



UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CHURCH OF ARLINGTON VIRGINIA

A Place to Connect, Grow and Serve

January 24, 2019 - Connections newsletter

8th Principle Congregational Vote March 31

The UUCA Board of Trustees has voted to call a congregational meeting for members to vote on the 8th Principle on March 31. Please mark your calendars for this important vote! Between now and March 31, the 8th Principle Task Force will be in Fellowship Hall each Sunday, will put more info in Connections regularly and hold informational meetings. The next **informational meeting is scheduled for Sunday, February 2** after both services in the Board Room. Also, Facebook users will find lots of information on our Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/UUCA8thPrinciple> Please follow us!

As part of accountably moving Unitarian Universalism towards a vision of a multi-racial Beloved Community, the 8th Principle Task Force at UUCA has been educating ourselves about UU's racial history, as well as learning from the powerful leadership of people of color within our faith community. Among the most prominent voices is the [Black Lives of Unitarian Universalism](#) (BLUU), which grew out of the broader Movement for Black Lives, of which Black Lives Matter is a major player. Since 2015, BLUU has provided ministry for, and by, Black Unitarian Universalists while working to expand the role and visibility of Black UUs within our faith. BLUU's organizing model centers self-transformation and self-determination for Black people, using a Black UU theological lens and drawing on resources in the Black UU community. For the past three+ years, BLUU has worked with hundreds of self-identified Black UUs around the country to design how they envision our UU faith now, and in the future. BLUU's mission is to:

- Expand the power & capacity of Black UUs within our faith;
- Provide support, information and resources for Black Unitarian Universalists;
- Justice-making and liberation through the UU faith.

BLUU works within and beyond Unitarian Universalism—directly addressing the assumption that UUism is a white faith, and confirming that the presence, voices, and perspectives of Black UUs are critical to countering the impact of “anti-blackness” so that Unitarian Universalism as a faith may move towards spiritual wholeness. BLUU is an independent organization, fiscally sponsored by the UUA, and led by an executive director, a community minister, and a volunteer organizing collective.

In October 2016, the UUA Board of Trustees provided a \$300,000 grant to BLUU, and committed to investing another \$5 million of funding over the next 10 years. BLUU has built a dynamic movement and implements an exciting range of activities:

- BLUU kicked off in 2015 with the articulation of the [Seven Principles of the Black Lives of Unitarian Universalism](#).

- In 2016, BLUU received funding from the UUA to bring more Black UUs to General Assembly. They coordinated the housing, transportation and registration of nearly 100 Black UUs who would not have otherwise been able to attend. A record 200+ Black UUs attended 2016 General Assembly (GA), and BLUU members offered workshops on Black UU history and the Movement for Black Lives.
- Also in 2016, BLUU established an explicitly Black online space (on [Facebook](#)) as a forum for Black UU's to support each other. The group has 650+ members, and is a space for Black UU's to talk about social justice, racism and other forms of systemic oppressions, including within our UU faith. The page description says, *"Being a Black UU, can be difficult. This group will strive to be a safe place for those that understand that struggle – a much needed respite from an overwhelmingly white world, to replenish yourself."*
- In March 2017, BLUU organized a [BLUU Convening](#), which brought together more than 100 Black UUs to help shape BLUU's long-term goals. They also developed programming for the 2017 General Assembly, designed to lift up the profile of Black UUs and offer space for their worship. Among the BLUU-sponsored sessions at the 2017 GA was a recollection of the pain of UU history during the Civil Rights era, when Black leadership was silenced and rejected – movingly expressed by Dr. Mtangulizi Sanyika, the former president of the Black UU Caucus of the 1960s.
- In 2017, BLUU established [#BLUUMicro30](#), an initiative that connects justice movement spaces with Black UUs and their resources. The goal is for Black UUs to learn organizing skills, be transformed in the service of the work, and make a tangible real-world change. In its first year, #BLUUMicro30 actions included diversifying Lifespan Religious Education book offerings for youth ages three to six to include main characters that are people of color, creating an LGBTQ Black outreach programs in a UU congregation, and hosting a viewing of the film *13th* at a congregation.
- In 2017, BLUU created the [Black Lives of UU Ministerial Network](#), a collective of Black UU ministers, religious professionals and lay leaders. BLUUMin advocates to the UUA to recognize the barriers of people of color to being leaders in our faith – such as the high costs of pursuing theological education, and the uneven and unclear recognition of lay ministers in UUism across the country. BLUUMin has also communicated concerns around ecclesiastical endorsement and access to training for Black UUs, and monitors institutional shifts around UU Lay Ministry.
- Starting in September 2017, BLUUMin formed a nine-person team to offer regular [African-American centered worship](#) via Zoom. Access to virtual worship is through BLUU's explicitly Black Facebook page, and is offered twice monthly – on the first Thursday of the month at 9:00 p.m. EST, and the third Sunday of the month at 4:00 p.m. EST. Worship leaders include Rev. Connie Simon, Yadene Hailu, Samuel Prince, Lisa Rockett, Rev. Kimberly Quinn Johnson, Donte Hilliard, Amanda Thomas, Kim Hampton and Oshara Meesha.
- In the spring of 2017, BLUU organizers supported congregations to confront white supremacy within UU institutions, via White Supremacy Teach-ins. Approximately two-thirds of the 1,038 UU congregations in the United States participated. BLUU helped with publicity and a [worship resource guide](#).
- Also in 2017, BLUU [endorsed the adoption of the proposed 8th Principle](#) of Unitarian Universalism, noting it had been 20 years since the 1997 GA where delegates voted that the UUA should commit to intentionally becoming a multicultural and anti-racist institution. BLUU's statement of support reads *"As Black Unitarian Universalists, we acknowledge that while some see our faith as a 'big tent' where everyone is welcome, UUs cannot uphold precepts or practices that undermine the worth and dignity of people of color at our common altars.... The maintenance of white supremacy and anti-blackness in particular, whether in the practices of the Association or in the hearts of parishioners, has no place within our faith and must be*

