

# Annual Report

from the  
**Anti-Racism Leadership Team**  
to the **Board of Trustees and the Executive Team**  
of **Unity Church-Unitarian**

CHURCH YEAR 2007-2008

## *Part One: The Anti-Racism Leadership Team (ARLT) activities*

During the past church year, the ARLT continued doing one-to-one conversations with Unity stakeholders. Training on this approach to “relational organizing” was provided by Dennis Donovan from the Humphrey Institute in 2007. The purpose of the one-to-one conversations was simply to begin to build relationships. Team members, past and present, met with more than 30 members of the congregation during the church year. This was a challenging activity for the introverted members of the Team. Including past team members was a plus.

It became clear that many Unity congregants had a desire for a more in-depth conversation about race and racial healing. The Team organized a dinner and guided conversation, which was held in April with over 40 attendees. The evening provided an opportunity to deepen the discussion of anti-racism at Unity. Participants valued the experience and several suggested that it be repeated.

The ARLT has continued its quarterly liaison meetings with the Board of Trustees as a way to build relationships and align the work of the two groups. The quarterly liaison meetings have opened up lines of communication in positive ways.

Early in the year, the ARLT sent a request to the worship associates asking that it be made clear when a reading during the service is from a person of color. We did not receive an official reply from the group, but were told informally that the request prompted a lengthy and earnest debate. The group determined that they did not want to do this during the service, but would make materials about sources available in the Parish Hall. The lack of an official reply leaves the commitment to action undocumented. In fact, the proposed action did not happen, probably because it was overly ambitious and there was no identified responsible party.

We continued to set aside a regular time during our meetings to caucus by racial identity. We spend this time reflecting on and discussing the ways in which systemic racism has socialized us to operate out of internalized racial rules. The hope is that, by establishing this practice, we will become more aware of these ingrained cultural tendencies. Lack of nonwhite team members limits the effectiveness of this practice, in particular as it supports the work of creating an environment and culture that reflects full participation and shared power with diverse racial, cultural and economic groups in institutional life. The lack of nonwhite members on the team is a concern and an issue the team needs to address.

We organized an MCARI one-day anti-racism training in April. Approximately a dozen people attended. Several participants gave very positive feedback on the value of the experience to their learning about the issue and how it applies to Unity Church. Training opportunities for congregants and lay leaders, and the funding to make them available, continues to be a challenge.

One Team member attended the Crossroads advanced organizer training in July. The report back to the ARLT and the church leadership, as appropriate, has not yet happened. We still need to develop a mechanism or process for sharing the learning of individuals pertinent to the anti-racism journey.

At the end of the church year, two members of the ARLT completed their commitment to the team, leaving the number of members at four. While additional members are needed, we believe it's time for a new model of team membership to be instituted. With the new Ends Statements containing explicit anti-racist language, and the forming of the racial justice outreach team, the environment at Unity has changed enough to more tightly integrate the ARLT into the formal governance structure of Unity Church. In August, the ARLT submitted a proposal to the Board of Trustees for a formally chartered team appointed by the Board. The details of how this would be structured are still being worked out.

It is part of our mission statement that an anti-racist perspective will be integrated into the religious education curricula in some fashion, and that the entire church community will have some understanding of the origins and functioning of systemic racism. With the children in mind, it is understood that this understanding will be in a manner appropriate to their age. The population of the Religious Education program is far more diverse, racially, than the adult congregation because of the number of interracial and internationally adoptive families. Kerri Meyer, director of Religious Education (RE), offered us her assessment of the program, some of which has been incorporated into this report. She rightly notes that this is her take on her own program through her own lens, and encouraged the members of the anti-racism team to experience the curriculum and review the materials directly.

### *Part Two: Worship, Communications, and Activities of the church.*

As we reviewed the year at Unity Church through our developing anti-racist lens, we looked for the following themes in services, projects, and communications:

1. Acknowledgement of white privilege as a reality in our world.
2. Support for the "whole self" at Unity. The term "whole self" refers to the idea that we are all wounded or imperfect. Our hope is that our church community will become one in which people know that they are welcome here as they are, with their woundedness, their anger, and their failures as well as with their talents, strengths and accomplishments.
3. People of color recognized as spiritual leaders and sources of wisdom.
4. Direct references to anti-racism work, and anti-racist action.
5. Unity's involvement in the community outside of its walls.

