

Annual Report for the 2013-2014 Church Year

from the

Anti-Racism Leadership Team

to the Board of Trustees and the Executive Team

of Unity Church-Unitarian

ARLT Members

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Part One:

Last Year's Recommendations and Analysis of Results

1. As part of any consulting arrangement designed to move Unity's anti-racism efforts forward, we recommend that the ET, the Board, and the ARLT develop an institutional vision for Unity's anti-racism work and determine how to integrate it fully into church life and governance.

The ARLT supported this recommendation by creating a set of Core Questions to be used by leadership teams within the church in auditing our focus and progress in becoming an anti-racist congregation. Further action is called for in recommendation #6 for 2014-15. The Core Questions are attached to this report as Appendix A.

2. Send one or more members of the ARLT, the Executive Team and the Board of Trustees to events like the Middle Project Conference on Building Multicultural Congregations, held each spring in New York City, to gather models and examples to inform Unity's anti-racism work.

This recommendation was achieved. Several ARLT members, members of the ET, and a member of the Board attended the Middle Project Conference on Building Multicultural Congregations. The conference informed potential changes in the Church's worship practices, especially around music, to extend inclusivity of the worship service. The Conference exposed attendees to models within Unitarian Universalism, particularly at All Souls Tulsa, Annapolis, and All Souls Washington, that will help inform the Church's efforts.

3. The budget for anti-racism is clear, and the ARLT has opportunities to provide input into developing that budget and determining how it will be spent. Within the church budget process, identify financial and staff resources to be devoted to anti-racism efforts, This includes a plan for regular training on systemic racism for church leaders (both staff and volunteer leaders), with the intent of delivering this plan as a part of the FY 2014-15 budget submitted to the Board of Trustees. The plan would identify key positions to be included in the training, the frequency of such training, and the cost of training.

ALRT was not invited into the budget process this year. However, staff and volunteers, including Rob Eller-Isaacs, Lisa Friedman, Drew Danielson, and Jennifer Nordstrom, devoted significant time to anti-racism work over the last year. ARLT has developed a plan regarding training, including positions to be included and frequency of training. ARLT also has determined that we wish to train trainers, which may become a budget issue.

4. Come to a consensus on a framework for anti-racism curricula integrated with both Adult Education and Religious Education efforts, and aim for a plan for 2014-15 that includes anti-racism components in more than 25% of Wellspring Wednesday or other adult education programming. This would likely involve joint planning throughout the year with representatives of the Executive Team, the ARLT, the Racial Justice and Restorative Justice Outreach Teams, and other key staff members.

We believe the Church achieved the recommendation that 25% of Wellspring Wednesday programming in 2013-2014 be devoted to anti-racism work. A structure is in place to work toward achieving a consensus on an anti-racism curriculum framework, with support of the Church's staff. We are confident that planning and coordination is underway among staff in collaboration with ARLT.

5. Develop a policy for implementing anti-racism efforts in staffing and recruitment of Board of Trustees positions, including broad public posting of open positions and outreach efforts to create a racially diverse pool of applicants (continued from 2012-13).

Recommendations from ARLT about job description language for new position were welcomed, but a policy to encourage a racially diverse pool for applicants for open positions was not developed. In 2014-2015 recommendation #5, ARLT makes a modified recommendation addressing this goal.

6. Establish a regular opportunity for facilitated discussions related to becoming anti-racist individuals and institutions (continued from 2012-2013). The ARLT is hopeful that the "Beloved Conversations" effort will result in greater clarity regarding how best to create and sustain such meaningful, ongoing discussions.

The Beloved Conversations initiative created a starting place for achieving this recommendation. Further action is called for in recommendation #3 for 2014-15.

