

Our Racial Justice Journey



Documenting Racial Justice Work at First Universalist Church

Fall 2019 | Vol. 1 No. 1

Introducing the Racial Justice Newsletter

Welcome to the first edition of the First Universalist Racial Justice Newsletter!

Since we began our racial justice journey in 2012–2013, many new members have joined the church; we've transformed our Racial Justice Leadership Team into two teams: the Board appointed Racial Justice Change Team, and the Racial Justice Education Team; and we've woven racial justice commitments into policy, practice, and programming. We are a different church than we were seven years ago. We still have a long way to go, of course, and at times the progress feels slow, but we are moving, guided by our faith and our principles.

The purpose of this newsletter, and specifically the Racial Justice Timeline, is to orient us as an entire congregation to the work we've done these past seven years. Liz Farmer, our Administrative & Adult Ministries Assistant and the creator of this timeline, has done an outstanding job pulling together original documents, sermons, classes, policies, photos, and more, in order to create an informative and engaging story about the journey we've

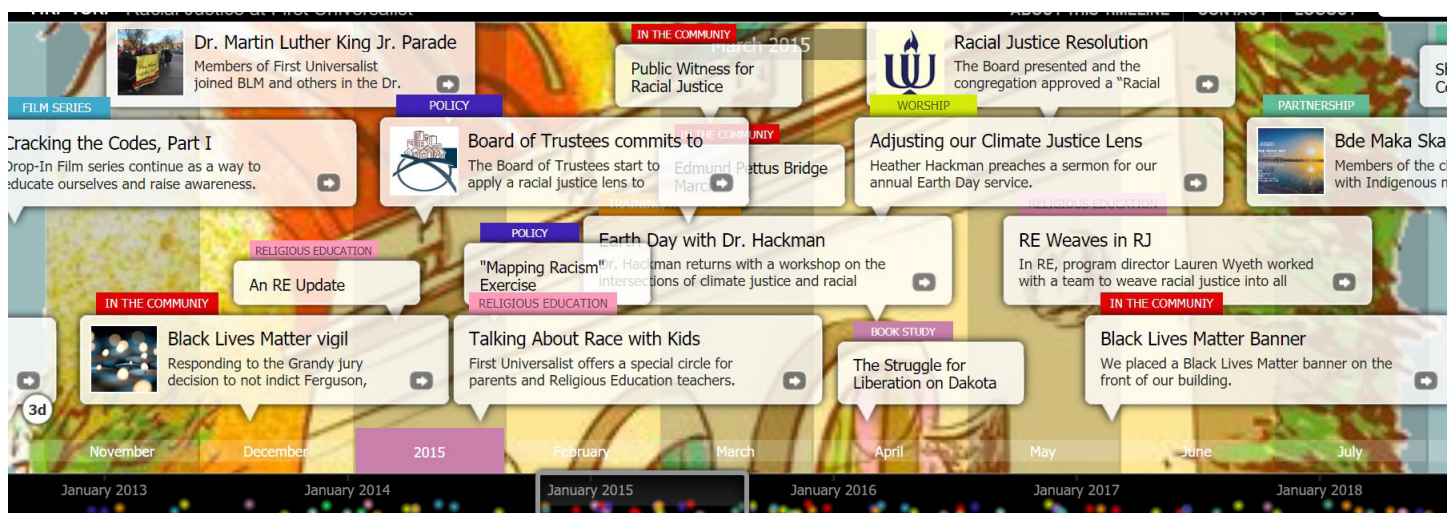
been on. We imagine this timeline being a resource for all of us at First Universalist, but also for other faith communities embarking on a similar journey to dismantle white supremacy culture and practices. Check out the timeline at: tinyurl.com/1URJtimeline

Finally, each issue will include information from/about the Racial Justice Change Team, the Racial Justice Education Team, as well as other related efforts in the church and personal reflections from church members whose lives are being fundamentally changed because of our racial justice efforts.

We want to hear from you! Do you have a story or testimony to share? Is something missing from the timeline? Let us know.

In gratitude that we are on this journey together, working to create a more fair and equitable world, guided by our faith,

Revs. Justin Schroeder and Jen Crow
Co-Senior Ministers



Check out the interactive timeline of First Universalist's Racial Justice Journey at: tinyurl.com/1URJtimeline

How the Change Team Came to Be

by Members of the Change Team

Challenging racism at an institutional level is a big task, but the purpose of the Change Team is to do just that: look at how existing rules and structures reinforce white supremacy culture within First Universalist, and recommend changes.

