

Jesse Rodriguez-Hammond
2217 Leness Lane
Crest Hill, IL 60403

11/16/2016

Unitarian Universalist Association
Board of Trustees
24 Farnsworth Street
Boston, MA 02210-1409

Dear Board of Trustees,

I have been a member of a Universalist Unitarian church since 2006 and have been involved, at some point with UU Churches in Boston, Lincoln, Omaha going back over 23 years -- I feel it my obligation to voice my concern and officially make a complaint. I received the minutes of the October 14&15, 2016 meeting where it was published that the Black Lives Matter group within the UUA would be receiving 5.3 million dollars. I am both outraged and disappointed that we are singling out one group and forgetting another, and both with relatively the same plight.

One month ago, my husband, who happens to be Hispanic, and I started the process of adopting our foster son, also Hispanic. Our foster son has never been to a UU church before and he expressed his doubts in god and organized religion. I explained to him that our church was different than most because our number one principle is "The inherent worth and dignity of every person". After coming with us for a month, last week my brown, Hispanic, son asked me "So, why do some of the people wear Black Lives Matter buttons"? It was a naive statement and made with no malice behind it. This is even more ironic and infuriating since only the white congregants in our church wear the pins. At any rate, I had no words for him. What was going through my mind was "I got him to go to our church because I told him that we believe in the inherent worth and dignity of every person knowing, I lied to him because [I feel] that our church has singled out one group as more important than another". This only amplified my frustration when I saw that the UUA was giving such a large amount of money to Black Lives Matter.

Yes, I understand and know the statistics. As of July 2016, 28 percent (123) black and 18 percent (80) were Hispanics who were fatally shot by a police officer. [and] Yes, as a researcher, I know the ethnic makeup of the US is 17.6 percent Hispanic and 13.3 percent Black (July 2015 US Census data). However, if we are talking percentages – Native Americans only make up 0.8 percent of the population, they make up 1.9 percent of all police killings. I understand that there is disparity. But does that diminish the inherent worth and dignity of my son and husband?

As a parent and husband of Hispanic men, I understand the fear of prejudice. I know that when my son walks out of the house, he could be targeted, he could be asked for his papers and without them he can be detained and threatened with deportation even though he was born in the United States to Puerto Rican parents, who are born citizens. I know this scenario all too well, last year, my husband was

detained on a trip because of his name. The fear is real for all of us and I am even more fearful given recent political events.

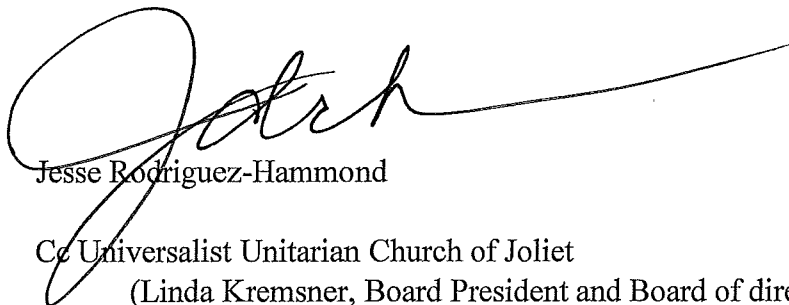
Please do not get me wrong. I understand the purpose of the movement, but by its name alone, it is not an inclusive movement. By its name alone it segregates the UUA Family into the "Black Lives Matter" and gives the perception of, "let's forget about the others", including my brown son and husband.

This is how I see it. When we became a welcoming congregation, we were open to Lesbian, Gay, Transgender, and bisexuals. We didn't say we were a welcoming Gay only Church or a Lesbian only Church -- because we aren't exclusive we are inclusive and when we weren't inclusive enough we added the Questioning Plus. Again, we believe in the inherent worth and dignity of everyone. This is such an important principle that we made it the first one.

Having said this, I understand that the UUA has already made up its mind and I don't expect the UUA to back out on a commitment. However, I would like some guidance from the UUA as to what to tell my son, husband, and the other Hispanic families in my congregation when they see the Black Lives Matter buttons and they hear that 5.3 million dollars was spent to help one ethnic group over them. I need to understand, so that I can explain to them why we say "Black Lives Matter" instead of just "Lives Matter". As the vice president on my local UU Church board, I honestly don't know what to say. Please, tell me what to tell them, when they come to church and put money in the offering plate and make a commitment of time and money to the church -- a church that says they believe in the inherent worth and dignity of all, yet by the church's actions, has chosen one ethnic group over another. Do their 80 lives lost this year not matter? Again, given the current political climate, things are only going to get worse for the Hispanic community; when they are faced with the real threat that 11 million of their friends and families face deportation and we haven't even mentioned the casualties suffered in the Native American community.

Thank you for taking the time to read my letter and listen to my concern and frustration. The UU Church has always been my home where I have always felt welcome, sadly, I am kind of feeling excluded right now. Thank you in advance for any help and understanding you can give me.

Very Sincerely Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jesse", with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Jesse Rodriguez-Hammond

Cc Universalist Unitarian Church of Joliet
(Linda Kremsner, Board President and Board of directors)
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