#### **Acknowledgement of white privilege as a reality in our world:**

Participants on the New Orleans trip received training on race, gender and class facilitated by the People's Institute for Survival and Beyond, including how race and class played into the Katrina disaster recovery process. The anti-racist analysis was similar to that taught by MCARI. Unity

pilgrims to New Orleans were given a packet of readings focusing on issues of race and class as well as daily reflections on the topic throughout the pilgrimage.

The still-forming racial justice outreach team viewed and discussed a white privilege filmstrip. The Green Sanctuary and Affordable Housing outreach teams had conversations and presentations about race and class surrounding the Central Corridor Light Rail. The St. Paul Council of Churches training for Project Home included a discussion of race and cultural differences.

The “Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner” event, organized by the ARLT with the help of Jacqueline Duhart, was an opportunity to engage in conversation on the topic of race, prompted by the following questions:

What emotions block you from talking about race?

What race are you and who decided?

What would an anti-racist/anti-oppressive Unity Church look like?

What would you gain if Unity Church became a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic congregation?

What would you lose?

The Tower Club has discussed the idea of white privilege as part of its exploration of topics such as homelessness and Gulf Coast reconstruction. The Junior High class, "What Do You Stand For?" has a one-session exploration of diversity issues, including an activity that alludes to white privilege.

### **Support for the “whole self” at Unity:**

The Words of Welcome at the beginning of every Sunday service now include words especially welcoming those who have been excluded due to race or gender identity or sexual orientation, and a statement that people’s “gifts and wounds are welcome here.”

The Litany of Atonement, part of a service in the fall that coincides with Rosh Hashanah and the Ten Days of Repentance of the Jewish faith, gives us the opportunity to practice forgiveness — of another or others and of ourselves — and commit to begin again in love.

In the RE program, the Joys and Sorrows ritual encourages children to share their anger and sadness, knowing that they are fully accepted and embraced. In Tower Club, youth feel comfortable sharing their anger and sadness with their fellow Unity youth and their experiences have sometimes touched on issues connected to race (for adopted teens, for teens who went to New Orleans on a work trip, for teens who attend very diverse high schools).

### **People of color recognized as spiritual leaders and sources of wisdom:**

On eight Sundays of this past year, the preacher in our pulpit was a person of color, primarily Jacqueline Duhart, the community ministerial intern. Jacqueline, an African-American, divided her time between working with Amicus and Unity Church. Her columns in *CommUnity* and the services she led offered a welcome perspective and point of view.

Rev. Rosemary Bray McNatt, an editor, writer and senior minister of a Unitarian-Universalist church in Manhattan, was the annual canvass Sunday speaker. Bray, an African-American, is a

founder of the UU Trauma Response Ministry, created to provide culturally sensitive liberal religious responses to mass disaster and other significant trauma.

Vivek Pandit is an anti-slavery organizer and educator. He has founded an organization dedicated to fostering positive, systemic social change in India. Rob and Janne Eller-Isaacs met him while on their sabbatical last year and invited him to Minnesota. During his visit, he participated in two forums about his work, a theological conversation, and one Sunday's services.

The RE program uses sacred stories and teaching tales from across the world's traditions. Among the nonwhite sources of wisdom referenced in the *CommUnity* or used in Sunday services were the following: the African concept of "ubuntu," i.e. a person is a person through other people; W.E.B. DuBois; Mahatma Gandhi; the blues tradition in music; Howard Thurman; Amartya Sen and his questions about identity-based politics as "miniaturization" of people; Ayaan Hirsi Ali, a Somali author; Barbara Jordan; the music of Oscar Peterson; Rabindranath Tagore; James Baldwin, a Zimbabwe proverb; the principles of Kwanzaa; and Gordon Parks. Two women of color were held up: Frances Ellen Watkins Harper (1825-1911), who worked for women's suffrage and racial justice; and Dr. Yvonne Seon (1937- ), the first African-American woman to enter UU parish ministry, who started a new intentionally diverse congregation.

