

Follen Responds to Racism – Congregational Meeting, May 11, 2017
Advancing Follen Church as an Antiracist Congregation
Banners and Beyond:
A Moderated, Structured Dialogue

Forty-one people attended this meeting. Rev. Claire opened the meeting with a prayer.

History of the Resolution Process

Maggie Herzig began the meeting by giving a history of how the FRR group first started. She reported that there was a meeting in December with Ann Engelhart and Alex Bromley from Parish Board and Program Council after some Follen members had talked with Claire and FRR members about wanting a Black Lives Matter banner. The focus of that meeting was on what an appropriate process would be for congregational engagement on this issue. Notes are available. In January there was a structured conversation where people talked about their vision for being an antiracist congregation and having a banner.

The FRR team then met to discuss the importance of conveying to the congregation that this initiative was about more than a banner. It was also about education, outreach, communication, and making sure that if there was a banner it would reflect the congregation. This led to the drafting of the resolution. (Everyone at the meeting had a copy of the resolution.)

Members of the FRR team met with the leadership at Follen as well as with action teams to talk about the resolution and to hear feedback. Claire and others met with police from the Lexington Police Department to talk about our plans for a banner. A couple of weeks ago, the resolution was in the newsletter (hopefully people had a chance to look at it). After Program Council met with members of FRR, they unanimously supported the resolution. A congregation-wide meeting was held on May 4 (last week) regarding the resolution. A panel of three spoke: Bernie Harleston and Lex Johnson from Follen and Lori Kenschaft from First Parish UU Arlington. (Lori spoke about her church's experience with the banner.) [See notes and videos of that meeting.](#)

The previous Monday several members of the FRR team met with the Parish Board, which amended the resolution to indicate that Parish Board would oversee the banner and be the "final sign off" on content. They then voted to support the resolution.

Resolution Next Steps

Maggie said that tonight is a time for everyone here to speak (unless they choose to pass) and then at Annual Meeting on May 24 there will be a written ballot vote (along with proxy/absentee ballots available before hand from Sarah Garner), and the resolution will be considered passed with a vote of 2/3 in favor.

Maggie told the group that the FRR team consisted of Tempe Goodhue, Marcia Butman, Susanne Intriligator, Nancy McCarthy, Harriet Peterson, Catherine Rielly, Wilma Ronco, Robin Tartaglia, Maggie Herzig, Kathy Hoben, and Nancy Alloway and indicated that any of the group would be happy to answer questions people may have about the Resolution. She stated that Ann Schaffler, and Lisa and Hill Snelling have been in the email loop with the group and also know a lot about the resolution.

Maggie, in her role as moderator for the evening, presented the agenda and indicated that this evening we will spend some time talking about the “why” of this resolution and the “what.”

Meeting Agenda and Agreements

She then explained the item on the agenda after those presentations: to show slides of some sample banners installed by other UU churches. She said that the possibility of including this in the meeting presented a dilemma. On the one hand, the resolution is not just about a banner, it’s about much more – RE, outreach, action. However, a lot has been said about the banner to date and we know it continues to be on people’s minds. The FRR folks thought that a slide show of various banners, put together by Tempe Goodhue and Catherine Rielly, might help people get a clearer sense of possibilities for Follen. Maggie assured people that Parish Board will put together a task force who will help determine what will be on the banner, size, etc., and the Parish Board would approve any banner before it is displayed.

Everyone agreed with the proposed Communication Agreement Maggie presented for the evening.

Why Do We Need This Resolution?

Robin Tartaglia then presented her thoughts on “why” the resolution:

In June 2015 she went to Portland for GA and heard Cornell West and John Lewis speak. The GA passed an Action of immediate witness (which is referred to in a Whereas clause of Follen’s Resolution). She was inspired and wanted to do something more. She came back to Follen and started a book group, which Don Snodgrass co-chairs with her. (List of books read is on table). Reading taught her a lot. She believes that this resolution is the right thing for us to do as a church. Robin grew up during the Civil Rights movement of 50s and 60s and watched searing images on TV of dogs attacking marchers, including children, and children facing hatred on the faces of adults as they tried to enter school buildings. These images stayed with her. She believes it is our duty and responsibility as a UU church to pass this resolution. She stated that racism is the belief that people of a different color/race, are inferior. This racism is in our Constitution and in our voter ID laws. Robin also talked about the fact that our prison population is majority African American and the lifelong impact that prison has on a person, i.e., after one has spent time in prison one loses basic civil rights.

