.

Kit Heintzman 1:09:09

Other than the pandemic, what has been some of the social and political issues on your mind and heart over the last couple of years?

Duncan Teague 1:09:17

Oh, that we got twisted up and allowed the Senate to play games with Obama and not allow him to appoint a Supreme Court justice. And then and the very reasons that gave for that they switched him around, of course, when it was their turn to do it. And they stack the court and the first thing they did was take away a woman's right to choose as a federally protected thing. And they're gonna pay for it they are going to pay for it. Because 90% of the people in the Senate haven't had an abortion. And they also don't know who had an abortion in their families. Because it's taken care of without telling him because he's a conservative political, whatever. Or a liberal, political whatever. Yeah, so. So this turning the clock back on women, and health, with all that we know, is ridiculous. And there will be political consequences to it. And then, the hypocrisy of Clarence Thomas saying anything about a right to privacy while he's married to a woman who is white and engaged in anti democratic behavior. The whole scenario sounds like something out of a comic book. It doesn't sound like reality. Like wake up buddy. Also the environmental stuff. Because when we stopped going to work the planet took a breath. And we heard some sounds and we saw some things happen. That we haven't seen. Because we weren't on the streets. And some animals started encroaching in their former territory. Because we were, we were at home. There were there were from what I understand there were some animals roaming New York City and the poor rats and to find over what they could find. Because the restaurants are closed Yeah. The environment became big for me. I think it was also watching so it's somewhat related to the pandemic but in a different way. Watching the virus circled the globe so quickly told me that we're a global community whether we want to be or not, whether we've come up with a logical and loving ways of being that yet or not, and like Putin taking advantage of all this to to have an essentially 18th century if not a 15th century war. Really? You because you want to take some territory back for what? What is the Ukraine as part of Russia gonna do for anybody? And the lives being lost and the environmental impact of him playing war around a nuclear plant? This is insane. It's just insanity. And unnecessary. This is serving one little man's ego it's just bizarre, and it's affecting the entire world. Because we are all connected.

Kit Heintzman 1:14:05

Curious, what does the word health mean to you?

Duncan Teague 1:14:08

Oh my God. Every everything everything. I'm a cancer survivor. I am a prostate cancer survivor. So had I not had a fairly assertive doctor who was gay and who could talk to me almost any kind of way with his corrupt self, um, but we had a friendship and we were connected and he was my husband's doctor. And so when he looked at my PSA, and it was climbing um, he could talk about my health in a way that somebody else might not have. And he did present me with options but he knew me and we were in it together and then my husband joined in and so I am sitting here on this interview because I prioritized my health no I'm not a 16 year old sexually but I guess I wasn't gonna be anyway I guess at this point and um and it has cost me something emotionally but I am here to do the work that I want to do and I'm here to help with somebody else's health and here to care for people whose health isn't so good. yeah. it's everything you know and and we're playing with our help by how we're treating the little blue marble we live on we can only dump so much trash in the ocean before it's a it's already affecting us, yeah.

Kit Heintzman 1:16:39

What does the word safety mean to you?

Duncan Teague 1:16:42

Oh my. So it weren't as much privilege as I have because I live in a fairly nice house my husband's retired I work because I want to at this point because I would like to do something important so I have the privilege of saying that safety for me is important and but I wish it were I wish those two words health and safety were prioritized in a way that we would realize globally that maybe everybody needs it and then we could improve the lives of everybody not just the few at the economic top by improving the lives of the safety and the health of everyone and it's in those words are also spiritual. Because if I don't care about your health or your safety if I really think it's alright to pump the country full of a ak 47 then I don't care about the spirit of what's going on and happiness is not at the end of that road. It cannot be. Yeah.

Kit Heintzman 1:18:40

How are you feeling about the immediate future?

Duncan Teague 1:18:45

The immediate future I'm a little scared about but the far off future I'm worried about. We you know, we're pretty smart. We're too smart. So we figure out ways to mitigate things in the media but and, and we buy junk that breaks down in three years. And the folks who had sticks and stones built stuff that it's still standing huh. So smartness must not be all that we crank it out to be. And we're finding out now that they worship that they had respect for the deceased, that they looked up in the skies and certain that's important. Same way we do. Yeah, so I think can we think about the 300 year plan, yeah.

Kit Heintzman 1:20:12

What are some of your hopes for a longer term future?