In 2012, ministers preached a number of sermons on race, racism and whiteness, which informally — but intentionally — launched First Universalist into a greater institutional commitment to racial justice work. Staff worked with consultant Heather Hackman, Ph.D. to create a new paradigm, with racial justice as a core tenet of our faith. A multiracial Racial Justice Leadership Team (RJLT) was formed to help launch and lead the effort, and the first of five 24-hour trainings for staff and congregants was offered by Dr. Hackman.

Over the next four years, the RJLT offered a variety of learning opportunities and trainings. Staff and lay leadership launched the Faithful Action Council, incorporated more voices of People of Color and Indigenous (POCI) folks into worship, and became active with Black Lives Matter. The Board and other groups began using a racial justice lens in decision making.

As our racial justice efforts expanded, two things became clear: First, our efforts needed to be firmly anchored in the governance structure of the church. Second, white supremacy within that very structure, and within our culture, history, and walls needed to be named and called on in order to do this work effectively.

After wrestling with those two questions, the Board determined in 2017 that the RJLT should be “split” into two groups. The first group would continue to focus on training and educational programming. That group became today’s Racial Justice Education Team (RJET). The second was the Change Team, responsible to the Board of Trustees, and charged with examining how white supremacy informs our church policies, practices, and procedures. As a committee of the Board, the Change Team has the structural authority it needs to effectively review institutional racism as it lives in the work of our church.

The Change Team is composed of current and former Board members, former members of the RJLT, and congregants who applied to serve in the fall of 2017. Current Change Team members are: Richard Spratt,


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Karin Wille, Ben Miles, Sarah Hedge, Kayci Rush, Keven Ambrus, and Justin Schroeder. Lillie Pang also served during 2018-2019.

Thus far, the Change Team has held listening sessions with adults and youth of color, recommended hiring a full time minister of color (resulting in the hiring of Rev. Karen Hutt), and made budgetary and policy recommendations to the Board.

Over time, the Change Team plans to develop, implement, and monitor a process to set clear standards and accountability for First Universalist’s commitment to racial justice at all levels of the organization. Doing so will enable us to fully live into our visionary goals of being “a multi-racial, multi-cultural, and intergenerational faith community of mutual caring and support” and “a faith community that acts with humility, bravery, and compassion to create a racially just and sustainable world.” To learn more, contact Change Team Chair Richard Spratt.

Richard Spratt
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The screenshot shows a digital interface for an interactive timeline. At the top, it says 'August 2017'. Below that is a blue tab labeled 'POLICY'. A white box with a drop shadow contains the text: 'Racial Justice Leadership Changes', 'The Racial Justice Leadership Team is reformed into two teams: the Change Team:'. To the right of this box is a small blue arrow icon pointing right. On the far right edge of the screenshot, there is a partially visible white box with the text 'Gi' and 'Re'.

The interactive timeline marks the shift to two teams: the Racial Justice Education Team and the Change Team.



Racial Justice Education Team (RJET) 101

by Lark Weller

What is RJET?

Through education, advocacy, self-reflection, and relationship-building, the Racial Justice Education Team (RJET) offers educational opportunities for congregants to interrogate white supremacy and deepen racial justice in their lives, wherever they are in their racial justice journey. RJET is made up primarily of congregant volunteers. Arif Mamdani, our new Director of Membership and Adult Ministries, is the staff liaison to (and Co-Chair of) RJET.

What does RJET do? How does it decide what to offer?

RJET provides education and training to the congregation on the historical and current impacts of systemic racism and white privilege through a variety of offerings, including “Racial Justice and our UU Faith” workshops, drop-in racial justice film series, book discussion groups, and extended series like “Brave Connections: Interrupting Bias and Systemic Racism,” and “White Privilege: Let’s Talk—A Resource for Transformational Dialogue.”

As it identifies content to offer the congregation, RJET keeps several guiding principles in mind:

1. RJET develops and invites educational resources for the church each year that will keep the congregation learning, growing, and acting (grounded in evolving wisdom) as individuals, as a congregation, and as an organization.
2. We look for opportunities that help the congregation pay attention to personal, interpersonal, institutional, and systemic levels of racial awareness.



RJET screens “Talking Black” in August, 2019.

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*“We seek to facilitate
continued congregational
growth, and to keep expanding
our growing edges outward.”*

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3. We seek to facilitate continued congregational growth, and to keep expanding our growing edges outward.