In her own family there was white privilege – the GI bill, educational opportunities, access to mortgages. She stated that Bryan Stevenson’s book, *Just Mercy*, is scarier to read than anything Stephen King ever wrote. White people are now seeing and hearing what black citizens have always known – it is life threatening to be black.

So, what can we do? We can educate ourselves and our children about the history of black people in our country. We need to actively teach against racism and actively commit to raising antiracist children. She asked us to think back to Charles Follen and his work as an abolitionist. Our faith calls us to seek justice. She quoted Bernie Harleston who said at last week’s meeting: “The Black Lives Matter movement is to me a political agenda aimed at making real the expectation that white Americans will view black Americans as equally valuable. It represents the pursuit of civic equality for and human respect of black Americans. I fully support this mission.”

What Is In the Resolution?

Harriet Peterson then talked about the resolution itself. She briefly reviewed the resolution (all had a copy). There are two sections – the Whereas section and the Be It Resolved section.

Realities tell us black lives matter less. We see this in the mass incarceration and police shootings of black citizens. We need policy reform in the US. We as UUs are being called by the UU General Assembly's Action of Immediate Witness from 2015 and renewed in 2016. Black Lives of UU is calling us to do antiracist work – calling us all to live our UU principals.

What will Follen do? Harriet referred everyone to the resolution and indicated that it is consistent with our UU principles. What the resolution calls for is an extension of what we have been doing all along. We hope to now give more energy to what the resolution calls us to do.

How will we do it? (See slide) 1) With attention to the importance of intersectionality: the reality that none of us have only one identity and life experiences are shaped by race, class, sexual orientation and other aspects of our identity, 2) By collaborating with others, particularly with the UU Urban Ministry, and 3) With Board oversight of banner design and installation.

She ended by reading the last paragraph of the resolution: Follen Church recognizes that the fight for civil rights and equality is as real today as it was decades ago, and that it has an opportunity to use its resources and resolve to fight for a system of fair, transformative, and restorative justice in which the full humanity and dignity of all people are recognized.

Harriet asks herself and hopes we ask ourselves, "What would Charles Follen do?"

Sample Banners

Maggie then presented slides of samples of banners from UU churches around the country, so that those present could see a range of possibilities. One person requested that Maggie show the Arlington banner again since it was difficult to read the words. At last week's talk, Lori Kenschaft from Arlington First Parish said their banner had been vandalized six times. Now there are other words on it in addition to BLM. People at First Parish UU in Arlington felt the additional words explained what the phrase Black Lives Matter was expressing, and also might be helpful when/if vandals go close to the sign to deface it they would be able to see those explanatory words. Several other churches had additional words. Several connected the BLM message to "Standing on the Side of Love."

Structured Dialogue

At the end of the slide show Maggie asked people to consider the questions for Structured Dialogue:

"As I imagine what it would look like if the resolution passes and Follen succeeds in living into its values and commitments:

1) I am most excited about or drawn to..., and

2) What most concerns me is..."

Maggie asked people to take a few minutes to think about the questions and then to jot down their thoughts.

After a few minutes, Maggie asked people to move into groups of three, preferably with people they didn't know well, and make sure that each person got a chance to talk about the questions. The groups were readily formed and there was a lot of chatter among the groups as they discussed the questions.

After about 10 minutes the group reconvened in a large circle and Maggie asked everyone to take a turn to speak for one to two minutes if they chose to do so. She asked people to tell the notetaker if they did not want what they said to be recorded in the minutes of the meeting. Catherine acted as timekeeper.

Follenites' Responses

The following are the thoughts expressed by people in the group. Two people passed.

