

In October 2016 the UUA Board of Trustees, based upon a presentation made by the Black Lives of Unitarian Universalism (BLUU) organizing collective, made a historic decision to fund BLUU in the amount of \$5.3 million. In this decision the question of “ARE WE READY?” was answered loudly in the affirmative.

Prior to the beginning of the October 2016 Board of Trustees meeting, Revs. Hope Johnson and Josh Pawelek expertly guided the Board through a series of exercises aimed at reflecting on the Board’s commitment and vision in regards to Anti-Racism, Anti-Oppression, Multiculturalism explorations of our systems of privilege, power, and oppression, as well as how to go from ideology to making it real in the Board’s internal work processes. This reflection set a tone in which the BLUU proposal was experienced the following day.

What is important to understand is that this decision was not the beginning (nor end) of our commitment to marginalized communities within Unitarian Universalism, but rather the culmination of a discussion that has been going in many different places by many different UUs...conversations begun in church basements and parking lots, in ballrooms and convention centers, in homes and at actions, in coffee shops and at coffee hour, in boardrooms and bedrooms, in private and in public...the question has been “ARE WE READY?”

Ready to envision the beloved community into reality, ready to commit to transformation which acknowledges that change makes us uncomfortable and yet we must stay the course, ready to demand accountable leadership and mutually accountable responsibility, ready to boldly lead our faith into new visions of ministry and racial justice. Below are just a few of the most recent mileposts along this decades-long journey.

- 2015
  - “Walking back to the hotel from a UUA Board meeting, Trustee Donna Harrison turned to me and said 'Chris, what do you think of the idea of making good on the financial commitment that was made but never delivered during the UU Black Empowerment movement of the 1960s?' Until that moment, I had never even thought it was in our ability to revisit that



commitment and it opened a wide ranging discussion on what that could look like and how transformative it could be for Unitarian Universalism." – **Trustee Christina Rivera**

- "Black Lives Convening in Cleveland: Black UUs discuss, rage, cry, and laugh. Centering discussions are about our faith and the place of Unitarian Universalism in the Movement for Black Lives. Difficult conversations range from alienation within UUism to doubts about whether our congregations are up to the challenge of supporting truly transformative racial justice work. What emerges are UUs who will become the BLUU organizing collective and a recommitment to our faith as well as dedication to creating a growing edge of our faith via BLUU." – **Lena Gardner and Leslie Mac, BLUU**
- "General Assembly delegates...overwhelmingly approved an Action of Immediate Witness entitled 'Support the Black Lives Matter Movement' ...but before they raised their voting cards, they took an awkward and confusing tour through Robert's Rules of Order" – **UU World 6-29-2015**
- "We must continue to support the Black Lives Matter movement and Black-led racial justice organizations," the adopted resolution says. "The 2015 General Assembly calls member congregations to action, in order to become closer to a just world community; 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; encourages member congregations and all Unitarian Universalists to work towards police reform and prison abolition, which seeks to replace the current prison system with a system that is more just and equitable; and . . .



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 many black people are exposed to.” – **Action of Immediate Witness GA 2015**

- 2016
  - "My 'aha' moment was early last year. I was at the ministerial installation of a dear friend in Florida with a minister of color who I have known for a long time, and we have connections from 35 years ago. The minister made a comment about his home hospitality and parking in the host's driveway late at night and letting himself into the host's home. The host was white, and the neighborhood was white, and Florida has a "stand your ground" law...which all gave him concerns. Although oppression and marginalization is something I have been aware of and trained on for many years, it wasn't until that moment that it became very real and frightening to me. When someone I know and care deeply about and with whom I have a very long connection is afraid to simply 'be,' and has to be constantly vigilant about their personal safety, it's way past time for action. Because I believe that Unitarian Universalism is a life-saving, life-giving faith, and there are so many people dear to me, supporting the vision of BLUU is the right action for me." – **Trustee Denise Rimes**
  - "The moment that made me realize that we are ready for this commitment was when a teen of color from my youth group shared a story of being arrested in the middle of school. He had been wearing black and took his black phone out of a backpack and an old woman called the police, assuming that the device was a weapon. Hearing his story of being dragged out of school during finals due to racial stereotyping brought





the civil issue into my home and therefore made Black Lives Matter an incredibly important and personal movement. Voting to further fund BLUU was just one way to support civil equality, and I cannot wait to do even more." – **Board of Trustees Youth Observer Bailey Saddlemire**