#### **Direct references to anti-racism work, and anti-racist action:**

At least one sermon each month, sometimes two, held up antiracism work as an important part of our lives and our religion's work. October and November each held three such sermons. These autumn sermons presented, in some detail, a theological grounding for antiracism work. They were sermons of spiritual and psychological depth inviting us and our church to grow.

The formation of the Racial Justice Ministry team, the New Orleans pilgrimage/work trip, and Project Home were all opportunities for congregants to participate in activities that could further anti-racism.

In conjunction with the "Shades of Praise" visit, a forum on racism was held featuring Michael Cowan facilitating a dialogue on the different positions people take on race and how to find a common ground for working together. There was a good turnout and lively discussion.

The UUA's and Unity's commitment to anti-racist work is explored in a six-week unit, taught every three years to children in grades 1-6. This in-depth unit on racism will be taught this fall, beginning November 2.

#### **Unity's involvement in the community outside of its walls:**

There were many more examples of this over the past year. Every month, the *CommUnity* newsletter lists the organizations that will receive each Sunday's donations. It is evident that many of these organizations serve people of color or people of less than middle-class resources. Recipient organizations need to have some connection to or involvement by Unity Church members, and each week that connection is identified in This Week at Unity, the Sunday order of service insert. *CommUnity* also includes reports from the various Community Outreach Teams. These items present Unity, to itself and other readers, as an institution that sees itself as responsible to groups in the larger community and that works to connect outside its own walls.

The visit by the “Shades of Praise” interracial New Orleans choir, and the joint activities organized in partnership with neighborhood churches, was a high-energy experience that required a lot of organization and coordination. It created an opening to develop relationships with people we don’t know, but the follow-up to build on that opening is still unclear.

One outgrowth of the “Shades of Praise” events was the participation of Unity Church members, with members from area churches, in this year’s Rondo Days Parade, singing on the Faith Float under the direction of Rev. Carl Walker.

Unity has a representative on the neighborhood District Planning Council. Outreach teams and other church members became involved with trying to get more stops in the plans for the Central Corridor Light Rail line in order to serve city neighborhood residents better. An art exhibit from the Center for Victims of Torture included stories from the Center’s clients that brought their experience closer to home.

Children learn about Unity's work outside our walls through worship, Chapel, and Wellspring Wednesdays. Martin Luther King Jr. weekend is always a Story Sunday and explores the history of civil rights and UU involvement. This worship usually focuses on Unity's work outside its walls. Kerri Meyer notes that “only through intergenerational involvement in the existing outreach teams can our children connect meaningfully with the outside world. This is an area that's ready for focused effort and new innovation.”

### *Part Three: Governance — the Executive Team and Board of Trustees*

#### **Board of Trustees**

This year, the Board recruitment language included the phrase “committed to becoming an actively anti-racist institution.” The Board updated the requirements for trustees to include anti-racism training, and plans to include anti-racism training as part of Board members’ orientation.

In the spring of 2008, the Board organized an appreciative inquiry process leading to the revision of the Ends Statements. Team members participated as individuals in the “Lift Every Voice” sessions and the ARLT was interviewed as a group by a Board member. In addition, Team members met with the Board committee that was drafting language for the new Ends Statements, offered suggestions for including explicit anti-racist language, and provided feedback, from an anti-racist perspective, as the language was developed.

The resulting new Ends Statements include a reference to racial healing in each of the three categories:

Within: “lifelong opportunities for racial healing.”

Among: “connect across racial identities, shared ministries.”

Beyond: “commitment to antiracism and racial healing, in covenant with people and communities of color, advocate publicly for liberal religious values in response to injustice.”

#### **Executive Team (ET) reports to the Board**

The Executive Team reported to the Board every month on what they perceived as actions and plans at Unity that were in line with a transformation of Unity into an anti-racist institution. Among those items were the following:

- Rob and Janne continue to participate in an ongoing anti-racism covenant group of clergy
- Unity served as fiscal agent for the “Shades of Praise” visit, organized by a Unity member. Unity members were heavily involved in supporting the event. Unity partnered with other churches — two of them predominantly churches of color — to support this event.
- Webster school interfaith mentoring/tutoring effort has several volunteers from Unity.
- An anti-racism drop-in covenant group was held on four Wellspring Wednesdays
- Planning is in the works for exterior signage
- An Interfaith Coalition for Racial Justice is being developed by a Unity member (Laura Park) under a St. Paul Foundation grant
- UUA Diversity in Ministry opportunity “to be explored”
- Initiative for interracial music relationships is being explored
- The vision of Unity 2 - another campus in the Frogtown area - is being explored