- Main thought is that appreciate being part of Follen and having opportunity to be part of a community to help live values, which we don't always do perfectly. Just having the kind of support and infrastructure to say "do this or do that" has been helpful.
- Want to say that one cannot choose family born into but can choose who one wants to stand with and support. Attracted to Follen because so much believes in the worth and dignity of every person. Whole life wanted to be part of a movement and movements can be divisive. (Gave the Civil War as an example.) Thinks the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement is historical and Follen having a sign is saying that we are standing on the side of that movement that represents our hopes and aspirations. The sign is both a symbol of resistance and symbol of hope. Having banner will tie him closer to this community.
- Read Coates *Between The World and Me*. This gave a look into how a black man faces the world and sees white people as "the other." This book had more impact than other books and gave a lot of insight into what black people think of white people and that black people do not necessarily feel part of the world white people take for granted.
- Strongly in favor of resolution. But exact words stick in craw. She is a mother whose son is Latino and he was not treated well in this community and in Lexington. So she was uncomfortable with the Black Lives Matter wording -- but in her small group Kyle solved that discomfort for her. (Kyle sighed and said "oh gosh").
- Filled with inspiration and wants us to live our values and wants our children to learn from early age. Fears for our beautiful building and has concerns and worries about what might happen. Needs to know that people will work together. This resolution and banner will take a lot of talking and caring. Loves our community so much and is proud of us and thinks this is the time for us to stand up together. She is in support of the Resolution.
- Lives in Arlington. In favor of resolution. This is the first time feels that she has a real opportunity to live her values. All her life she wondered what she could do. She is a shy person and was not sure she could do anything. She is excited about the opportunity for her own learning and learning how to raise antiracist children. Concern that we not just do things to

make us feel better, but to take actions and be intentional and calm for when waters get rocky. We need to be ready to persevere and confront white privilege. She is ready for this now.

- Most excited. Excited and feel pride if we succeed in this and proud of Follen Community to be part of it. This is not the number one priority for him in social justice. If this action succeeds at Follen he will be most pleased for passionate people here. Proud of them and would love for them to be happy about outcome. He assumes Follen will be successful in values and commitments. So concern is if this does not happen. There could be misunderstanding of phrase BLM. A lot of people don't understand that this phrase is because black lives are not respected as other's lives are. Concerned about people who will not support banner. He likes the phrase "Standing On the Side of Love" as a way of expanding on message.
- Wholeheartedly in support of resolution. Feels process has been very educational and does not want to fall into a "one and done" situation and that we need to continue with this work. Wants to be sure we do things right when raising antiracist kids and look at recruiting process for new DRE and pay attention to curriculum.
- Happy to be here. Educational experience. Racism is intolerable. Honored to be here as a part of this community. The need to be loved is essential and feeling a loving community is so important. These are the qualities of this resolution. Want us to be loving and kind to one another and be committed to morals and values that make us Unitarians.
- May be because of office he holds at Follen – feels this is the most important public thing we will have done in last 12 years. Each of has a set of criteria different from others. His have to do with our country's current president and everything he says and does. It is hard for him to believe what the GOP and president do. Feels like the only thing a church of reason can do is stand on the side of the most disenfranchised in this country – the descendants of slaves. Our church is named for a man who fought for the abolition of slavery. By hanging that banner we stand firmly on the side of the disenfranchised. We need to do more than just vote for the banner.
- Respects the democratic process used to come to this decision. This is meaningful. We at Follen will not be pioneers (FP Arlington has already done this), but we need to do it. He wanted to put in plug for the antiracist book group book, *Stamped from the Beginning* since it is an amazing history of racism and racist laws in this country. Strongly urges people to read the Epilogue to this book.
- One of the central if not central concerns of BLM movement is police murders and defenselessness of black people. As a fire chaplain works with fire fighters and they are glad to help. Sees a difference with police. Seems to him we might form a small group of us to look at psychology and how police look at this situation. Perhaps we can work with police in this town about what we want to happen in this current time.
- Sooner banner goes up, better. Doesn't mean other lives don't matter but need to focus on BLM. Let's put it up.
- Strongly support resolution. Feels right. How can we call ourselves UU and not do this? Excited and enjoy prospect of standing tall with others and our moral principles and doing it in a public way. Important at any time but even more so with time we are in now. Also, have concerns about the divisions or hard feelings in community and what might get/hear from outside

community. Also worry that might be a lot of talk and not action. Thinks we will need sustained effort for each of us to move beyond comfort zone and make these things happen. It is important to acknowledge concerns but not let that hold us back.