Part Two:

ARLT Recommendations for 2014-2015

1. Institutionalize anti-racism work by including it in staff job descriptions and performance evaluation processes.
2. Develop a staff position to support and coordinate anti-racism efforts.
3. Build on and maintain our commitment to Beloved Conversations.
4. Commitment by the Board and the Executive Team to continuing cultural competency and anti-racism education in consultation with the ARLT.
5. Develop a procedure for anti-racism efforts in staff and volunteer recruitment.
6. Develop a policy to ensure church teams integrate the ARLT's Core Questions into the evaluation of their work. (See Appendix A)

Part Three:

Worship, Congregational, Social Justice teams' activities

Beloved Conversations

“Beloved Conversations: Meditations on Race and Ethnicity” is a curriculum developed by Dr. Mark A. Hicks as an experiential curriculum, in the spirit of covenant groups, that provides a container for exploring the spiritual and intellectual dimensions of racism in our lives. As developed, the program consists of eight two-hour seminars in which the group encounters ways in which issues of race and ethnicity shape individual and group assumptions. It considers the spiritual dimensions of what is learned. Each session poses questions that connect with both the sources of inspiration as well as the challenges of race/ethnicity that slow our human journey toward wholeness. The curriculum differs from many approaches to anti-racism/multicultural work in that it frames the discussion not only in terms of demographic urgency or cultural critiques, but also how developing skills and the habits of an anti-racist mind helps everyone—those in dominant groups as well as those who are targets of oppression —heal from the wounds of racism.

This curriculum was used as the basis for the Beloved Conversations initiative at Unity Church, starting in late October with a weekend-long retreat lead by Dr. Hicks. About fifty people, many from Unity Church as well as participants from Above Every Name Ministries, Morningstar Baptist Church, and White Bear Unitarian-Universalist Church, navigated the eight-session program. Reports from participating congregants and from the pulpit described the experience as covenantal, transforming, emotional, joyous, angry, cathartic, tearful, and a basis for ongoing relationships between individuals and the participating institutions. One participant commented: “Deep appreciation for the opportunity to hear and be invited to speak about culture, race and hope. The simplicity of building trusting connections one story at a time.”

Beloved Conversations continued in a “sampler” form with three Wellspring Wednesday “Beloved Wellspring Conversations” in February, March and April. These 90-minute conversations had an average attendance of about thirty and were deemed valuable by participants and instructive as an introduction to the larger curriculum.

In April, a shortened but intensive Beloved Conversations mini-retreat was held over a weekend. Attendance at the mini-retreat was about 25, and was more evenly distributed between Unity members and participants from partner churches and organizations.

Wellspring Wednesday Ending the Cradle to Prison Pipeline Programming

In 2013, the congregation was encouraged to read and discuss Michelle Alexander’s book, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. To follow up on that, the Racial and Restorative

Justice Outreach Teams organized six presentations on aspects of racialized mass incarceration offered from November 2013 through April 2014. Topics included education, employment, housing, and the issues of access experienced by those who have been involved with the criminal justice system. Discussions were moderated by local experts in these fields and joined by individuals who have experienced stigma and exclusion due to all levels of “being in the system,” whether convicted and incarcerated or not. These presentations were lively and well attended, with from twenty to forty participants. This was a significant undertaking by the Racial and Restorative Justice Teams.

Prison Baby book launch

The Racial and Restorative Justice Outreach Teams and the Library and Bookstall Team hosted the launch of *Prison Baby*, a new memoir by Deborah Jiang Stein published by Beacon Press. Born in prison to a heroin-addicted mother, Stein was a mixed-race child adopted by a middle-class Jewish couple who discovered her history by accident. In a remarkable colloquy before a large crowd on March 21, Stein explored her life struggles with acceptance, addiction, alienation from and eventual reconciliation with her adoptive parents. These transformative experiences led her to form the **unPrison Project** (www.unprisonproject.org), a nonprofit working to empower and inspire incarcerated women and girls to prepare for a successful life after prison.

