

I am so glad to be here with you all today. It feels like a long road that has brought us to this day. When I think of that road, I think back to late 2014 when Reverend Mara put out a call to anyone interested in talking about how our congregation might respond to the death of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri. That small group of five was the beginning of our current Racial Justice Task Force, which now has more than 30 members. But the road stretches back further than that, back to 1995 when Kathleen Kemp and other members of our Society formed the Anti-Racism Action Committee, which was active for 10-15 years. And the road stretches back still further to the Civil Rights Movement and Reverend Bob Senghas who travelled to Selma to support Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. And I suspect, if I spent some time in the archives, I'd find that the road stretches back further still. We gather today to recognize one more step on that long road.

For me and many of us on the Racial Justice Task Force, this step itself has felt like a long road. It was fall of 2015 when we first talked about putting up a Black Lives Matter banner. The Black Lives Matter movement was two years old, the UUA General Assembly had passed an Action of Immediate Witness in support of the movement, and in the year after the deaths of Michael Brown and Eric Garner, Black Lives Matter filled national headlines. We were eager to put up a banner and declare ourselves part of that movement.

But we also realized that the banner had to have the support of more than just our task force and that we had to do more than just put up a banner. The banner would have to represent a deep commitment to the long-term work of dismantling racism. So we put off the banner raising and set about the work of educating ourselves – our task force and our congregation – about racism, racism within American history and culture and within each of us.

It's been two and a half years since we made that decision – a long road, some would say too long. There were many times in our meetings when someone would say, "Does it have to be this hard to just put up a banner?" And in the past six months we've looked hard at the question of whether or not racism played a part in how long it took us to get to this day. Would it have taken so long if it hadn't been about black lives? There's no easy answer to that question other than to acknowledge that our history and our culture are steeped in racism and it inevitably touches everything we do. We are engaged in work in which we inevitably stumble and fall and pick ourselves back up only to stumble again. Those conversations in which we looked hard at the white supremacy in our own processes – conversations in which we were divided and passionate on all sides and still remained committed to each other and our shared ministry – that is some of the task force work of which I am most proud to have been a part.

And so it's been a long road to bring us to this day. And it's tempting at the end of such a road to think we've reached our goal. But what we've done, where we've come to at the end of this road is just another starting line. The banner we dedicate today is not an end in itself, but a representation of our commitment to the work ahead. The long, steady work of identifying and dismantling systems of racism around us and within us – within our broader society, within our Unitarian Universalist faith, and within each one of us. We dedicate this banner at a time when our Racial Justice Task Force is shifting its focus. While we'll continue to work on educating ourselves – we must always be learning in this racial justice work – we are moving into a new phase focused on action and finding the difference that we can make in this world. Look to hear more from us in the coming weeks and months as we form new teams focused on this new work.

We know that for some, the Black Lives Matter movement is seen as divisive, and we are committed to bridging that divide. We know that for some Black Lives Matter seems like too narrow a focus, and we are committed to making this work one piece of our larger justice ministries. Our banner has the UU

Side With Love colors and heart logo, reminding us that we are called to this work by our faith. That we are called to do this work not in anger, but with love and compassion.

Thank you for being here today as we dedicate this Black Lives Matter banner and dedicate ourselves to the work of justice that it calls us to do.