

## North Parish Black Lives Matter Banner- FAQ

### **Q: What is “Black Lives Matter”?**

A: Black Lives Matter (BLM) is an international activist movement, originating in the African American community, that campaigns against violence toward black people. BLM regularly organizes protests around the deaths of black people in killings by law enforcement officers, and broader issues of racial profiling, police brutality, and racial inequality in the United States criminal justice system.

In 2013, the movement began with 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. Black Lives Matter became nationally recognized for its street demonstrations following the 2014 deaths of two African Americans: Michael Brown—that resulted in protests and unrest in Ferguson—and Eric Garner in New York City.

Since the Ferguson protests, participants in the movement have demonstrated against the deaths of numerous other African Americans by police actions or while in police custody, including those of Tamir Rice, Eric Harris, Walter Scott, Jonathan Ferrell, Sandra Bland, Samuel DuBose and Freddie Gray. In the Summer of 2015, Black Lives Matter began to publicly challenge politicians—including politicians in the 2016 United States presidential election—to state their positions on BLM issues. The overall Black Lives Matter movement, however, is a decentralized network and has no formal hierarchy or structure. *(From Wikipedia)*

### **Q: What has been the Unitarian Universalist response to the Black Lives Matter movement?**

1. Delegates at the 2015 General Assembly passed a resolution in support of the Black Lives Matter movement which said, in part:

*...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;*

*...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.*

2. The Standing on the Side of Love campaign, the UUA umbrella campaign that supports and amplifies local justice making efforts, states:

*We must continue to support legislative efforts to address racial inequity including an end to the militarization of police forces throughout the country, support for the passage of the End Racial Profiling Act (ERPA), and specific policies to stop mass incarceration.*

*As actions and organizing for racial justice continue to grow across the country, we consider this to be an urgent and exciting time for organizing for racial justice- within our congregations and communities.*

**Q: Why hang a banner?**

A: One of our UU ministers explains it well:

*To display the sign, Black Lives Matter, is an act of cultural resistance, of public witness. This action is a symbol of something larger, and a spiritual practice as well—focus, attention, and steadiness. The aim and desire is to keep the spotlight on the complex set of issues affecting Black people in this country, dating from slavery through to 2015. Not since the Civil Rights Era has there been such a sustained commitment to make broad change. Black Lives Matter is a statement about that renewed commitment, a vow to keep looking, watching, and struggling. -- Rev. Louise Green, Minister for Congregational Life, River Road UU Church, Bethesda MD*

We hang the banner to acknowledge that none of us are free until we are all free. My liberation is bound up in your liberation.

**Q: But don't all lives matter? Why are we lifting up Black Lives especially?**

A: Black people are at risk from systems in our society that devalue or endanger them—mass incarceration, economic inequality, housing discrimination, inequality of educational opportunity, and others. The devaluing of black lives is a legacy of slavery and Jim Crow, systems that were in place for hundreds of years in our country. If your neighbor's house were burning, you would not tell the fire department that all houses matter. You would want them to direct their attention to the house in danger. So it is with black people both in the US and globally. The house is on fire and we need to act!

**Q: Why is this happening now? Haven't we made great strides toward equality?**

A: In a book recently published by our own (UU) Beacon Press, Rev. Dr. William Barber, an important civil rights leader in our time, explains that throughout our U.S. history, strides toward racial justice and equality have provoked an intense backlash. We are currently in a time of backlash, a time when those who believe in racial justice and equality need to be visible and vocal as we stand in the public square. In the words of 1960s Civil Rights leader Ella Baker, "We who believe in freedom cannot rest until it comes."