

# **Annual Report for the 2014-2015 Church Year**

**from the**

**Anti-Racism Leadership Team**

**to the Board of Trustees and the Executive Team**

**of Unity Church-Unitarian**

## **ARLT Members**

Drew Danielson (staff), Rob Eller-Isaacs (staff),  
Danny Givens (staff), Peter Heege, Jill Henricksen,  
Amy Kujawski, Gabrielle Mead, Russ Peterson,  
Brooke Darst Rice, Vicki Stewart, Lindsusan Ulrich (staff),  
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## **Congregational Activities**

### **Beloved Conversations**

Unity continued to build on the Beloved Conversations curriculum initially designed by Rev. Mark Hicks. Participants in the Selma pilgrimage were invited and expected to participate in seven Beloved Conversations sessions totaling around twenty hours. These sessions were led by Ashley Horan (director of MUUSJA and soon to be ordained by this congregation), Drew Danielson, Lindasusan Ulrich and Rev. Danny Givens and Marea Perry from Above Every Name. Mark Hicks was present at and helped to lead one of the sessions.

This program matured and adapted in the second year at Unity. Program leaders were able to tailor materials and conversations to a much more demographically diverse group of participants, and were in regular contact with Mark Hicks to accomplish that. The diversity of the participants fostered authentic relationships between people of widely differing backgrounds and experiences. This was an intense and shared emotional experience which enabled people to communicate their experience openly and have it received with love and compassion. Both the program and the participants grew.

### **Selma pilgrimage**

A wonderful group of 70 people made the pilgrimage to Birmingham and Selma. This was a venture that grew in its creation. Originally planned for 50, the planning process attracted the attention of public officials (three Chiefs of Police and St Paul department heads), non-profit leaders, activist leaders and other faith leaders. The group quickly grew to the actual total of 70.

Around \$100,000 was raised by the planning team for general pilgrimage expenses and for scholarships for those for whom this was an important trip but for whom the cost was a major issue. That group included a delegation of men and administrators from Ujamaa Place, church members, staff and youth, and other local social justice and community leaders.

Here are Rob's words; they ring true to all of us who were inspired, moved and profoundly changed by this experience:

"I tend to be inordinately proud of our church. But I tell you I have never been so proud to be a Unitarian Universalist and particularly a member of Unity Church-Unitarian. It wasn't because of our numbers, though we showed up from all across the country. It wasn't the ecstatically diverse group of seventy pilgrims from Saint Paul that traveled to Selma together. It wasn't the \$100,000 we raised to make it possible for everyone to go. It wasn't the considerable media attention our delegation drew.

"My pride is two-fold. More than half of the St. Paul pilgrims were not from Unity Church but trusted us to convene the group and honor its diversity. And, that we have learned enough over the years to lead from behind with little to take credit for what was a profoundly collaborative effort."

Each pilgrim had his or her own unique and profound experience. We know that justice work is hard and that feelings can be hurt and expectations disappointed. It is important to acknowledge

that despite the transformative nature of this pilgrimage, those things did happen. We still have work to do and relationships to honor. We also know that the strength of the relationships that were built around Selma will let this work happen.

The Selma pilgrims have continued to meet after the trip, and to work together to further relationships and to take action on issues of social justice and racial equity in Saint Paul.

### **Worship, Wellspring Wednesday and other Church Programming**

#### *Worship*

In a case of intention meeting culture, anti-racism was powerfully imbedded into the worship experience at Unity this church year. Each staff preacher spoke directly and often to the spiritual and social dimensions of the work of the congregation toward the Beloved Community, as did visiting preachers. Of special note were Mark Morrison-Reed's sermon *The Little Boy* on November 8 and Lisa's sermon *Crossing Bridges* on the Sunday of the Selma crossing.

In December Unity once again held a joint Christmas Eve service with the Above Every Name congregation.

#### *Wellspring Wednesday*

In October, Unity, in collaboration with a large group of Saint Paul faith communities, presented a series of three programs on *Disavowing the Doctrine of Discovery*. These programs took a hard look at the tragic treatment of Indigenous peoples by our state, nation and religious institutions.

On November 11, Melanie DeMore gave a lively presentation on the Gullah Tradition and Stick Pounding.

Lisa presented a workshop on February 4 on Soul Work, based on the Beacon Press title *Anti-Racist Theologies and Dialogue*. February 18 Terri McNeal from the Racial and Restorative Justice Team presented a session on Unintentional Bias. At the February 25 Wellspring Wednesday, a group held a book discussion on *The Selma Awakening*.

