

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

February 2008

We had hoped to present this report earlier. Because of internal challenges and the need to refocus, this annual assessment by the Anti-Racism Leadership Team (ARLT) has been delayed.

This marks the sixth year since our anti-racism journey began, with the formation of an anti-racism task force in 2002. The ARLT, commissioned in 2003, has a stated mission of leading the church in developing and living out an intentionally anti-racist identity in all aspects of church life. As part of that mission, the ARLT, and the task force before it, has regularly presented reports on our progress to the Board of Trustees and the Executive Team.

We see the ARLT becoming a structure for institutional self assessment within Unity Church — it is both within and without at the same time. In psychological terms, it is to function as an “observing ego” with regard to the transformational journey of the church. This requires and ensures that the topic of Unity’s transformation into an anti-racist institution will be an ongoing conversation within church leadership.

Because we are all involved in the process of transforming our church institution, we think that ongoing assessment is important. The annual report of the ARLT to the Board of Trustees and the Executive Team is part of the institutionalization of anti-racism in the identity of the church. Our intention is for these annual reports to serve as a useful tool for our church community. We look forward to any comments or feedback on this report and any suggestions on how to improve this institutional self-assessment.

Sincerely,
The Anti-Racism Leadership Team of Unity Church
Sue Conner, Drew Danielson, Sherm Eagles, Pauline Eichten,
Wendy Harris, and Daphne Thompson,
with Jacqueline Duhart and Rob Eller-Isaacs

CHURCH YEAR 2006-2007

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

In the fall of 2006, the ARLT was asked by James Addington, of MCARI, and Art Hoekstra, from Crossroads Ministry, to participate in an evaluation/documentation process. Sixteen anti-racism teams around the country were interviewed in order to identify best practices as well as gaps in both the training and the ongoing support and development of teams. Using the criteria provided by Crossroads, the ARLT organized a full day of interviews in January 2007 — four hours with the team and an additional four hours spent interviewing 12 people. There was considerable preparation involved, but the hope was that the Team would benefit from the resulting findings.

The fall also saw a retreat with the Board of Trustees that had some challenging moments. The ARLT and the Board worked to develop a model that would support a joint working relationship. This involves quarterly meetings, rotating membership from each group, and a framework for discussion. The ARLT and the Board clarified that

- 1) it is the role of the ARLT to monitor and hold the Board accountable for the church's progress toward developing an anti-racist identity, and
- 2) it is the role of the Board to build the institutional capacity for this transformational process.

During the church year, the ARLT engaged in various activities to inform and connect with congregation members. The ARLT promoted the Science Museum's RACE Exhibit via the newsboard and the CommUnity newsletter. Members of the team were available to take others to the exhibit, and a talking circle was held at the church for people who had attended.

The ARLT prepared public newsboards displayed in the Parish Hall on four different months using educational and thought-provoking materials. Handout literature was available at the table. The ARLT also had articles published in five issues of CommUnity during the church year.

The ARLT began a project of doing one-to-one conversations with Unity stakeholders. Training on this approach to "relational organizing" was provided by Dennis Donovan from the Humphrey Institute. Team members have committed to doing one of these conversations each month with selected church members.

The ARLT had some membership changes in the 2006-2007 church year. Some team members finished their terms of service and new members were brought on. A couple of team members resigned under challenging circumstances. Unfortunately, they were the only nonwhite members of the team. The church provided outside leaders for several rounds of a "circle" process to help the team work through the issues that arose. For much of the year, the team focused on working through these internal challenges, both with its membership and its purpose.

Summary:

The internal challenges were very difficult and clearly affected the entire year. Nonetheless, the team maintained a community presence via the table, newsboard and CommUnity. In addition, the team began a major project, the one-to-one conversations, which it hopes will be a base for ongoing work in transforming the institution.

We believe that developing a working understanding with the Board as to the role of the ARLT was a good step for the church. This makes it clearer that it is the job of the church as a whole, with all of its various parts, to do the transformation work. Creating a vehicle for the ongoing working relationship of the Board and the ARLT, through quarterly meetings, is a good structural addition within the institution.

The lack of nonwhite members on the team is an ongoing concern and an issue the team needs to address.

Part Two: Worship, Communications, Activities and Governance 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,
- 3) the use of sources of wisdom or spiritual authority which are other than white,
- 4) direct references to anti-racism work, and
- 5) Unity’s involvement in the community outside of its own walls.

