

St. John's Unitarian Universalist Church
Commitment to Racial Justice
June 12, 2016

1. **Whereas**, Unitarian Universalist principles affirm the inherent worth and dignity of every person, justice equity and compassion in human relations, and the goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all, and
2. Whereas, the Unitarian Universalist Association calls on us as a religious movement to the work of Anti-Racism, Anti-Oppression, and Multiculturalism (AR-AO-MC), and
3. Whereas, delegates to the 2015 UU General Assembly approved an Action of Immediate Witness calling on us to support the Black Lives Matter movement, and
4. Whereas, the Organizing Collective of Black Lives of UU has called on congregations to work toward a future where black lives are truly valued in our society, and
5. Whereas, UUs are working to reach a consensus that respects the will and intent of the Black Lives Matter movement, (see FAQ2) and
6. Whereas, St. John's covenant includes a commitment "to do our utmost for justice, peace, and equity," and
7. Whereas, the Urban League study, *The State of Black Cincinnati 2015: Two Cities*, found increased racial disparities from 1995 to 2015 in education, housing, employment, voting, health care, and the environment due to continuing institutionalized discriminatory practices, and
8. Whereas, police use of lethal force in Cincinnati, mass incarceration, and the war on drugs has had a disproportionate impact on minority families and communities, and
9. Whereas, we are determined to continue in this work, confident that by doing so we will thrive as a fully engaged, relevant faith community that brings healing to the world,

Therefore, recognizing that actions are more powerful than words, St. John's Unitarian Universalist Church resolves to promote racial justice by a series of meaningful actions. These include:

1. Developing a racial justice congregational lens for learning to recognize structural racism and the many forms of privilege enjoyed that arise in related issues involving race, gender, sexual orientation, class and ability. (See FAQ3)
2. Assuming the best intentions of all, forgiving and supporting those who unintentionally offend in ways that feel like micro-aggressions to others, with responses that advance intercultural competence. (See FAQ3)
3. Affirming that all individuals are welcome, recognizing that no should feel invisible in our spiritual home. (See FAQ5)
4. Taking risks as individuals in learning to accept discomfort as we engage in hard conversations using compassionate communication to achieve right relations. (See FAQ3)
5. Exploring additional racial justice curricula that enhance multigenerational interchange through both adult religious education and for children and youth. (See FAQ6)

6. Finding additional ways to engage young adults, listening to and respecting their concerns, and acknowledging their critical role as current and prospective leaders.
7. Budgeting for professional development, auxiliary expenses and arranging volunteers for needed release time so that staff can effectively support our commitments to racial justice.
8. Display St. John's commitment to racial justice with appropriate banners and/or artwork both inside and outside our building with special fundraising to cover the expense. (See FAQ1)

Therefore, be it further resolved that in order to support the Movement for Black Lives (see FAQ2) St. John's will work in collaboration with partners and allies to address broad social ills that may include:

1. Reforms that remedy school inequities that impact racial minorities and the poor.
2. Initiatives to assure quality health care for all.
3. Efforts to end homelessness and *de facto* residential segregation.
4. Remedies for food deserts, toxic waste disposal in marginalized communities, and tainted drinking water.
5. Efforts to reduce mass incarceration, facilitate reentry by returning citizens, reform police practices, abolish the death penalty, and welcome immigrants.
6. Efforts to provide a living wage, and opportunities for minority business enterprise.
7. Efforts to assure effective voting rights for all.
8. Welcoming immigrants of all nationalities and faiths.
9. Efforts to combat religious intolerance.

Therefore be it further resolved that when preparing annual reports to the congregation, the Board President and Council Directors will include an assessment of progress toward these 17 goals.

The Congregation voted to approve this resolution on _____, 2016.

Board President

Minister

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Related to St. John's Racial Justice Resolution

FAQ1. *Will passing a resolution and public displays affirming a commitment to racial justice result in any effective action or simply make our members feel virtuous?*

A. Resolution: It is important to our leaders, and to all St. Johners doing justice work, to have this formal declaration from the entire congregation as something to which they can publicly refer. It affirms the engagement of the church as a whole on racial justice initiatives.

In addition, the yearlong initiative process has already stimulated multi-generational, inter-racial conversations and improved understanding of difficult racial issues, past and present. Those hard conversations have only just begun.

The resolution calls for the Board and Council Directors to include in their annual reports to the Congregation an assessment of progress toward the goals.

