

Living the Pledge

UUs organize to end racism

Dear Southern Region UU,

The presence of racism in our nation and its people has been long known and understood in the Southern U.S. The permeating effects of racism are a tragic weight upon the lives of so many; descendants of the enslaved, the commercial beneficiaries of the slaveholding system, the ongoing keepers of systems of oppression have left a deep, yet unhealed toll on all people. Unitarian Universalist congregations have a leadership role to play in dismantling racism in their communities. But to do that, they must have knowledge, skills, and opportunity.

With your support and the support of UU congregations throughout the Southern Region, we have the opportunity, through the first region-wide Chalice Lighters call, to offer every Southern UU congregation the training and resources to engage their communities in the work to end racism.

Genesis of Living the Pledge

In 2014, in response to the rash of deaths of African Americans at the hands of the police, First Unitarian Universalist Church of Richmond modified and adopted the Birmingham Pledge, a personal commitment developed in Birmingham, Alabama, to work to end racism. The pledge asks each who affirm it to make it personal. On the first day, it was shared with the congregation, hundreds made the commitment. But, fighting racism is challenging and requires tools adequate to set a new standard of resistance to a long entrenched social disease. So, we asked ourselves, how do we live out the pledge?



Signing the Pledge to End Racism at First UU Richmond

The Workshops

Our response to that “how” was developing a twelve-hour workshop-based program called *Living the Pledge to End Racism*, which focuses on incorporating the pledge into one’s own life, the life of the congregation, and the Greater Richmond area. It is a scalable program, customizable to every UUA community of the South, and quickly going beyond. First Unitarian Universalist, as a “resource congregation,” wants to offer this training to you at minimal cost, so you can bring it to cities and towns throughout the South to allow new healing and wholeness in our communities.

Living the Pledge to End Racism is much more than a workshop for passive participants. It's a comprehensive program designed to build leaders through small group interactions, reflection, self-study, didactic presentations, and most importantly, a focus on making real commitments to become involved in the work to end racism in their community.

Comments from *Living the Pledge* workshop participants

As a result of this workshop, I feel even more strongly about building lasting, personal relationships with people of color. I have, through this experience, come to a better understanding of what true diversity means and how important it is for my whole life, not just my church life, to be diverse and open to many ethnicities, cultures, abilities, etc.

It's inspired me to be more diligent in speaking up for what I want to see - in the congregation and in the world.

This was a very well thought out class and I very much appreciate the time, energy and thought that went into it. It was motivating, educational and challenging. Keep it up, I hope the whole congregation attends!

So much gratitude! These sessions were clearly well planned and conveyed so much information with enough room for the sharing of personal experiences. Thank you. I'm really looking forward to October's workshop.

Thanks for putting this together - the small group/ large group interactions were great, and having the small group facilitators was a great way to add even more depth for those who were able to serve as facilitators.

I was so impressed with the plans and the skill with which they were carried out. I continue to reflect on much that was presented in the sessions. I feel good about the Richmond Pledge and its promise for the future, both of our congregation and of the city.

The Model of LTP

The *Living the Pledge to End Racism* program is designed using a leadership development model so participants gain skills and develop competence in not only talking about racism, but in facilitating discussions about race, and then working together to organize *Living the Pledge* workshops for people throughout their community. Instead of just talking about racism, we're developing knowledgeable, passionate leaders who can do something to address it. The *Pledge* strengthens local antiracism efforts, brings congregations together with other faith communities with like commitments, and creates teams of people involved on the local level in making change in their own communities.



Richmond Pledge Leaders and Facilitators (left around the table)
Leigh Ann Luscan, Annette Marquis, Sharon Amoss, Leon Andrews, Jim Armstrong, Ryan Evans, Heather Greenwell, Reggie Henderson, Wendy DeGroat, Anita Lee, Barbara Henderson, Candice Evans (Not pictured: Anne Joseph, Dorothy Hollahan)

The *Living the Pledge to End Racism* program includes:

- an organizers' guide
- a training module for small group facilitators
- six two-hour workshop modules
- facilitators workbooks
- participant workbooks
- online resources for participant pre-work
- commitment cards
- *I'm Living the Pledge* buttons
- ongoing support and consultation, as needed

We started *Living the Pledge to End Racism* in Richmond and almost immediately, our sister congregation in Glen Allen (Unitarian Universalist Community Church) heard of it and asked if their members could be a part of the training. Soon, with our support, they offered a workshop in their congregation. In addition, people from other faith communities in Richmond have become involved in our *Living the Pledge* efforts. A General Assembly program in 2016, led to the participation of 10 more UU congregations as far away as San Diego. The response to the concept and the repeated need to offer the class have happily filled our capacity. We have asked, how can we support more?

To the South

With your generous donation and those of hundreds, and hopefully, even thousands, of other Chalice Lighters throughout the Southern Region, the *Pledge to End Racism* program organizers from First UU Church of Richmond will be available to provide curriculum and consultation to fifty (50) or more congregations in organizing the *Pledge to End Racism* programs for their communities. This will include how to develop *Living the Pledge to End Racism* workshops, select and train small group facilitators, and promote the program in your congregation and to your larger community – all with the goal of building a community-wide movement to end racism.

A Vision

By spreading the *Pledge to End Racism* program throughout the South, Unitarian Universalist congregations can have a recognizable impact on the rise in racial tensions and division and can play an essential part in building stronger communities imbued with justice, equity, and compassion.

Conclusion

How fitting is it for the first Southern Regional Chalice Lighter's call to be used to confront the racism that has so long plagued this area? How wonderful will it be to see our congregations generate waves of personal pledges, rooted in the strength of religious congregations?

We can't do this without your help. Your donation and the support of your congregation through a share-the-plate offering can make this happen.

Please join with us in leading the way toward healing for other faith communities in our land.

How to Donate Online

Donate online with this link:

[Chalice Lighters Pledge to End Racism Donation Form](#)

Visa, MasterCard, American Express, JCB, Discover, and Diners Club accepted

By check

Make a check out to *First UU of Richmond – Chalice Lighters* (be sure to include “Chalice Lighters in the “Payable to” or memo lines.

Mail to:

First Unitarian Universalist Church
1000 Blanton Ave.
Richmond, VA 23221

Submitted by:

Anita Lee
Annette Marquis
Rev. Jeanne Pupke
First Unitarian Universalist Church of Richmond



The Richmond Pledge

I BELIEVE that every person has worth as an individual. I BELIEVE that every person is entitled to dignity and respect, regardless of race or color. I BELIEVE that every thought and every act of racial prejudice is harmful; if it is my thought or act, then it is harmful to me as well as to others.

Therefore, from this day forward I WILL strive daily to eliminate racial prejudice from my thoughts and actions. I WILL discourage racial prejudice by others at every opportunity. I WILL treat all people with dignity and respect; I WILL commit to working with others to transform the Greater Richmond region into a place that treats people of all races, ethnicities, and cultures with justice, equity, and compassion, and I WILL strive daily to honor this pledge, knowing that the world will be a better place because of my effort.

For more information about the Richmond Pledge, visit richmondpledge.org
or contact pledgetoendracism@gmail.com