Shared Worship Experiences

Beginning in August 2013, Above Every Name Ministries and Pastor Danny Givens have been renting Unity’s sanctuary for their Sunday worship service. In the initial conversations with Pastor Givens, Unity Church leaders discovered that our congregations share a deep commitment to restorative justice, to universal welcome, and to this neighborhood and community. Within our different faith traditions, we both share a vision for building congregations based upon the foundations of unity and love. Unity Church has also continued to grow our long-term relationship with our near neighbor, Morningstar Baptist Church, and its pastor, Rev. Carl Walker.

These relationships have led to several shared worship services. On Christmas Eve, members of Morningstar Baptist Church, Above Every Name, and Unity Church celebrated a joint Praise service. This spring, Unity Singers participated in a service at Morningstar Baptist. The Morningstar Baptist choir joined us at a 4:30 service on a following Sunday. The weekend of the Beloved Conversations mini-retreat in April, there was a joint service on Palm Sunday with Above Every Name at which the Unity Choir sang.

The Spirituals Project

As a part of Foote Music Weekend in May, Unity Church invited Dr. Arthur C. Jones, founder of The Spirituals Project, to lead a two-hour seminar on Saturday and to participate in Foote Music Sunday. The Spirituals Project was incorporated as a non-profit in 1998, with a mission “to preserve and revitalize the music and teachings of the sacred songs called ‘spirituals’, created and first sung by enslaved Africans in America in the 18th and 19th centuries.” Dr. Jones provided a fascinating commentary on the origin, purposes and social functions of spirituals, punctuated by the singing of some songs by those attending.

He also led the congregation in a spiritual on Foote Sunday. About seventy-five attended the Saturday workshop.

Second Chance Day at the Capitol

Second Chance Day at the Minnesota Capitol, held Wednesday, March 12, was a gathering of advocates for proposed legislation around several issues affecting ex-offenders. Unity Church was well-represented by staff, Racial and Restorative Justice Outreach Team members, current and former Anti-Racism Leadership Team members, and other interested congregants. Those attending advocated for three measures:

- 1) a proposal to change the current law, which disenfranchises ex-offenders who are no longer incarcerated but are still “on paper” (parole or probation);
- 2) a proposal for expungement of juvenile criminal records (anyone accused of a felony has this kind of record, regardless of the outcome of any adjudication); and
- 3) a proposal to halt the practice of shackling pregnant inmates during labor, delivery, and post-partum.

The juvenile and criminal records expungement bill was signed into law in May. This advocacy is an adjunct to the congregational racial and social justice work of ending the cradle to prison pipeline, as all of these laws disproportionately affect persons of color.

Middle Project Conference

Nine Unity members (five staff, three ARLT members, one Trustee, and Rev. Danny Givens from Above Every Name) attended this remarkable social justice/cultural competence conference in New York City at the end of April. All came back energized and with fresh ideas for the congregation’s work in building a multi-generational, multi-ethnic, multi-racial congregation, and with the realization that this will be a difficult, emotional, transformative process that will require all of us to minister to one another.

Other Social Justice Activities

- A delegation with participants from Unity, Above Every Name, White Bear Unitarian Universalist, and First Universalist churches participated in the Mass Moral March in Raleigh, North Carolina exactly fifty-four years after North Carolina’s trailblazing role in the civil rights movement. They joined with tens of thousands of other activists—from all backgrounds, races and causes—in a march and rally protesting a variety of new laws and policies in North Carolina and beyond, including those viewed as suppressing the ability of people of color to vote.
- The Rainbow Chalice Alliance Team worked with Representative Jim Davnie to get a strong anti-bullying law passed. The law provides educators, parents, and students with tools and resources for bullying prevention and intervention.
- The Affordable Housing Team, in partnership with their community partner, Beacon Interfaith Housing Collaborative, advocated and successfully campaigned for funding to secure the resources to build/rehab an estimated 5,000 homes for our lowest income neighbors. Prior Crossing, a new housing unit for homeless youth in St. Paul, could benefit from these resources.

