

UCCH Negro Spirituals Royalties Project

This year on Juneteenth (Sunday, June 19), United Church is launching the Negro Spirituals Royalties Project, a new racial justice initiative, sponsored jointly by the Board of Justice, Outreach and Service and the Music Committee. So many songs we know and love, such as “Balm in Gilead,” “This Little Light of Mine,” “Deep River,” and “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot,” have been on our lips and in our hearts from our earliest years, and have helped shape our faith in ways we may not even be aware. The composers and poets of most of the music that we sing in worship have been acknowledged and compensated, but those creators, enslaved on plantations, that gave us the huge body of music known as Spirituals remain unnamed, unrecognized, and certainly uncompensated.

In an effort to acknowledge this omission and pay reparations, United Church of Chapel Hill is joining many other congregations around the country to collect “royalties” for the use of these spirituals. Beginning Juneteenth, any time a spiritual is sung or played during worship, our congregation will be invited to contribute to the NSRP fund. The money collected will be given to an organization that provides music education to young Black musicians. Join us on June 19 in the Festival Service to learn more, and to once again hear and sing these songs so dear to all our hearts.