CommUnity

A couple of Board of Trustee columns during the year reinforced the fact that Unity is on a path toward becoming an anti-racist institution. Three of the minister’s columns spoke along the above-mentioned themes. The minister’s column of October referenced a spiritual leader and a political leader, both people of color. There were many references to our “giving away the plate” and clearly several of the recipient groups served communities of color.

The Outreach teams were often mentioned, some of which also seek to involve themselves in and support efforts in communities of color, such as Evergreen, Restorative Justice, Malawi, and Mano a Mano. The New Orleans work trip was promoted and reported on. General Assembly was mentioned in the March issue, and it was noted that there would be conversations about race and class. However, there was no report back to the congregation on any of these General Assembly activities. DRUUMM, Diverse and

* 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 will 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.

Revolutionary Multicultural Ministries, a UU people of color organization, was mentioned once. The ARLT had a column or announcement in five of the issues.

The Samuel Morgan Forum of September, which featured Norma Miller, was a rich experience of an art form and history rooted in communities of color. This forum was in response to an idea initiated by some women of color in our local community, but not of Unity Church, after the Ysaye Barnwell event. Unity staff worked very hard and extended themselves a great deal in order to bring it about.

Religious Education

We have not tracked activities or content in the RE program, primarily because it is less visible/accessible.

Wellspring Wednesday

There were varied offerings here that related to acknowledgement of white privilege, involvement in the community outside the church, and support for the whole self.

In the fall of 2006 one of the ministerial interns offered a series of classes on what it means to work for justice in a religious context.

The winter 2007 series included an intergenerational evening focusing on New Orleans, the upcoming work trip and making bracelets to use as a fundraiser for the trip. The next week there was a presentation by Julie Landsman, author of “A White Teacher Talks About Race.” The Welcoming Congregation Team sponsored a movie and conversation about becoming a welcoming congregation. One of the offerings for children was an ongoing workshop for children and their parents using the “Families All Matter Book Project,” which allows children to explore family diversity issues through reading. This workshop continued in the spring 2007 series.

The spring 2007 series had presentations on a magazine that focuses on life-changing humanitarian efforts; the new Rondo Community Library; a discussion about sex-offenders in the community; the organization MicroGrants and its micro-credit program; Rainbow Families, a Twin Cities LGBT family organization; and a discussion of the current state of Bolivia following the election of Evo Morales.

Executive Team (ET) reportage to the Board of Trustees

In eight out of the ten ET reports to the Board, there was mention of anti-racism. Items of particular interest were as follows:

1. In August: Laura Park attended a Prairie Star District meeting with anti-racism training that focused on “next steps”... how to move the AR work out into congregations.
2. In September: Unity is advertising in Penumbra Theatre’s season programs.
3. In November: Unity hosted the UUA’s DRUMM/Allies for Racial Equity (ARE) national conference.

It was noted in September's report that Anti-Racism and Anti-Oppression were one of the six major initiatives for the coming year. February's report states that the ET plans "to review membership materials and processes with the AR and Welcoming Congregation Teams" to identify needed changes in order to better extend our hospitality. The ET reports kept the Board informed of some of the ARLT activities, i.e., the Crossroads project, the one to one project, the initial facilitated meeting with Board which was an attempt to clarify mutual goals, and the peacekeeping circles which the ET arranged for the ARLT to help with the team's internal issues.

Things We Are Curious About:

- Did Laura Park's participation in the Prairie Star District training result in any new ideas here at Unity?
- Will the advertising in the Penumbra season brochure will be an ongoing initiative? Is it part of a larger media effort?
- What was the ET's assessment of the value of the DRUMM/ARE conference to Unity's congregation and to Unity's journey?
- Did the review of membership materials and processes get completed? Were improvements made?

Board of Trustee

In the fall of 2006, the Board participated with the ARLT in a retreat. Each group affirmed their mutual commitment to the development of an anti-racism identity. The Board and the ARLT determined that they needed a way to maintain and encourage ongoing communication, and the two groups developed a vehicle to do this. Furthermore, the Board, having clarified that the "mission and goals of the anti-racism team fall within the scope of the ends statements that shape the board's work," committed itself to leading the effort to transform Unity Church into an anti-racist institution; providing MCARI training for all incoming board members; endorsing the work of the ARLT within the church; improving communication to key work groups in the church, including the ARLT; continuing to dialogue within the church and the community around congregational values, including anti-racism (from Board minutes of 12-13-06).