- Totally in favor of this resolution. Not afraid that won't act and not afraid (maybe being naive) of what will happen. Thinks we are a strong community and this process has been a wonderful experience – to speak honestly and to see it happen. Want to thank those who made it happen and particularly what our staff wrote in newsletter today. Proud to be part of this place.
- In favor. Want Follen to take a very concrete action that will advertise to world at large what we stand for and that will remind us also. A bit like rainbow flag – tells world but also reminds you. Concern is that we will get too mired in process and discussion and not actually do stuff. Process is important and useful, but sometimes Follen can get mired in just talk and sometimes we just have to do it.
- Wholeheartedly support and want to join in thanking those who have brought us to this point. Excited that can share in our church community and beyond the deep abiding sensation of rising up through the expectation that comes from racism in America. We are still suffering from the impacts and legacy of slavery. What concerns him is that if Follen succeeds in moving into its values and commitments, then nothing concerns him. He hears others concern, but as a defense lawyer his partner said “If people are not spitting on us in the street then we are not doing our job,”
- What he said. Important process but now impatient. Discussion strengthens us, but the biggest challenge is how to implement raising antiracist children. That is the most important thing we can do; to raise the next generation so that they can address this and other problems with conviction and support.
- Most excited because feels like our somewhat dispersed energy around justice is now at the point of saying the buck stops here. Most concern – he's a composer and know can have one big theme. We can have small print explanations but that can make the theme feel diluted. Feels like when people comment about our process we talk in our heads.
- Think most of us feel that we are living in historically perilous times. For our sisters and brothers of color it has always been more perilous. Indicated we may not know that the UUA is in leadership crisis around naming and dismantling racism in the denomination. Leaders of color in UUA have asked us to join in antiracist work. It is time for us to answer this call. When she was a child she had a wayside pulpit in her yard and her parents as active UUs would put quotations there and the kids also got to choose what would be quoted. She feels it is important to put our words out there. She thinks it is exciting that the town will see BLM banners.
- Stands in support of banner. Having a banner up is a statement, but it is also a statement to not have a banner up. Having a banner is one thing that affirms me as a person of color. As a descendent of slaves, having Follen have an active way of stating BLM means that this is a space that affirms that part of him.
- Making this decision in a way is beginning this work. Need action and to talk more. Need to listen to people who are asking us to do this work. It is time for us to step into our discomfort and begin work.