B. Displays: St. John's has affirmed its commitment to peacemaking with a Peace Pole in the Memorial Garden and peace cranes in the sanctuary. Bearing public witness to our racial justice commitments both inside and outside the church would make clear to passersby and visitors that St. John's welcomes persons of color and stands for equal rights. While some members may simply feel virtuous by association when viewing the displays, for others they will serve as reminders of the need to act on our formal commitments.

St. John's religious education and music programs regularly use racial justice themes as do our public art exhibits. Appropriate committees and members who create art would collaborate in deciding on proposals for congregational review and consideration. An exterior colorful wall mural or banner would bring together our commitment to racial justice and aesthetics. No interior or exterior locations have been identified. For a mural, special fundraising would be needed to meet the expense and to qualify for matching grants from ArtWorks. No special permit would be required.

FAQ2. *How can we find consensus when some members wish to bear public witness that Black Lives Matter, while others prefer to affirm that All Lives Matter?*

At least three UU Congregations in Ohio display Black Lives Matter banners, a majority in one rejected a proposal to do so, and another added the phrase "All Lives are Precious." See [On Being Asked to Change "Black Lives Matter to All Lives Matter"](#) (www.uua.org/worship/words/reading/change-black-to-all). Consensus can be reached when those in the minority agree to live with an outcome that is not their first choice. St. John's Bylaws and policies require a super majority for calling a minister and for adopting a congregational initiative resolution. When unable to reach consensus, members to agree to disagree when the decision process is fair and democratic.

FAQ3. *Will Resolution #s 1, 2, and 3 relating to internal congregational commitments impose on members a "politically correct" doctrine and practice that suppresses freedom of expression?*

Imposing any politically correct doctrine would violate our UU principles affirming the "free and responsible search for truth" and "the right of conscience."

Learning to use a racial lens is a consciousness raising tool, but perspectives differ with the eye of the beholder. We need to reflect on and share with others our different thoughts/feelings about race. Marginalized individuals often feel wounded by what they consider micro-aggression ("verbal,

behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative slights and insults”). Whites may feel injured if accused of racial insensitivity, and may feel threatened by expression of anti-racist anger. St. John’s will support members interested in learning about *intercultural competence* (“the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately with people of other cultures”). Feeling uncomfortable when people speak freely in the pursuit of truth may lead to positive change.

FAQ4. *How can we do more to affirm that all are welcome and help those who feel invisible?*

One possibility for Welcoming Words: We are a welcoming congregation. When I name an identifying group, please join me in saying: "you are welcome here." Whether you are young or old, or in between, "you are welcome here." Whether your skin is black or white, brown or red, "you are welcome here." Whether you are gay or straight, or in between, "you are welcome here." Whether you walked into the sanctuary or rolled in, "you are welcome here." Whether you are married, partnered, single, divorced, or widowed, "you are welcome here." Whatever your beliefs or political affiliation, "you are welcome here." Whoever you are, whomever you love, "you are welcome here."

FAQ5. *What materials are being considered for religious education on racial justice?*

UU Justice Ohio has an online list of resources for adults and children to facilitate book discussions, film screenings, workshops, curricula for adults and children. UUA resources include:

- [UUA Journey Toward Wholeness Path to Anti-Racism](#)
- [UUA curricula on Whiteness](#)
- See also [Beloved Conversations Curriculum](#) and [AR-AO-MC materials](#).

FAQ6. *How can St. John’s realistically commit to addressing broad social ills? Shouldn’t the resolution focus exclusively on racial justice?*

When injustice impacts poor marginalized individuals and families, St. John’s has made varied commitments to protect the environment, reduce income inequality, shelter the homeless, combat discrimination against all, assure due process for those accused of crime, reduce mass incarceration and more that all promote significant improvement for persons of color. For example, providing quality pre-school education for all 3 and 4 year olds will reduce racial disparities. When St. John's members pursue a broad range of Justice Ministry activities they are encouraged to apply a racial justice lens.

Realizing our limited resources, we work with partners and allies in efforts to achieve goals that may not be realized in our lifetime, if ever. When initiating a project, St. John’s enlists those from other faith communities and justice organizations to join us. St. John’s also frequently signs on to campaigns initiated by allies as part of a multi-racial interfaith Coalition – the AMOS Project, MARCC, Ohio Justice and Policy Center, Contact Center, Interfaith Worker’s Center, Intercommunity Justice and Peace Center, UU Council of Greater Cincinnati, UU Justice Ohio and more.

Justice Ministry *denotes member of Congregational Initiative Drafting Committee

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