Anti-Racism Leadership Team (ARLT) activities

The many activities of the past year related to anti-racism, building the Beloved Community, and racial justice required a tremendous amount of time, effort, and dedication from volunteers, the ministers and staff of Unity. The ARLT believes that in order to sustain, much less build upon, this great work, more of Unity staff's time and budgetary resources will need to be specifically dedicated to this work. For example, having the Beloved Conversations and related activities as a core focus of Jennifer Nordstrom's work during her time as the Hallman Intern sets a precedent, which the ARLT hopes can be sustained with future internships. And Drew Danielson's support of the ARLT and the Beloved Conversations seems unlikely to be sustainable as a volunteer activity above and beyond his paid work. Overall, the ARLT notes the importance of maintaining this level of energy and enthusiasm for the work of building the Beloved Community, and we anticipate that this will require additional thought on the part of the Board of Trustees and the Executive Team, and a higher level of resources put toward supporting staff efforts going forward.

This past year saw significant structural strengthening of the ARLT. Due to some attrition and participants cycling off the team, the group was down to five members in the fall of 2013. With the assistance of and recommendations from the Board, interested candidates were interviewed and, by early 2014, four new members had been added.

The critical mass achieved by these additions allowed the formation of functionally specific sub-groups within the team. This year, the ARLT has been actively working with three groups in the areas of Education & Training, Communications, and Policy & Monitoring. These groups meet regularly and report on and discuss their work at the monthly ARLT meetings. Following are reports from each of the groups.

Monitoring & Policy

The Monitoring group developed a set of guiding questions, using the ARLT's vision and mission and Unity's Ends Statements as a framework [See Appendix A]. These questions were part of an effort to clarify the monitoring role. They were also a response to the 2012-2013 recommendation that the Executive Team, the Board, and the ARLT develop an institutional vision for Unity's anti-racism work and determine how to integrate it fully into church life and governance. Our intention is that the questions will serve as an aide to assessing how the work of institutionalizing an anti-racist focus at Unity is progressing. It is our thought that these questions can and should be asked and answered by any individual or group at Unity Church.

The Monitoring group also saw the announcement of Pat Haff's retirement and the reconfiguration of job responsibilities for Lisa Friedman as an opportunity. Our goal is to review various institutional documents, including job descriptions, with an eye to incorporating language that conveys the church's commitment to an inclusive, anti-racist community. Members met with Lisa Friedman and suggested language to include in the posting for the new position of Volunteer coordinator. We suggested

changing the phrase "ability to work cooperatively with different types of personalities," to say "ability to communicate and work cooperatively with different types of personalities and with persons from diverse backgrounds and experiences." This language communicates both the value and the expectation that the candidate be able to work across differences. Lisa was very receptive to the proposal and saw it as a good addition. This was in line with a recommendation from last year that spoke to implementing anti-racism efforts in staffing, including broad public posting of open positions and outreach efforts to create a racially diverse pool of applicants.

Education

We have had the opportunity to engage in and develop two significant educational opportunities in 2013-2014. The Beloved Conversations program began in November 2013 as an opportunity to build authentic relationships between Unity members and people of color from other institutions. Drew Danielson and Jennifer Nordstrom, and Danny Givens of Above Every Name (AEN) organized the fall program. Leaders from Unity, Morningstar, and AEN were very involved as facilitators and presenters. In addition, Beloved Conversations continued as workshops on three successive months on Wellspring Wednesday evenings and a "Mini Retreat" in April. ARLT members played a pivotal role, along with AEN's Marea Perryman, in planning and implementing these programs.

ARLT members have also had the opportunity to work with Unity's Board of Trustees to help build understanding and awareness around culture. Kelley Nelson, Avi Viswanathan, and Drew Danielson created a curriculum for a series of Board trainings beginning in January 2014. The curriculum is designed as an introduction to cultural awareness. To date, ARLT members have conducted two trainings, which were very well received. The Board has committed to continuing these trainings during each of the Saturday board meetings in 2014.