Duncan Teague 1:20:16

Woah. That my niece's great whatever would hear about this crazy uncle and being proud of me that they'll look back on our especially chemotherapy and go What the hell were they doing? Didn't didn't they know that all you have to do us blah, blah, blah. And that they that they also like we're talking hundreds of years in the future, which my husband has doubts about. But about us being here, not the planet. Hopefully the computers won't go where they did themselves in and, and you know, that's the way it went. But if we, if we make it, I hope they they go, Well, it was so hard on that group that cleaned up the planet. But we're so grateful. And that's going to have to be our grandkids because we're not doing it. Yeah, and unlike, unlike Elon Musk, and some other idiots, I have no desire to pollute Mars or, or the moon with our crap. I really don't. I mean, okay, can we talk about population? We were fruitful and multiplied. We've done that. We can stop now. We really can. Yeah. And there are other ways of passing on our heritage and our importance and are and what we value other than having all these people for whom we don't feed and care about and make safe and make healthy. Yeah.

Kit Heintzman 1:22:44

I'd like you to imagine speaking to a historian in the future, someone far enough away, that they have no lived experience of this moment. Go forward with their research and track their casual research interest in COVID-19.

Duncan Teague 1:23:00

Yeah.

Kit Heintzman 1:23:01

What would you tell them cannot be forgotten about this moment?

Duncan Teague 1:23:06

That there were those of us who were working hard and loving the people around us in ways that we hadn't been, because we didn't know them. And COVID put us in our houses. And we got to know the kids on the block because they were running up and down the block to see each other. And also that we weren't fooled by everything that that was idiotic and stupid. There were a whole lot of people who who were not lost in the misinformation and the the craziness that happened. And forgive us for for, for not figuring out some of the things that you all take for granted, whoever you are way out there and, oh, and that we had a medical community that put their lives on the line to save all of us. And many of whom went to work not knowing if they were going to get infected, and some did and some died. And they were not well compensated they were not treated with with the respect they deserved. And we owe them a debt of gratitude and compensation. and everything and we we really need to have revamped our whole medical nightmare especially given what we've learned now to more equitably and more fairly, treat those people who are taking care of us, all of them from, from the person who sweeps the floors, to the surgeons who come in, you know, once a month to make their million dollars we need we need to do better. And I'm sorry we we didn't I'm sorry, we didn't figure it out. But not all of us were fooled. And not all of us were fooled by the insurance industry which I hope is gone in your time because they have made they have ruled the world.

Kit Heintzman 1:26:10

I wanna thank you so much for the generosity of your time and kind beauty of your answers. Those are all of the questions I know how to ask at this moment. So right now I just want to open some space. If there's anything you'd like to share that my questions haven't made room for. Please share it.

Duncan Teague 1:26:37

That COVID initially struck us in a societal way, that was so painful, because the very things we use to cope with in life were taken from us and as a minister trying to be helpful be loving and concerned around that was so hard. Because I'm I'm in it with everybody else. And I'm thinking about my aunt, who died at 96 long full life three husbands. She said after she lost the last one she was marrying for money finally, but um, [inaudible]. And just before COVID She had to go and stay with her children, not she lived in Kansas City where I was grew up, and she had to, she had to go to Arizona and then California to stay with their children and they know before they died, and it 96 You die not of COVID but that there wasn't a funeral over 200 of us there. And four attempts to make her peach cobbler and they would have been attempts because she took the recipe with her, damn her. No, I love you aunt Opal Faye but you took the recipe with you. And I'm looking for it by the way not peach pie peach cobbler. With the dumplings on the inside the sweet dumplings. It's it's religious, um, that we weren't able to gather as a family to say goodbye to the last sibling, my parents my mother had and celebrate her 96 years and 100 would have been just her descendants for her five children from the first marriage two from the second and two from the last and all their children and then the cousins and she deserved that. And we deserve to celebrate her. And we were on Zoom watching the funeral home in California with 25 people there. And aunt Opal Faye used to cook more food on Thanksgiving for more people than that that's what COVID did to us. And I I don't have words for. Next to my mom and my first cousin who was there when my parents married and has always been there. She's like a third parent, the next most important woman from my mother's side of the family, either side of the family because of proximity was aunt Opal Faye. And we couldn't attend the funeral except to watch it

on Zoom. And it wasn't the same. Not even all her children and their spouses could be there. I think somebody should know about that part of this.

Kit Heintzman 1:31:03

Thank you so much.

Duncan Teague 1:31:05

You're welcome. Thank you