

# **The History of Race Relations and Unity Church-Unitarian**

## **1850 – 2005**

An institutional audit by the  
Unity Church Anti-Racism Leadership Team

Delivered to the congregation on May 22, 2005

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## Preface

This report is the work of the Unity Church Anti-Racism Leadership Team: Sue Conner, Cris Brizuela, Pauline Eichten, Allen Giles, Pat Haff, Mansour Hadidi, Kevin Harris, Steve Lewis, Laura Smidzik, and Jean Staneslow, with some last-minute assistance from Angela Newhouse and Lia Rivamonte. We want to acknowledge the participation and contributions of Jennifer Crow, Melissa Ziemer, and Bill Neely, the Hallman Ministerial Interns over the past three years. They each chose to be part of our efforts, and we are grateful for their insights and spiritual direction.

We want to express our thanks to the many people who have helped us along the way. Linda Snyder, Stephanie Mosher, and Ginny Martin assisted us with our research efforts. Many long-time members of Unity Church shared their experiences with race-related social justice efforts. Carmen Valenzuela, James Addington, and Jeff Agaton-Howes of the Minnesota Collaborative Anti-Racism Initiative have held our hands and cheered us on from the start.

We have been honored by the faith the Board of Trustees has placed in us by giving us their endorsement, and buoyed by the support expressed by members of the congregation and the Executive Team of Unity Church.

And finally, we could not have done this work without the sacrifices and commitment of the families of the Anti-Racism team members. Thank you.

Each section of the history audit was researched and presented by a different small group of the team. The entire team then discussed the implications of the findings and developed the assessments. Several people contributed different sections of the document. Pulling all of the disparate pieces together into a coherent document was a challenge. There was discussion of trying to edit the document so that it had a more professional polish. Instead, we decided to leave the diversity of style and voice that reflect the passionate, committed, and volunteer efforts of the Anti-Racism Team. It is our hope that this diversity will enrich your experience of reading the report.

We are aware of how much is not included in this report, and apologize for any errors or omissions of historical fact. We believe that we have included the key learnings about the shaping of Unity Church with respect to race and racism.

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## Introduction

In 1998, in preparation for our search for new ministers, Unity Church did extensive surveying of the congregation. The results showed that congregants were feeling a spiritual need to connect in meaningful ways with the world outside of Unity's walls.

By 2001, it was obvious that things were changing within Unity Church. A large group attended General Assembly that June and was amazed to learn of the ways in which active engagement in the larger world was being encouraged by the UUA. For the first time, a group of members went on a pilgrimage to our partner village in Transylvania. They returned having been truly moved by the experience of having their hearts opened toward people whom they had just met. In early 2002, a church service at Unity focused on the history of the Rondo neighborhood, the onetime African-American neighborhood just to the north that was torn apart by the construction of highway I-94. This service confronted the congregation with both historical and current information about segregation and racism here in St. Paul.

It was after this service, and in this climate of change, that a couple of members began to question what Unity might be able to do with regard to the issue of racism. How did Unity, a basically white church located in a more diverse neighborhood, in an increasingly diverse city, function with regard to racism? How might things become different?

They learned about the Minnesota Collaborative Anti-Racism Initiative (MCARI), which provides training on understanding and dismantling racism. Eight Unity members attended an introductory workshop in April 2002. Sixteen interested members met as a follow-up and created a task force to make preliminary plans for an anti-racism initiative within Unity Church, and to secure support from the leadership of the church community. They presented a project description and received the support of the Board of Trustees. In January of 2003, Unity's Anti-Racism Leadership Team was formally commissioned by the congregation.

Since that time the Team has participated in several training sessions with MCARI to learn about the power of systems and institutions with regard to race, how to work as a team, and prepare for doing an institutional audit of Unity Church. We have also created a mission statement, a vision, and a covenant that guides us in our work together.

Now, as a foundation to the anti-racism work at Unity Church-Unitarian, the Anti-Racism Team has researched and summarized an analysis of the church's identity in relationship to racism within a historical context. We have examined the church from the time of its earliest formation to the current day, painting our institutional history on a backdrop of race, and noting our country, region, and community's response to the issues of race. We have drawn from our church archives, history books on race, periodicals, and focus groups. Much of what we present is based on facts offered by historians. Yet, we also rely on inference, often from information we

were not able to find, or by drawing probable conclusions from a review of multiple sources on the subject.

In any case, this audit represents the hard work of the entire team, whose intentions from the beginning have been to provide a thorough, thoughtful analysis of Unity Church-Unitarian's institutional response to race. We intend to use this audit to inform us as we continue to lead the church in the process of becoming an intentionally anti-racist institution.

## **Vision and Mission of the Anti-Racism Leadership Team**

**Vision:** Unity Church Unitarian is an anti-racist community that is actively engaged in dismantling racism both internally and in the wider community in a manner that is accountable to communities of color.

**Mission:** The mission of the Unity Church Anti-Racism Leadership Team is to lead the church in developing and living out an intentionally anti-racist identity in all aspects of church life. The team will seek opportunities to:

- promote dialogue and learning within the church community about the origins and functioning of systemic racism;
- integrate an anti-racist perspective into the identity documents, religious education and member development curricula, worship service, and governance of Unity Church; and
- develop meaningful partner relationships between Unity Church and communities of color as we work together to dismantle racism in society.

