

**November 8, 2017**  
**Report to Standing Committee from the**  
**Black Lives Matter (BLM)**  
**Banner Process Group**

Since we received your approval of our Black Lives Matter (BLM) Banner Process Proposal last spring (copy attached for your convenience) we have proceeded with the first 2 steps in the proposed BLM banner process.

We initiated our activities with a display in the Symmes Room, an insert in the Order of Service and announcements in Highlights. We included a comment box on the display and also set up a dedicated email address where folks could submit comments via email.

We then scheduled four two hour “open conversations” for the fall (9/28, 10/8, 10/12 and 10/22) and conducted them using the attached covenant and format.

Rebecca Kelly-Morgan took advantage of the banner display in Symmes to discuss the banner with some of our older kids during the Religious Education morning.

- Quoting Rebecca: “We spoke briefly about the reasons for the banner and the reasons for setting aside white privilege and making this about people who have been marginalized for too long. They got it. Right away. You have some kid comments on the board and kid votes on the language in the ballot box.”

There are additional plans underway for conversations on this topic to take place with the middle schoolers and the older folks who participate in Soup and Conversations on Wednesdays during the daytime.

One of our members helped to facilitate a discussion with 20 WUSYG youth on 10/8 under the direction of Sam Wilson and Haley Wagner. (Please see the attached report: “WUSYG BLM Banner Conversation, 10/8/17.”)

By way of reporting on the four “open conversations” with a total of 39 adults who participated (made up of 32 members, 4 staff, and 3 friends from our community), we are attaching 2 documents for your review:

- Data on the Participants of the 4 Open Conversations as of 10-30-17
- Comments Categorized from all 4 Open Conversations

In addition we are attaching all of the comments we received via email (which include comments from 4 additional adults who did not participate in the open conversations) and a spreadsheet summarizing the comments posted on the display or placed in the comment box.

- Comments on BLM Banner via email as of 11-1-17

- BLM Posts and Comments 10-29-17

During our Banner Process Group Meeting on Monday, 10/30/17, we focused on the next couple of steps in our proposed BLM banner process. (Please see attached proposal for the details on those steps.)

We found that with some discussion we could all agree on the following:

- Among the 43 adults who participated in the process broad support was expressed for some kind of a BLM banner.
- Among the 43 adults who participated in the process broad support was not expressed for any specific banner design, including simply BLACK LIVES MATTER.
- The 20 youth who attended the WUSYG discussion have again expressed their support for a BLM banner.
- We all feel strongly that further education within our community is both appropriate and needed.

Six of the eight of us agreed that our personal preference is to publicly display a design that is simply BLACK LIVES MATTER for the following reasons, among others.

- There is a small but hopefully growing group of folks that understand the importance of respecting the creators of the movement and not modifying their language. If we create new wording it becomes all about us, an example of white supremacy. The reactions to the simple BLM message show how effective it has been. Black Lives Matter was created by black people and we can support them in their own words. We are supporting a cause and we have aligned with causes in the past without agreeing with everything they promote. We need to understand why just plain “Black Lives Matter” seems “inflammatory.” To edit or change the “Black Lives Matter” message is to whiten or soften it to make ourselves feel better. Changing the language on the banner would be making who more comfortable? We should not work hard to avoid offending people. We are not here to make Winchester more comfortable. As a community, this is a real prophetic voice opportunity. If it is not controversial, there is no point in doing it.
- Also 6 of the 8 of us feel strongly that the ongoing need for education should not be a reason to further delay joining the UUA and many congregations in publicly displaying a BLM banner.

Two of the eight of us have written the following:

## Black Lives Matter Banner Minority Report

Black Lives Matter (BLM) is now really the BLM movement. In 2013, it began as the use of the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter on social media after the acquittal of George Zimmerman in the shooting death of African-American teen Trayvon Martin<sup>1</sup>. It has changed since then. The minority view wants to be inclusive regarding the choice of a banner to express our support for African Americans in this country but urges that the church not choose to use the simple BLM as the slogan because it could be confused with supporting the BLM movement. Sending a different message other than BLM does not take away from those who support the BLM movement at our church. We just don't believe that the support of a movement should be intertwined with the support of black people as a church. Specifically:

- The original BLM message has evolved and has extended beyond the initial motivation, and has provided for a platform that is at least controversial for members of our church as expressed in some of the comments.
- For at least some members of the congregation, this movement is really part of a political movement which could discourage the type of rich diversity that the Church should want to encourage as part of its mission of inclusion.
- The reactions to not having a simple BLM message show how at odds supporters are with those seeking an alternative, as exemplified in the following statements arguing for it. If they are representative of the movement, it should be avoided.
  - If we create new wording it becomes all about us, an example of white supremacy.
  - To edit or change the “Black Lives Matter” message is to whiten or soften it in order to make ourselves feel better.
  - Who would be made more comfortable by changing the language on the banner?
  - We should not work hard to avoid offending people. We are not here to make Winchester more comfortable. If it is not controversial, there is not point in doing it.
- Our creating new wording for our neighbors, to soften, or make more comfortable, or not offend, or be less controversial, is inclusive and will invite them to join us in our work for people of color.

- We have aligned with causes in the past without agreeing with everything, but we have always made very sure that the alignment represents a consensus. If what we don't agree with may be inferred to us, it may cause some to not support aligning.
- One member believes that our banner, our "Main and Mystic Valley Pulpit", should be reserved for more inclusive work, support people of color by doing as they ask "Fix the White Problem", and help them in myriad other ways.
- We are simply saying BLM is not the way to work with Winchester because it is a mixed message around supporting a movement, and we want to send a clear message regarding our support of black people.
- In the current environment in which we live, we believe the more people are made to feel comfortable, the more likely it is we will be able to increase the opportunity to obtain the support of people of color from everyone else.
- We must ask ourselves if we believe that the total participation recorded during 4 pre-planned conversations that were well-advertised taking place this fall is the type of support for the BLM banner that the majority view would advocate.
- We believe there are many potential banner slogans that could be acceptable to a greater majority of our church including:
  - We believe BLM
  - Black Lives: They Matter Here.

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1 Wikipedia

## CONCLUSIONS

We all realize that 43 adults and 20 youth is not a particularly large sampling of the 200+ WUS congregants. Given that congregants have been provided multiple ways to participate and share their opinions (more than 4 discussions scheduled at various times to engage different audiences, email, anonymous comment box) over a number of months, we all have very mixed feelings about conducting a congregational survey at this time, even though this possibility was included in our original BLM banner proposal. Each of the discussions was rich and complex, where through conversation, congregants weighed in on various aspects of the issue. After these experiences, we feel that a survey would be onerous to undertake at this time and that the results obtained may not be worth the extra effort requires to implement a well thought out survey.

The idea of simply taking a congregational vote in the spring was also discussed but our group is currently more receptive to the idea of working on a special resolution about this issue as a next step. Such a resolution could serve as both a way to make explicit our joint intentions in displaying a BLM banner and a continuing form of education for us all. Two examples of resolutions of this nature that have recently been passed by other local congregations are attached.

With appreciation for this opportunity to discuss our work with you,

Steve Butterfield, Phil Coonley, Sarah Kelley, John Loewy, Gordon McIntosh, Kathy Richardson, Patty Shepard, and Sophia Sid

BLM Banner Process Group