- Support. Excited for opportunity to be part of a movement that will be nationwide to bring idea of racism out into the open publicly and forcefully so can see and address. Concern is that while in this area there are enough like-minded people so won't get pushback as much. But in other parts of nation there are people who don't understand or don't understand the political meaning of BLM. How do we reach these people? If they can listen to reason, is there a way we can help to educate them and bring on board.
- Would like to see sign that said "Be kind to all people." Stated that many aides at her husband nursing home are African-American and she cannot imagine saying "Black Lives Matter" to them because thinks they might not understand why she needed to say that.
- Been very active in Civil Rights work since 60s and as grad student and as social worker. As Social Worker worked extensively with immigrants who have come to this country after having been tortured and is concerned about their plight as well. Likes the resolution because it is inclusive and mentions black and brown, but banner doesn't mention this. Feel language is not inclusive enough. Would be interested in coming up with different language that reflects more people of color and people from different cultural backgrounds. This would be more Unitarian and more inclusive. Would like to work on different language that would be more inclusive. Was suggestion of rotating signs, but not sure about that because very confusing; women, two months later, immigrants. Liked Arlington sign and would be interested in something along those lines.
- Thank you to this group. This resolution is incredibly thoughtful and taken with how clearly and eloquently it says what I personally believe. Excited that Follen wants to live values and those expressed by Charles Follen. Wonders how to say it concisely on banner. Fears about blowback and want to believe that greater community and Follen community will embrace this. Tough time now with everything getting politicized.
- In favor of resolution because it gives chance to look inside. This process is personal and introspective for him.
- Greatly appreciate what people have done. Interested in education. Resonates with what others have said. We are all at different places. Appreciate fact that as a community we are trying to bring "rest of us" along that path. Opportunity as shy person to find place in the community where can contribute. Also is as a personal spiritual journey. As child of 50s in Midwest – conformity, don't rock the boat. It is social justice and a personal journey.
- Appreciates the resolution for myriad of reasons as expressed by others tonight. Was on Facebook today and saw Upworthy video called "Driving While Black," which she recommended. An interviewer traveled to Minnesota where a black man was killed in a car stop in front of his partner and 4 year old, and to Texas, where Sandra Bland was arrested. A young woman interviewed in the video talked about how every time she and her family get in the car it is with fear. As she watched the video, she felt white privilege smack her in the face. The woman in the video also talked about the fact that she has police radar in her car as protection so she knows when police are near and she makes sure that everyone is always buckled in and checks her speed so she won't get stopped. There were others interviewed, including a big man who drives a mini-van and dresses in a suit jacket and light colored shirt to avoid looking "bad". She realized how much blacks have to think about every time they get in a car to run to the store, or to school, or work. There are parents who want their kids and/or grown adult children

to call them to let them know they got home, etc. safely. Black lives matter and it is time for us to do work and continue to educate and also be proximate.

- I've said a number of times that our country was founded on premise of white supremacy. In the 60s it took white people turning against white supremacy and aligning with black people. James Reeb, a white UU minister went to marches in the south and it was only when he, a white person, died, that people started to pay attention. She wanted us to think of that as we think of our church. Our big white body on Mass Ave that we are putting on the line. A banner, the resolution, is work that has already been happening at Follen for over 100 years. Not a first or last step. Knows community will work hard to be antiracist and to put our body on the line.
- As someone noted, we have to accept everyone where they are in this journey. Feels have grown so much this year by being involved in this. Learned through own person journey – we may have heard her talk about her own family history research – and it was an amazing experience. Hopes that as we move forward that we will honor that we are all at different places. Really grateful that when started her own journey 18 months ago she had humility to say I need to learn a lot and she learned through book group and looking into herself. For everyone who needs to do that it is a powerful journey.
- In FRR group. Felt compelled to join group after November election. Feels need to rise up and this community has opportunity with our leadership and we will be only church in Lexington that has BLM sign. Opportunity for us to show leadership in town by having a BLM sign on Mass Ave. She hopes that we are listening to people who are asking us to stand with them.
- Proud of this community for so many things – how we take care of each other, pastoral care, so many involved with social justice issues. See this as way to encourage us more and more to not only take care of each other and be loving here, but to keep our eyes on what is going on in world. Loved Claire's sermon about value of home and stretching. Book group (thanks Robin) has been wonderful and work of FRR team has been really good for stretching. At this time in her life she is ready for much more stretching and glad that she is in a community that is for most part giving us that opportunity.
- Lots of thoughts and could go on forever – as her loving and patient parents know. It is time for banner; we talk too much; we love to talk about things. We can't move fast enough. We are behind people, black activists like BL UU, and black people saying stand with us and we are taking our sweet time. Not worried about blowback and people's opinions. If people going to be mad, let them be mad. If we can be with/talk with a person and we can dull that person's anger so when they meet a black person they are calmer.... So, yes, do it.
- Felt fear initially about the possibility of violence or blowback against our church building if we put up a banner, but that fear has now disappeared. The fear and discomfort that white people feel if a banner is put up is nothing compared to what black people feel all the time. Watch the video that is posted on our website of the person from Arlington talking about FP UU experience with their banner. Their banner has been up for two years and it has been a positive for their congregation.
- Thank you to committee, beautifully written resolution and he is fully in support. In terms of what excited about – have vision that we have established ourselves in fight against racism, police brutality and educational opportunity. And excited about vision as being known in region