On March 11, a panel of local residents including Rev. Carl Walker and Mel Carter Jr. presented a fascinating look at *1965 in Saint Paul* and reflected on how things have changed or not in those 50 years. March 18 Well- Spring Wednesday had a program on *Ferguson to the Twin Cities: Implications of Police Brutality*, led by volunteers from the non-profit Communities United Against Police Brutality.

March 25 Wellspring featured a special appearance and concert by folksong artists Kim and Reggie Harris. Kim and Reggie were featured artists at the UUA Living Legacy Conference in Birmingham, which was part of the Selma tour.

April Wellspring Wednesday programming included a discussion on Health Care Equity presented by church members Mollie O'Brien and Terri McNeal, and Reflections from Selma from a number of the pilgrims.

May 6 Ashley Horan presented a short workshop on *Spiritual Grounding for Justice Leaders* at Wellspring Wednesday.

### *Other Church Programming*

In November, Mark Morrison-Reed, author of this year's congregational read *The Selma Awakening*, gave a Saturday presentation on the history of racial justice in Unitarian-Universalism to a large group. He spoke from the pulpit the next day. He also met with a group of parents of children of color while here, and effects in the Religious Education programming are already being felt from learnings from that meeting.

Rob and Danny Givens were members of a discussion panel at the St Paul Interfaith Network (formerly Saint Paul Area Council of Churches) Midday Dialogues series this winter. This program was shortly after the Black Lives Matter Mall of America protest.

Unity made a start-up contribution to the Rondo Memoirs Project, which is commencing its work by publishing the memoirs of local activist Kofi Bobby Hickman.

On March 8, in conjunction with the crossing of the Edmund Pettis Bridge in Selma, Unity members and others participated in the Crossing Bridges commemoration in downtown Saint Paul. This sister event in Saint Paul was the direct result of Unity's convening of the planning team.

April's Parish Hall art installation was *We Are All Criminals*; this was a participatory installation inviting church member to anonymously acknowledge crimes they committed for which they were never caught or punished. Many participated. This was also an opportunity to reflect on racial inequities in our criminal justice system.

### **Rev. Danny Givens Ministerial Residency**

The relationship between Unity and Above Every Name, the congregation led by Rev. Danny Givens, began in August 2013 as a space rental for their Sunday afternoon service. It has quickly become much more than a business relationship, and the collaborative and covenantal nature of that relationship was further affirmed this year as Rev. Danny Givens came on staff as Ministerial Resident. This residency was enthusiastically funded by special contributions from Unity members. In addition to these generous contributions, this Spring the church did a Faithify campaign to raise funds for this residency. Faithify is a crowd-sourced funding mechanism for worthy church projects initiated and run by the UUA, and is basically along the lines of Kickstarter. More than \$14,400 was raised through Faithify and other contributions for this campaign were received separately from church members.

This two year half-time residency includes full participation in the life of the staff, an opportunity for spiritual discernment, interfaith work, chaplaincy of Black Lives Matter and tutorials in church

administration. As part of the residency, Rev. Givens preached twice to the Unity congregation during this church year. The residency is supervised by Rob Eller-Isaacs and a residency support team consisting of three Unity members and three Above Every Name members.

### **Coordinating Council**

May was the initial convening of the Coordinating Council. This group is intended to gather together different groups from the church working separately on racial justice issues to compare notes and support each other. The first meeting included staff, Anti-Racism Leadership Team members, Racial and Restorative Justice Outreach Team members, Religious Education Committee members, and Selma pilgrims. This work of the council and its final name is a work in process.

## **Summary of ARLT Work During 2014-2015**

### **Retreat**

During this past year, the ARLT set aside time to reflect on our own experiences with racism; the reasons anti-racism is important work at Unity; the ARLT's charter and how the ARLT's work has and has not aligned with the charter; and the sources of each member's motivation. This time allowed us to reflect on our values, ground our work, connect with each other, and motivate our ongoing commitment to the ARLT.

### **Team Transitions**

This year saw the departure of team members Kelley Nelson and Pauline Eichten. We would like to thank them for their dedication and hard work toward the mission and vision of the ARLT. This created two openings, which were filled by new members Russ Peterson and Vicki Stewart.

### **Realignment of ARLT Structure**

The ARLT has traditionally organized its work among sub-teams designated to focus on three specific areas: education, communication, and policy/monitoring. As an outcome of the retreat, the ARLT restructured the sub-teams. We believe the new sub-teams more easily align with members' energy and Unity staff member responsibilities. The new sub-teams are:

- Board Liaison (linkage, monitoring, writing policy, education & communication)
- Religious Education (kids, youth, RE teachers, RE staff, education & communication)
- Adult Congregants & Outreach Teams (education & communication)
- Front Line Staff & Volunteers (includes welcome teams, cooking teams, reception, guests, choir)

### **ARLT Work in New Structure**

The new sub-teams have begun meeting with Unity staff members to learn what already is happening, what plans are in place, and how the ARLT can fulfill its Charter in this new structure.