unequivocally rooted out of our culture.... We wonder why the dismantling of white supremacy, as implicated in the 8th principle, has not been formally included in our covenant as Unitarian Universalists."

- The Fall/Winter 2018 #BLUUMicro30 Action is a [Living History Project](#) titled "Recording Our History as We Live It." Regional BLUU Leads are making connections between Black UUs for peer-to-peer recorded interviews, as well as collecting art, music and poetry submissions. Materials are being compiled into a digital magazine that will serve as a snapshot of Black UUs spiritual growth in its current form.
- BLUU has led a number of social justice campaigns. In 2017, they administered \$86,000 in disaster relief grants for Black families affected by Hurricane Harvey, and raised \$30,000 for Mama's Day Bailout efforts. They also sent BLUU Organizer Lena Gardner to Standing Rock with donations of medical supplies, clothing and food. In 2018, they created 1,000 Domestic Violence Survivor care packages for a shelter in Kansas City; supported the Uzazi Village, a center for ending racial disparities in Black maternal health outcomes; and provided \$5,000 to the Highlander Center in Tennessee for expansion of their educational center and library.
- The BLUU Canvassing Project built a directory of Black UUs cross the country, enabling them to undertake the first-ever [survey of Black UUs](#) in June 2018. The survey found: "A majority of survey participants began attending UU churches in the last five years. Whether or not they're part of a congregation, Black UUs who answered the survey said they feel a deep sense of isolation and rely heavily on social media, particularly the BLUU closed Facebook group, to connect with other Black UUs. Respondents said they tend to become a part of UU congregations because of their theology, and many said they feel white dominant culture gets in the way of their communal experience at church. Most Black UUs have only attended the one or two UU churches nearest them, and so local congregations currently have the greatest impact on whether or not Black UUs remain active in the faith."
- In 2018, BLUU held its first [Revival](#) in Kansas City. BLUU worked with local Black organizers to offer a ministerial presence and public space that offered 120+ Black folks of many faiths fortification via song, word, learning and community.
- In March 2018, the BLUU Ministerial Network started providing pastoral care via phone. The service can be accessed by calling or texting 984-219-8711, and leaving your name, pronouns, a brief description of your request for care and a number where you can be reached.
- BLUU also offers free daily affirmations through text messages or email, for the UU community's uplift and encouragement. Anyone can [sign up!](#)
- BLUU is partnering with the African Francophone UU Ministry led by Rev. Fulgence Ndagijimana. An August 2018 trip by several BLUU members to Rwanda was the beginning of connecting African UUs with those of African descent in the U.S.
- In February 2018, BLUU shared on YouTube a [conversation with BLUU 360 Council member Rev. Dr. Susan Newman Moore](#), about her employment and treatment at All Souls UU in Washington, DC, which led to her resignation.
- In December 2018, BLUU paid tribute to UUA Trustee Christina Rivera, a Latina UU who received racist threats related to her tenure on the UUA Board. BLUU promoted a monetary campaign to support Christina and her family in the wake of her resignation from the UUA Board.
- In January 2019, BLUU partnered with the #BlackTransPrayerBook on a social media campaign to reframe the conversation about Trans people in faith spaces, using the hashtag #TransphobialsASin.
- In the fall of 2018, BLUU started a Financial Transparency Group, which will develop a structure for the BLUU Board of Directors, to be in place by spring 2019. This is among BLUU's first strides towards organizational independence, which is planned for June 2019, a full year ahead of the