if not in country for our antiracism activities. Concern – want to be sure that our reasons behind banner are clear. Concern about inclusivity, principal and manifestation. (Likes approach in Arlington.) More aware so want others (i.e., immigrants) to know. As it is written it is a wonderful resolution. Suggested we put up two signs and one might say something like, "Follen stands firmly against racism and bigotry" and the other sign would say, "Black Lives Matter."

- Hope we go public because that affirms us. It is also a way to start a conversation and that is a very important part of it. Shows people that they are not alone in their feelings if they feel the way we do, so hopes we go public.
- Firmly in favor of resolution. Think it is exciting to think of Follen community impacting this change. Amazing to get through so much of your life in ignorance. Real opportunity for changes in laws of State that could have significant impact. No concern about blowback because we are behind curve. Arlington had difficulties at beginning but not for this last year. What is visible from street is very important because it is what people will see and it gives people something to think about or even say, "I could be there." Thinks phrase Black Lives Matter has to be big enough to see.

What Is Next?

Maggie was asked, "What is the next step?" She said that for those who don't want to keep processing – there are only 11 days until annual meeting so no more meetings of this sort before vote. If gets 2/3 yay's then the resolution is accepted and Parish Board will oversee specifics of banner and FRR will maintain its commitment to work on other things.

Lu Shurlan asked if there will be several options that we can choose from for banner. In response, per Maggie and Claire – the Board will oversee a task force, which will include designers, B & G and others; the Board will make sure the task force that gets put together makes sense. Task force will bring ideas to Board. It will not be that the congregation talks about font sizes, etc., and the Board won't handle this detailed aspect either – the task force will and then present to Board. Exactly how the task force will work – with one or more proposals – is TBD.

Claire stated that the Board's role is to set long-term policy. There hasn't been policy around public witness. Some small group will work on this.

Lu asked if the comments and thoughts from this meeting will be incorporated into the Task Force's decision. Maggie said, yes, they will, and a summary of this meeting will be available.

Catherine Rielly wanted to speak to Kyle's and Lu's concern about other groups. Follen is beginning the process of being a sanctuary church and determining how we will help immigrants, Muslims and other refugees.

Kathy Hoben mentioned that there are opportunities to participate in actions that are happening right now and if anyone is interested they can email her. Maggie said that those opportunities are listed in today's newsletter.

Toby Sackton asked how to get a ballot if one was not here for the Annual Meeting. You should call Sarah Garner for information about this.

Maggie added that Tempe Goodhue was not present, but that she, in particular, has worked extensively on the resolution. Maggie also stated that it was so good to work with Nancy McCarthy because she (Maggie) is a “process geek” and Nancy says, “Let’s get the darn banner up!” Maggie was glad to have that diversity in the group. Maggie thanked the committee for their work.

Claire closed the meeting with a prayer.

Attendees

The following people were at the meeting:

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| Susanne Intriligator | Ellen Adolph | Jim Herzig |
| Harriet Peterson | Anne Engelhart | Robin Tartaglia |
| Marcia Butman | John Dacey | Catherine Rielly |
| Doug Durant | Maggie Herzig | Toby Sackton |
| Hill Snelling | Wilma Ronco | Lil Swanstrom |
| Laura Maltby | Lisa Snelling | Kyle Johnson |
| Alex Bromley | Rev. Claire | Paul Rubin |
| Gerry Mimno | Isaiah Johnson | Ruth Lyddy |
| Nancy McCarthy | Ericka Riddington | Lu Shurlan |
| Jill Reurs | Lili Fisher | Kevin McCarthy |
| Dottie Vacca | Kathy Hoben | Nancy Mimno |
| Don Snodgrass | Rachel Hyde | John Hickey |
| Ann Schauffler | Karen Edmonds | Jane Spickett |
| Alice Dunn | Linda Dacey | |