4. We seek to provide content that interrupts dynamics that prioritize whiteness in what has historically been a white congregation, while also ensuring that offerings meaningfully serve our increasingly diverse congregation.

5. We recognize that many intersecting factors (e.g., class, gender, sexuality, ability) can impact racial dynamics and outcomes, and seek to provide content that acknowledges these interrelated dynamics.

Interested in helping RJET meet its goals?

There are a few ways we could use help (and likely many others that haven’t occurred to us yet, so let us know where you see possible improvements to our work!)

» Join RJET this year! We welcome congregants interested in serving on RJET. We generally meet one evening each month, and several of us plan and organize between meetings to keep moving the work forward. We are particularly eager to welcome people of color to the group. Given the work we are doing, we hope this work will benefit from as many perspectives as possible.

» Help host and facilitate a film screening. We will be showing films each month, and welcome help facilitating these screenings and related discussions. We seek facilitators with experience navigating the complexities of—and typical triggers and reactions to—conversations about race and white privilege.

» Help us see what we’re missing. Reach out to an RJET co-chair (see below) if you see a blindspot in the development or delivery of RJET’s educational content. We need help catching our shortcomings! To learn more, please contact either RJET Co-Chair.

Arif Mamdani
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Lark Weller
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Congregant Reflection: Justice Work Beyond Our Walls

Excerpted from an email from Alison McGhee, church member

My ministers,

Have your ears been burning? I've been talking to you in my mind for a long time. While I don't do a lot in church beyond Sunday services, your words and spirit are with me daily. Here are a few things in my own life that are influenced by our shared mission.

Two years ago, in response to a new "racial issues graduation requirement" at Metro State University, I created and taught a creative writing class focused on race and identity in the Twin Cities. I agonized over how to teach it without being disrespectful and foolish, and eventually decided to be open about my worries. On the first day, I said that, having been raised white, there was no way I wasn't racist, and that I'd be working the rest of my life to dismantle it in myself and our society. This was my truth. In the year before I began teaching the class, the honest way we wrestled with racism at church was powerful and helpful.

I make myself have hard conversations about race and politics. When I return to the Adirondacks where I grew up and I go to the diner with my dad, I talk with his friends honestly and lovingly. These are men I've known my whole life. I respect their commitment to family and friends. They would drop everything to help a neighbor in need. Over time, we have learned to talk calmly and openly about our often differing beliefs.

Our church is about the power of love and strength to chart a new future. I carry that belief, and your beautiful smiling faces, with me wherever I go. Thank you for being such a force of good in the world.

Love,
Alison

Share your racial justice journey—or reflections from events on the timeline—for the next newsletter! Email Liz Farmer at liz@firstuniv.org with questions or your story.

Upcoming Events

AT FIRST UNIVERSALIST CHURCH

People of Color and Indigenous People Circle

Sundays, Oct. 20, Nov. 24, Dec. 15, Jan. 26, Feb. 23, March 15, April 19, May 17, 1–3 p.m.

"Get Out" film screening & discussion

Thurs., Oct. 24, 6:30–9 p.m. & Sun., Oct. 27, 1–3:30 p.m.

Brave Connections: Interrupting Bias and Systemic Racism - A Spiritual Deepening Circle

Tuesdays, Oct. 15, 22, 29, Nov. 5, 12 & 19, 7–8:30 p.m.

Racial Justice and Our UU Faith Workshop

Saturdays, Nov. 9 & 16, 9:30–11:30 a.m.

"Ice Box" film screening & discussion

Sun., Nov. 17, 1–3:30 & Thurs., Nov. 21, 6:30–9 p.m.

"Black Panther" film screening & discussion

Sun., Jan. 26, 1–3:30 p.m. & Thurs. Jan. 30, 6:30–9 p.m.

IN THE COMMUNITY

The Harper-Jordan Memorial Symposium, Wednesday, Oct. 30–Saturday, Nov. 2, responds to a longing on the part of many Black Unitarian Universalists to more fully understand where we have been, who we are now, and how we hope to live out our Unitarian Universalism as Black people. The four-day gathering includes a welcome reception, interactive plenaries, worship experiences that speak directly to our onsite learning, networking and community-building opportunities, and a worship service on Saturday morning at Unity Church-Unitarian.

The Symposium is open to everyone, and we are prioritizing spaces for Black people, Indigenous people and People of Color. Learn more and register online at blacklivesuu.com/about.

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A BLACK UU
THEOLOGY**
THE HARPER-JORDAN
MEMORIAL SYMPOSIUM

