

# APRIL 23, 2017

## Black Lives Matter (BLM) Banner Process Proposal

### WUS Background:

Our WUS Mission is “devoted to spiritual growth, social transformation, and environmental responsibility.” Over our past two church years, continuing US racism against blacks has been given attention in sermons by Rev. Heather Janules and DYM Sam Wilson, in workshops for adults and WUSYG, and in Social Action and Outreach grants. So far this work has supported “spiritual growth” and “social transformation”, especially for individual congregants. With Standing Committee support for our Black Lives Matter (BLM) proposal below, this anti-racism “spiritual growth” and “social transformation” can become much deeper and broader.

### UUA Background:

In June 2015, the below [Action of Immediate Witness](#) was passed by the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) General Assembly.

### 2015 Action of Immediate Witness

*WHEREAS, Unitarian Universalists strive for justice, equity and compassion in human relations;*  
*WHEREAS, Unitarian Universalists have a goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all;*  
*WHEREAS, allowing injustice to go unchallenged violates our principles;*  
*WHEREAS, the Black Lives Matter movement has gained powerful traction in conjunction with recent tragic events involving, in particular, police brutality and institutionalized racism that target the black community;*  
*WHEREAS, Tanisha Anderson, Rekia Boyd, Michael Brown, Miriam Carey, Michelle Cusseaux, Shelly Frey, Eric Garner, Freddie Gray, Trayvon Martin, Kayla Moore, Tamir Rice, and Tony Robinson are just a few names of people who were recently killed by the racism that exists in the United States today;*  
*WHEREAS, people of all ages and races are killed by law enforcement, yet black people ages 20-24 are seven times more likely to be killed by law enforcement;*  
*WHEREAS, mass incarceration fueled by for-profit prisons and racially biased police practices drive the disproportionate imprisonment of black and brown Americans;*  
*WHEREAS, the school-to-prison pipeline is an urgent concern because 40% of students expelled from US public schools are black and one out of three black men is incarcerated during his lifetime; and*<sup>[1]</sup>  
*WHEREAS, we must continue to support the Black Lives Matter movement and Black-led racial justice organizations;*  
*THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the 2015 General Assembly of the Unitarian Universalist Association calls member congregations to action, to become closer to a just world community, and to prevent future incidents of this nature;*  
*BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the 2015 General Assembly urges member congregations to engage in intentional learning spaces to organize for racial justice with recognition of the interconnected nature of racism coupled with systems of oppression that impact people based on class, gender identity, sexual orientation, ability and language;*  
*BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the 2015 General Assembly encourages member congregations and all Unitarian Universalists to work toward police reform and prison abolition (which seeks to replace the current prison system with a system that is more just and equitable); and*  
*BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the 2015 General Assembly recognizes that the fight for civil rights and equality is as real today as it was decades ago and urges member congregations to take initiative in collaboration with local and national organizations fighting for racial justice against the harsh racist practices to which many black people are exposed.*  
*No matter who you are, black lives matter, and a system of fair, transformative, and restorative justice that is accountable to communities is something to which each of us has a right. Unitarian Universalists and our greater society have the power to make this happen. Let's do it!*

### Footnote

<sup>[1]</sup> This sentence was edited for accuracy. The original clause, as adopted by the General Assembly, read “WHEREAS, the school-to-prison pipeline is an urgent concern because 40% of black students are expelled from US public schools and one out of three black men is incarcerated during his lifetime; and”.

### Current Challenge:

Since the June 2015 resolution, 156 UU Congregations, including scores in New England, have publicly displayed “Black Lives Matter” banners. The Vision Statement supporting our WUS Mission

Statement says under “Serving the Greater Good”: We organize meaningful advocacy, outreach, and service work to express our common commitment to social justice and environmental responsibility.”

In practice, the WUS also furthers social justice by “education” and “public witness”. The [UUA.org](https://www.uua.org)'s discussion of [Social Justice](#) asserts that “public witness” is “the spiritual practice of taking a public position in support of justice”. The WUS's display of our rainbow banner on the front lawn, in church, and in Boston's “Gay Pride” parades exemplifies “public witness” that followed much education, furthered the spiritual growth of many in the Congregation, and was part of social transformation that spread from Massachusetts to the entire nation.

### **BLM Banner Process Proposal:**

We, a group of WUS congregants (*Steve Butterfield, Phil Coonley, Sarah Kelley, John Loewy, Gordon McIntosh, Kathy Richardson, Patty Shepard, and Sophia Sid*) request the Standing Committee to endorse the following proposed plan for WUS:

1. Conduct three open conversations on the question of WUS Public Support of “Black Lives Matter”: To determine the level of interest of the “The Winchester Unitarian Society to display a Black Lives Matter banner to publicly affirm our support for the Black Lives Matter movement.” These conversations would be scheduled with the intention to provide for a broad spectrum of work and family commitments in order to optimize participation. In each of these meetings we would facilitate a discussion of the broad range of policies advocated in the most recent BLM platform, located at: <https://policy.m4bl.org/platform/> For your convenience the platform is displayed as an attachment.
2. In preparation for these conversations, we would display a variety of informal Black Lives Matter banners in a public place inside the church (such as the Symmes Room) to stimulate interest in the conversations proposed above.
3. Following these activities we anticipate the need for further educational efforts such as a panel discussion and a worship service with a theme of the Black Lives Matter movement.
4. When/if we sense broad support, we would report to Standing Committee on our conversations and other activities and ask them whether or not they want to conduct a congregational survey on our final proposal for a specific banner.
5. Before displaying a banner outside the church we would also request funds to purchase one or two banners, as is recommended to have a ready replacement if the first is vandalized.
6. Additionally before the banner is hung we would:
  - Have conversations with our local police, the executive director of WMCN, and other local congregational leaders (with Heather's assistance, of course.)
  - Do a publicity campaign including a press release and/or letters to the editor of local papers to inform them of our commitment.
  - Provide a way for folks to contact us about the banner via our website or email.

After the banner is hung, we (or other interested congregants) would continue to provide support to the process in the form of offering continuing conversations for any folks within or outside our congregation who indicate an interest in understanding our public witness position.

We welcome questions and suggestions and would be glad to have one or more of our group attend a Standing Committee or Executive Committee meeting to discuss this proposal. Given the crush of spring church activity, we would really appreciate your timely consideration of this earnest request.