schedule previously agreed to with the UUA!

What can white UUs do to support BLUU?

BLUU is an exciting movement within the UU faith amplifies the voice and experiences of Black Unitarian Universalists, and enables our religious community to be more inclusive. While many of BLUU's activities are explicitly Black, there are many ways white UUs can support the Black Lives of UU:

- Let Black UUs and other UU people of color know about BLUU! If you are at a Welcome Desk or otherwise engaging with people of color attending a UU church, direct them to <http://www.blacklivesuu.com> to get engaged with BLUU.
- Keep informed of and support BLUU's latest projects by signing up for a [monthly email update from BLUU's executive director](#), or following their public Facebook page [@BlackLivesUU](#).
- Subscribe to [BLUUBox](#), a monthly service that enables financial support to BLUU as well as content grounded in the lived experiences and diverse perspectives of Black Unitarian Universalists. Each #BLUUBox includes prayers, reflections, the profile of a Black UU in History, a curated social justice activity and a unique piece of BLUU swag.
- Participate in BLUU's on-line theological series, [Whose Faith Is It Anyway?](#). This series of online panel discussions will discuss the a UU theological framework in a way that centers Blackness. Starting January 30, events will be broadcast live on the BLUU website and public-facing Facebook page.
- Subscribe to [BLUU's YouTube channel](#), where BLUU posts recordings of its monthly Community Conversations with Black UUs about the 7 Principle of Black Lives and theological inquires into our faith.

Meet the Black Unitarian Universalists who lead BLUU

Lena K. Gardner is the Executive Director of BLUU. A co-founder and leader of Black Lives Matter Minneapolis, Lena works for the UU Church of the Larger Fellowship and attends the First Unitarian Society of Minneapolis.

Dr. Takiyah Nur Amin is BLUU's Content Director. A native of Buffalo, NY and an alumna of the UUA Multicultural Leadership for Youth of Color (known today as THRIVE), Takiyah holds a PhD from Temple University in Dance & Cultural Studies, and is an active member of the National Coalition of 100 Black Women.

Rev. Mykal O'Neal Slack is a speaker, trainer, worship leader, community minister and congregational life coordinator in UU and interfaith settings, based in Durham. He recently became the first Co-director of the Freedom Center for Social Justice, a Southern-based national organization working to affect culture shifts in the workplace, faith communities and school – at the intersections of race, sexual orientation, gender and faith.

Samuel Prince served in leadership positions at the Unitarian Society of New Haven and the UU Church in Meriden, Conn., before becoming a member of the GRACE (Growing Racial and Cultural Equity) team of the New England Region. After relocating to Sandusky, Ohio, Samuel served as the Board President of the Oberlin UU Fellowship, and organized one of the first gatherings of people of color in the Ohio Mid-Atlantic District.

Leslie Mac is a Brooklyn-born activist of Jamaican ancestry. She created the *Ferguson Response Tumblr* to connect nationwide efforts to support the racial justice movement started in Ferguson, MO. Leslie is also the co-creator of the Safety Pin Box. In January 2019, Leslie was appointed as a Trustee of the UUA.

Rev. Kimberly Quinn Johnson serves as minister of the UU congregation of the South Fork in Bridgehampton, N.Y. Before ministry, she worked as a union organizer and taught Gender Studies at New Jersey City University. Kimberly is a member of the Central East Region Congregational Live Advisory Council, a Program Leader with the UU College of Social Justice, and works with UU youth of color in the THRIVE summer program.

BLUU's 360 Council is a leadership panel to ensure BLUU's efforts are rooted in the history of Black Unitarian Universalists. The Council includes Paul Cole Jones, Dr. Mtangulizi Sanyika, Rev. Mel Hoover and Rev. Susan Newman Moore.