## **Recommendations / developing a feedback loop**

### *Readings*

For the typical congregant, there is no way to know whether a wisdom source used is from a person of color or a white person unless the reader gives some context. Our suggestion to the worship team, asking that this context be given during the service, was not adopted. The unofficial response was that information about the sources would be made available in the Parish Hall. This didn’t happen, but there was no follow up on why. This is an opportunity that our church is missing. The issue should either be consciously addressed and strategies developed, or it should be consciously dropped.

Also, we have no record of the readings used as part of this past year’s services. They are no longer available on the website and we did not keep these records during the year. With the readings not on the website, no one sees them anymore.

### *Executive Team (ET) Reports:*

When an item appears in the ET report to the Board as an intention or something that will be done, it should reappear each month until it is either done, or a decision made to drop or alter it. Otherwise, things are misleading.

Example: an early ET report stated that a white privilege workshop was being developed to test here. This was never mentioned again in any of the reports during the rest of the year. When we asked about it in July 2008, we were told that the Racial Justice team had started out the year discussing white privilege, then got into working on the “Shades of Praise” event instead. This next year they will again renew the process of becoming an outreach ministry that will include an education dimension which “may refocus on white privilege—but I can’t say that with any certainty.”

Meanwhile, the board has been left with the impression that it has occurred when, in fact, it hasn’t and may not (and when history reads the ET reports, history will think so too).

### *Wellspring Wednesdays (WW):*

As the ARLT moved away from programmatic work, it relied more on staff to provide opportunities for congregants to expand their awareness of racism and white privilege, and learn about ways to make a difference. The Team offered suggestions of WW programming to staff, but didn’t hear back on the status of these ideas. Generally, there seemed to be little intentionality this past year with regard to programming that would lead or support Unity’s

transformational journey into an anti-racist institution. It's not clear how decisions were made about WW programming or how to provide input into the process.

Questions posed by the ARLT at a May 2008 meeting with the ET:

- What is being done to create a more inclusive, welcoming environment at Unity Church for people of color?
- How can we improve communication to the ARLT and to the congregation, as appropriate, about activities that relate to becoming an actively anti-racist institution that is accountable to communities of color?
- What are the mechanisms for assuring that Board and staff experience an anti-racism training? What institutional entity will have what parts of that responsibility?
- How do we raise the visibility of Unity's anti-racism journey and intention, i.e. mission, vision, audit, reports, etc., to the congregation and visitors? Which institutional entity would take responsibility for assuring this happens?

### **Benchmarking**

The Continuum on Becoming an Anti-Racist Multicultural Institution is one of our benchmarks of progress toward becoming an actively anti-racist institution. The Continuum has the following six stages, each with a list of indicators:

1. Exclusive A Segregated Institution	2. Passive A "Club" Institution	3. Symbolic Change A Multicultural Institution	4. Identity Change An Anti-Racist Institution	5. Structural Change A Transforming Institution	6. Fully Inclusive A Transformed Institution in a Transformed Society
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We believe Unity Church is currently working to move from Stage 3, a multicultural institution with symbolic change, to Stage 4, an anti-racist institution with an identity change. Some of the markers of stage 4 include

- develops intentional identity as an “anti-racist institution”
- develops analysis of systemic racism
- new consciousness of institutionalized white power and privilege
- growing understanding of racism as barrier to effective diversity
- increasing commitment to dismantle racism and eliminate inherent white advantage
- sponsors anti-racism training programs
- begins to develop accountability to racially oppressed communities
- anti-racism efforts inform institutional response to other social oppressions: classism, sexism, heterosexism, ageism, etc.

#### **But ...**

- Institutional structures and culture that maintain white power and privilege remain intact and relatively untouched.

The new Ends Statements, increasing efforts to be a positive presence in the larger community, and becoming a Welcoming Congregation are all positive steps. A learning edge for the institution is developing a heightened consciousness of institutionalized white power and privilege and looking at structures and culture that maintain it.