### *Board Liaison*

Board Liaison sub-team members attended several but not all board meetings during the year. The sub-team met with Hal Freshley of the Policy subcommittee to discuss Requirement 3 of Policy J regarding Executive Team reporting on the percentage of offerings given to organizations that have an anti-racist agenda or that serve communities of color. Subsequent to that meeting, the sub-team met with Barbara Hubbard and Lisa Friedman and developed a worksheet to determine the information requested by Requirement 3.

### *Religious Education*

Members of the Religious Education sub-team have begun establishing connections with Director of Religious Education KP Hong to better understand roles and work in progress. KP reported extensive conversations with the Religious Education Ministry Team (REMT) and a special Task Force focused on antiracism within the RE program, including consideration of short and long term curriculum review (currently underway), accountability and measurement of the effects of curriculum work, teacher orientation and training, and social justice/racial justice community engagement. We also discussed challenges related to the variety of models and language used in anti-racism and social justice work, Unity RE teacher competencies around this work, and the context of anti-racist education within Unity's current demographic. The RE sub-team plans to continue these conversations with the RE staff and volunteer groups in the upcoming year, and to consider other ideas for the continuing education of children and families at Unity around anti-racism.

### *Adult Congregants & Outreach Teams*

The Adult Congregants & Outreach Teams sub-team held an initial meeting to discuss focus and direction in advance of a meeting with Lisa Friedman. After identifying some areas of opportunity around outreach & communication, the sub-team met with Lisa. In addition to exploring ideas for adult congregant programming, we discussed ideas for how best to communicate to the congregation and some strategies for conversations with the various outreach teams. Next steps are to meet with Martha Tilton about communication and hold a follow up meeting with Lisa to move ahead on programming ideas. Additionally, the sub-team will start to connect with the various outreach teams.

### *Front Line Staff & Volunteers*

The Front Line Staff & Volunteers sub-team has been planning ways to collaborate with Welcome Teams (WT). The sub-team's plan is to meet with the members of the WT to reflect on ways in which they might deliberately further Unity's anti-racism focus as it strives toward the Beloved Community. The values of our church's anti-racism work are similar to the values of the WT work of inviting deep and meaningful participation for our congregation and its guests on Sundays, so the sub-committee will use the core questions generated in 2014 by the ARLT to generate conversations about how the WT might be able to imbed a conscientious focus on anti-racism while carrying out their service. The sub-team includes other important groups such as the cooking teams, reception staff, choir, and guests.

## Report on 2014-2015 Recommendations

One year ago, the ARLT made the following six recommendations:

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)

### Overview

The lack of progress on the majority of these recommendations over the past year, and for several years running, points to more fundamental problems with how the ARLT's recommendations have heretofore been developed and pursued, as well as to perennial issues related to the allocation of staffing and monetary resources toward anti-racism work at Unity.

### Follow-up On Selected Recommendations

#### *2. Develop a staff position to support and coordinate anti-racism efforts.*

The intent of this recommendation was to address the lack of resources available to support the unmet needs of the church requested of the ARLT and identified by the ARLT such as BOT training, adult programming, and Beloved Conversations. The status of BOT training and Beloved Conversations are explained in further recommendations. Rev. Lisa Friedman has implemented a strong variety of adult education programming throughout Wellspring Wednesday offerings. A framework for regularly occurring adult education on anti-racism work are in-development.

#### *3. Build on and maintain our commitment to Beloved Conversations.*

The work of Beloved Conversations was taken up by Ministerial Intern Lindasusan Ulrich and Ministerial Resident Reverend Danny Givens on behalf of Unity. As explained in a previous section, the program grew in number of participants, organizational diversity, hours of connection, and impact. However, as Lindasusan and Danny conclude their commitments, there are no identified resources to continue this work.

#### *4. Commitment by the Board and the Executive Team to continuing cultural competency and anti-racism education in consultation with the ARLT.*

Early in the year, two trainings were conducted by ARLT volunteers for the BOT to begin to understand aspects of culture and the influence of individual life experiences on how one

interacts with "difference." Time was spent identifying the culture of Unity and who might feel part of the culture and who might feel absent. After struggling with limited resources and conflicting roles, the ARLT determined that this practice was not sustainable and recommended other resources for continued training.

### **Recommendations for 2015-2016**

1. Determine more effective ways of developing and pursuing ARLT recommendations.
2. Allocate the resources needed to support anti-racism training for Unity board members, adult education programming related to anti-racism, and continuation of the Beloved Conversations.
3. Develop an ongoing relationship between the ARLT and the policy sub-team of the Unity board.