- "For me, the pivotal moment was the closing worship at GA 2016. I had learned early in my UU experience that the UUA had defaulted on a commitment to the Black Empowerment movement of the 1960s, resulting from the bankrupting of the UUA's unrestricted endowment during a period of inadequate governance and financial controls. Rev. Bill Sinkford's powerful message in worship at GA, in combination with Rev. Nancy Ladd's, prepared me to be swept away by the power and beauty of the closing worship lead by the members of the Black Lives of UU Organizing Collective, 'We Ready-We Comin.' Since that time, I have wished every current, former, and potential UU could have experienced the power of our movement when we are *truly open* to embrace each other, in all our rich diversity." – **Financial Advisor Lucia Santini Field**
- "At the end of the closing GA 2016 worship service, a moving, edgy, celebration brought to us by BLUU, I was walking down a hallway, basking in the afterglow. I thought about half a century of trial and error, of old betrayals and bold experiments, and I realized that the ministry BLUU brought to GA 2016 achieved the balance between the pastoral and the prophetic that makes for sustainable change. I also realized that BLUU's ministry was deeply grounded in Unitarian Universalism and in a passionate commitment to its future. I knew then that BLUU presents us with a rare opportunity to invest boldly in becoming a more effective partner in building the Beloved Community." – **Trustee Rob Eller-Isaacs**



- BLUU creates an experience track at GA 2016, one which brings together UUs seeking to further our commitment to racial justice while providing space for White, Black, and non-Black People of Color to express the challenges they face while engaged with this work.
- Responsive Resolution passed GA 2016 (excerpt)
  - ...the Black Lives Matter AIW [of 2015] has been frequently referenced as satisfactory proof of our progress towards racial justice;
  - ...the Board of Trustees of the Unitarian Universalist Association, in their 2016 report to the Assembly, called upon the Association to “find the will and the way to do a better job” in the fight for racial justice;
  - ...Therefore, be it resolved that we hold ourselves accountable to less witness and more action;
  - ...be it finally resolved that the Board of Trustees shall issue a multi-year report on the board, staff, congregational, and denominational responses to Black Lives Matter, and particularly examine the year-to-year growth in these responses, at General Assembly 2017, 2018, and 2019.
- October 2016
  - "My commitment to support BLUU came in the context of experiencing the BLUU organizing collective representatives during their presentation at our October 2016 board meeting. Their commitment, their clarity around BLUU-UU history, including unhealed hurts, and their visionary outlook on how to make BLUU and UU whole in relation to race were compelling. I pray that in additions to dollars, we will support them with generosity of spirit and trust, that we will be their

faithful ‘cloud of witnesses’ (Hebrews 12:1).” – **Trustee Dorothy Holmes**

- “Today, the UUA Board affirmed support for Black Lives of UU with a motion allocating \$300K to address our short term organizing needs, AND a commitment to meeting our long term request for financial support in the amount of \$5 million. This moving act of solidarity followed a stirring presentation to the Board by Black Lives of UU Organizing Collective members Leslie Mac and Rev. Carlton E. Smith. We acknowledge those that came before us in the struggle for self determination as Black UUs, and we are overcome with emotion at this historic moment for our faith.” – **Black Lives of Unitarian Universalism**

All of these experiences, pivotal moments, and many more than could possibly be listed, led the Board of Trustees and BLUU to say, with one voice, “Yes, we are ready!” Those transformative moments brought each of us to our own yes. In expressing our support for, and our solidarity with Black Lives of Unitarian Universalism, the UUA Board is embracing our obligation to help our Association be an increasingly effective partner in working to build and to be the Beloved Community.