Three members of the ARLT attended the Middle Project Leading Edge Conference in New York in late April and were able to observe several ways of integrating multi-culturalism into church life

Communications

The Communications group took responsibility for maintaining a monthly presence in the CommUnity, sharing stories, news of events, and experiences around Unity's racism work. One member took the lead on compiling the elements of this report.

The group is interested in supporting the establishment of informal, low risk, regular conversation on the impact of racism in our lives. It also looks to deepen the communications between the ARLT and Community Outreach Teams in support of the journey toward the Beloved Community.

Appendix A

Core Questions to Guide Unity's Journey Toward Anti-Racism & the Beloved Community

Following are a set of questions that arose out of discussions about how to monitor Unity Church's progress on our journey toward the Beloved Community. We developed these guiding questions as a way to think about what to measure. We used the Vision and Mission of the Anti-Racism Leadership Team as well as language from Unity's Ends Statements as the framework. Our intention is that these questions will serve as an aide to assessing how the work of institutionalizing an anti-racist focus at Unity is progressing. This is the work of everyone, and it is our thought that these questions can and should be asked and answered by any individual or group at Unity Church.

ARLT Vision Statement: Unity Church - Unitarian is an anti-racist community that is actively engaged in dismantling racism both internally and in the wider community in a manner that is accountable to communities of color.

ARLT Mission Statement: The mission of the Unity Church Anti-Racism Leadership Team is to lead the church in developing and living out an intentionally anti-racist identity in all aspects of church life. The team will seek opportunities to:

- promote dialogue and learning within the church community about the origins and functioning of systemic racism
- integrate an anti-racist perspective into the identity documents, religious education and member development curricula, worship service, and governance of Unity Church
- develop meaningful partner relationships between Unity Church and communities of color as we work together to dismantle racism in society

Within... The people of Unity Church-Unitarian value a deeply meaningful, transforming liberal religious experience.

“Actively engaged in dismantling racism internally ...”

- How does Unity actively engage in dismantling racism internally?
- How does Unity integrate an anti-racist perspective into
 - ... all aspects of Unity's governance and policies, i.e. identity documents, governing policies, job descriptions, Community outreach team charters, etc.
 - ... worship services?
 - ... its communications and representations to the wider community (e.g., website, Facebook)?
 - ... its educational programming, including member development curricula and religious education?

- How does Unity promote dialogue and learning within the church community about the origins and functioning of systemic racism?
 - o How well does Unity grow self-awareness related to race, racism, and racial healing? (Among Unity congregants, volunteer leaders, and staff)
 - o How well do people understand the terms and concepts related to anti-racism?
 - o How does Unity create opportunities for practicing open, honest, loving conversations focused on race and racism – sharing experiences, perceptions and responses.

Among ... Unity Church-Unitarian is a community of welcome, reverence, and deep connection.

“Actively engaged in dismantling racism internally ... in a manner that is accountable to communities of color”

- How well does Unity grow congregants’, volunteer leaders’, and staff’s ability to interact – with each other and with Unity’s “moral owners” – in a way that furthers Unity’s journey toward the Beloved Community?
- How well does Unity grow/foster meaningful relationships among people of different races?
- What does Unity do to further racial healing and emotional resiliency related to overcoming racism?
 - o How well does Unity further racial healing and emotional resiliency related to overcoming racism?
- How well does Unity serve its members of color?

Beyond... Unity Church-Unitarian carries out the work of love in community, making a positive impact in our neighborhood and in our world.

“actively engaged in dismantling racism ... in the wider community in a manner that is accountable to communities of color.”

- How well does Unity grow/foster meaningful relationships among people of different races? (Among Unity congregants and “beyond” to include relationships within the Unity neighborhood)
- How does Unity develop meaningful partner relationships with communities of color in the community?
- How does Unity actively engage in dismantling racism in the wider community?
- How does Unity identify opportunities for people to become engaged in anti-racist work that is accountable to communities of color?
- How does Unity hold itself accountable to people of color in its anti-racism work?