**Jim Dixon: OK. What are you going to do about it?**



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**By Jim Dixon, Guest Columnist**

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Just a few short months ago, our region was shocked into the reality of racism following the death of Michael Brown just 101 miles down the road from Lincoln’s hometown in Ferguson, Missouri.

Sometime last year the comedian Chris Rock tweeted something that many found sadly true.

“Hey, I’ve found an app that can determine if your friends are racist or not. It’s called Facebook.”

“What has to be so for this to be so?” was a question I learned from professor Rachel Anderson at University of Illinois Springfield, and it serves as a guide for me in my work as vice president of Faith Coalition for the Common Good and vice president of Springfield & Central Illinois Trades and Labor Council AFL-CIO.

During the past several months, Faith Coalition has refocused its work in our community with four goals: Create structural racial equity, build people’s control of government, build community control of the economy and expand the public sphere.

As one part of that effort, Faith Coalition was to able get passage of the Springfield High Speed Rail Oversight Act. The intent of this law is to appoint community members to an oversight commission, allowing those most affected by the rail project to participate in the decision-making process.

Up to this point, the same old politicians, private businesses and government staff have controlled the decision-making process through the Rail Steering Committee’s bi-monthly meetings, which are not open to the public.

A group of our members attended the Gamaliel Race & Power Summit at the United Auto Workers Training Center in Detroit a short time ago. We have met with the Human, Civil and Women’s Rights Department of the AFL-CIO in Washington. Our national organization Gamaliel is participating with the American Federation of Teachers at the upcoming conference: “Advancing Racial Justice in 2015: How Community and Labor Can Organize Together.”

A core team of Faith Coalition for the Common Good members from our communities is in training to lead Sacred Conversations on Race (+Action) in small group settings in congregations in Springfield. Sacred Conversations have been led by our sister organization Metropolitan Churches United with more than 40 congregations across the St Louis area in the past year following Ferguson. These conversations have moved people in white and minority areas to make positive changes, and we are hopeful for the same results here.

Citizens of Springfield who are ready to answer the question, “What are you going to do about it?” are invited to join with people from neighborhoods across Springfield at Faith Coalition’s Race & Power Summit on Saturday, Sept. 26, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. as we preview the Gamaliel training on Race & Power. You will also hear short reports from our Rail/Jobs, City Services/Civic Engagement and Immigration task forces about successes and goals for the coming year.

We ask you to confirm your attendance or get more information by calling 544-2297.

On Oct. 17, we are hosting our “Race & Unity” banquet where you will have the opportunity to hear Dr. Jacqueline Battalora, a lawyer and professor of sociology and criminal justices at Saint Xavier University and a former Chicago Police officer who has been engaged in anti-racist training since the mid 1990s. She is author of the acclaimed book “Birth of a White Nation.”

We encourage you to join with us to make Springfield a place where there is justice for all of us and not just some of us.

Faith Coalition for the Common Good is an organization whose purpose is to unite congregations with other faith-based and community organizations to identify common issues of concern. The mission of Springfield and Central Illinois Trades and Labor Council is to organize in the community to promote social justice for all working people.

*— Jim Dixon is vice president of the Faith Coalition for the Common Good’s board of directors. For more information:* [*faithcoalition-il.org;*](http://faithcoalition-il.org;) *544-2297.*