Services....sermons, readings, etc.

The new system of podcasting rather than posting text of the sermons and readings, or making transcripts available, made it very challenging to review the year's services after the fact. The following is what we were able to determine, knowing that it is incomplete.

The church year started with a theme of cultivating openness to the "other." One sermon seemed to operate out of a "white as normative" experience, assuming that everyone listening was descended from immigrants. There was a late mention that some came over as slaves, but no acknowledgement of those dispossessed or killed by those immigrants. A later service on atonement acknowledged the need to redeem our nation's wrongs.

The Celebration Sunday service, preached by Rob Hardies, spoke to the "radical hospitality" that reaches out to those in despair and offers them a "God of All Souls," not just some.

The Privilege of Place series included the service of Oct. 22: “As people of privilege, we feel bound to give to those less fortunate,” but we must examine our motives and the power differential. We like to be the givers, but a spiritual life means to give **and** to receive. The service of Nov. 5 explored hospitality as a spiritual practice. The challenge issued was to break out of the cage of self, encounter the divine in another, and receive the gift of another's presence and experience. On Nov. 26, the service defined spiritual companions as those who have the courage to stand up and speak, and the courage to sit down and listen. It was described as a journey into the presence of another person, which harkens back to the theme of being open to the “other.”

The service of May 6 was an urging of congregants to do “real work,” that is, work that “heals the world.” The service of May 27 directly referenced the need for anti-racism work, for truth and reconciliation work, for involvement of our whole selves in this work.

Connecting to the Larger Community

One of the hopes for Unity’s transformational journey is that its people will come to experience the church in a working relationship with the community outside its walls. As part of that effort, Unity sought a seat on the Summit University Planning Council (SUPC), the vehicle for residents to have a voice in neighborhood development and other issues relating to city government. In August 2006, when the SUPC held its annual retreat, Unity Church donated the use of its facilities to the group. Council members were very appreciative of the donation, the estimated value of which was \$350.

Disappointments

On Feb. 18, 2007, our ministerial intern gave a sermon that specifically focused on anti-racism. It was a service that had a very enthusiastic reception by the congregants in attendance. We were disappointed that we hadn’t known ahead of time so that we could have been prepared to respond to congregation members’ questions, concerns and energy. Whereas we do not mean to say that worship leaders need to feel obligated to give us a “heads up” on their planned focus, we would like them to know that the ARLT is available and wants to help extend their message as appropriate.

Unity Church has had a seat on the Summit University Planning Council (SUPC) since May 2005. Seeking this seat was an initiative that Unity took in order to be a more present and responsible neighbor in the larger community. It is our impression that our congregation is ignorant of this step that Unity has taken. Unless the congregation knows and understands this action and all that it involves, it is impossible for them to expand the sense of institutional identity to include the fact that we are functioning as a responsible member of the neighborhood. We suggest that some plan be developed that will ensure communication from Unity’s representative on the SUPC to the Board of Trustees or to the congregation at large.

National Night Out this year was a missed opportunity. Early on, the idea was raised that Unity might partner with House of Hope to do a National Night Out event in the immediate neighborhood. The idea was passed on to a couple of appropriate staff

members who expressed enthusiasm. To our knowledge, no staff member moved it along. Unity's SUPC representative later learned that House of Hope was looking to sponsor such an event and wanted to partner with Unity Unitarian and Unity Baptist churches. There was minimal involvement by Unity Church with the planning and execution of this event, which ended up being a House of Hope event and not a joint one. This would have been a way for Unity to be involved in its immediate neighborhood in a positive way, and it is our hope that the church will participate next year.

Suggestions:

- Focus on ways to provide feedback to the ARLT and the congregation, as appropriate, of activities that relate to becoming an actively anti-racist institution that is accountable to communities of color. Examples would be Laura Park's PSD meeting, anti-racism presentations at 2007 GA, Unity's participation in the Summit-University Planning Council, etc.
- Share what is being done to create a more inclusive, welcoming environment at Unity Church for people of color. Are there plans for outdoor signage, targeted marketing, etc?
- Identify ways in which the ARLT can help bring an anti-racist lens to an activity or initiative.