VIGIL FOR RESTORATIVE JUSTICE
July 16, 2013

Good evening friends. My name is Reverend Matilda Cantwell. I am a SSW alum and associate; and am honored to be with you as facilitator and partner in this vigil. We are calling this event a Vigil for Restorative Justice as we continue to move through a myriad of common and divergent feelings with respect to the verdict in the trial of George Zimmerman, who killed Trayvon Martin, an unarmed black teenager who was walking home after a trip to a convenience store for Skittles and iced tea.

We are calling forth restorative justice for we are naming this as a time to begin to build hope among ourselves as a community. Let us call upon the place within us that cares more for justice than revenge, more for equity than punishment. Above all we call for true justice—moral righteousness, integrity, and reparation. We cannot bring back Trayvon Martin, but we are called—required to begin to replenish a deep well of human integrity, dignity, and love, drop by drop.

We may be feeling many things—outrage, bereft, rueful, helpless, we may also be feeling confused, bewildered, in a blur, agitated by the winds that are blowing around us, yet not quite sure how we really do feel, what we really do think, at our core.

Whatever the discomfort, need for hope, desire to share hope, that brought you here this evening, thank you for being here; and we invite you to bring all of it, and all of yourself, here into this circle. There is no wrong way to feel.

We claim this night as a time for restoration. We feel our feet on the ground where we are, and lean ourselves towards the cool breeze of possibility.

All the spiritual and religious traditions, in different ways, teach us the same two things about how we feel in the face of overwhelming feeling:

First—that it is experienced and felt, and that it is not to be judged.

And second—that it possesses within it, even if buried in unspeakably deep caverns, the tools for its own transformation. Your sorrow has in it the fruit of possibility. Your rage contains the fuel for hope.

So I invite us now into a time where we begin to plant, water and tend to the seeds of our feelings, in service of transformation and restoration. Let us act in a radically different way than the criminal justice system as manifested in the Trayvon Martin case—let us allow our gaze to move away, if only for a moment, from fear and retribution toward justice and change.

As social workers, each of you is specially located in this time, and in so many times of upheaval and despair. For each of you in different ways, the tragic death of Trayvon Martin is your time; to feel what you feel without judgment; to acknowledge the unspeakable pain being felt by those
intimately involved; and then, in time, to begin to act to bend the moral arc of the part of the universe you inhabit toward justice.

Bring us to where the mind is without fear, and the head is held high; Where knowledge is free; Where the world has not been broken up into fragments by narrow domestic walls; Where words come out from the truth; Where tireless striving stretches its arms toward perfection; Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way into the dreary desert sand of dead habit; Where the mind is led forward by You into ever-widening thought and action—Into that haven of freedom, O God, let us awake.

-Rabindranath Tagore