## **I. THE EARLY YEARS, 1850–1900**

The first Unitarian service in St. Paul was held in 1852. It was a single service; there is no record of how many attended. In 1858, Rev. Frederick Newell, an inactive Unitarian minister from Boston, started a business in St. Paul. He agreed to preach for the Unitarians, using old sermons that he had. These are the first recorded signs of the beginning of what became Unity Church. Between 1852 and 1872, those who would begin our Unity Church found each other and nurtured and developed the vision that became Unity Church in St. Paul. What was the environment with regard to race at that time?

### **A. The Racial Historical Setting in the United States of America, 1850–1900**

#### **Both North and South Supported Continuation of Slavery in the South**

The first Africans came to Jamestown, British America in 1619 as indentured servants. They could, over time, work off their bondage (Bennett, 1968). Nearly all the Africans that followed, however, were purchased as personal property and were owned as human livestock, not unlike cattle, sheep or pigs. By the time of the Revolutionary War, slavery had become unprofitable in the North. After independence, each Northern state, either by constitutional provision or statute, prohibited slavery or provided for gradual emancipation. However, in the South, the African human livestock provided the labor to build the Southern states and grow the cotton and tobacco. By 1850 the primary labor force in the South was African human livestock who at this time numbered about 4,000,000 or about half of the human population in the South (Bailey, 1967).

The 1850s initiated what was probably the most turbulent and unstable period in the history of the United States of America. At stake was the continuing viability of the Union itself. The Southern states had developed an agricultural economy relying primarily on cotton. Fewer than 1800 wealthy families controlled the commerce and politics of the South. One historian described the Southern states as an oligarchy instead of a democracy (Bailey, 1967). The wealthy planters relied on the labor of African slaves as a central underpinning of their economy. The elimination of African bondage threatened their aristocratic lifestyle (Bailey, 1967).

Southern states repeatedly threatened secession from the Union whenever the governmental balance of power appeared to tilt away from the South. Would the future government of the U.S. be led by leaders sympathetic to the Southern “oligarchy” or by leaders sympathetic to the Republican Party — “government of the people”? African slaves were trapped in the middle of these political issues.

In 1850, approximately 40% of the population in the North was neutral or indifferent to the slavery issue. Another 45% opposed the spread of slavery to any new states but did not oppose slavery continuing in the South. Thus, in 1850 about 85% of the Northern population did not oppose slavery continuing in the South (Bailey, 1967). Approximately 12% were “moderate” abolitionists who believed that slavery should be ended gradually over time and that Southerners should receive compensation for their loss. Only a very small number, approximately 3%, demanded that the institution of slavery be abolished (Bailey, 1967).

### Inflammatory Events that Triggered the Civil War

A number of inflammatory events triggered the Civil War; the practice of slavery in the South was not one of them. Until the 1850s, the number of states of the United States of America where slavery was legal was about equal to the number of states that prohibited bondage. Maintaining the balance between the number of slave-holding states and the number of “free soil” states challenged the political will of the U.S. Congress. A series of inflammatory events occurring in the 1850s triggered the Civil War.

In 1820 the Missouri Compromise had prohibited human bondage in the Louisiana Purchase territory above the 36<sup>th</sup> parallel (except for Missouri). The Missouri Compromise established that Louisiana Purchase territory above the 36<sup>th</sup> parallel was “free soil” which meant that any state organized from this territory would become a “free soil” state (Bailey, 1967). “The North had come to regard the sectional pact [Missouri Compromise] as something almost as sacred as the Constitution itself” (Bailey, 1967).

Another legislative act, the Compromise of 1850, admitted California as a “free soil” state and implemented the Fugitive Slave Law. This meant that slaves who had escaped to the safety of the North were to be found and returned to the slave-owner. This law became a source of antagonism for both North and South. Southerners were angry because of the lukewarm enforcement of the law in the North, and the law “stirred up a storm of opposition in the North” (Bailey, 1967). The admission of “free soil” California also permanently tilted the political balance of power to the North.

In 1854 Congress passed the Kansas and Nebraska Act, which allowed the citizens of these territories to decide whether they were slave or “free soil” states. This act repealed the Missouri Compromise. Abraham Lincoln called the repeal a “gross breach of national faith.” (Lincoln Speech on June 26, 1857) The repeal of this popular, “sacred” pact embittered the North and marshaled popular support in favor of doing whatever it took to preserve the Union.

Finally, in 1857 the U.S. Supreme Court issued a decision in the *Dred Scott v Sanford* (1857) case that further inflamed sectional tensions. Dred Scott, a slave, had moved to

Minnesota Territory with his master. He petitioned the court to declare that he was no longer a slave by virtue of the fact that he lived in a free soil territory. The Court rejected his claim concluding that he continued to be “property” after he moved to a “free soil” territory. Therefore he was not a citizen and had no right to sue for his freedom.

The Court could have stopped there. As if rubbing salt into a Northern wound, the Supreme Court further concluded that the Missouri Compromise, already repealed by Congress, was unconstitutional (Bailey, 1967). The decision further enraged the North and created even greater resolve to contain the Southern aristocratic oligarchy.

These triggering events galvanized public opinion in the North to support war to save the Union, and ignited a groundswell of support for the upstart Republican Party, (the party “of the people, by the people and for the people”). The Republican Party’s successful rise in power was in part a response to the Southern oligarchy where a few aristocratic wealthy planters represented the leadership of government and commerce. The popular opinion in the North supported continuation of slavery as practiced in the South but opposed the spread of slavery to free soil states and territories.

#### Abolition of Slavery Was Not the Reason for the Civil War

Abraham Lincoln and the Republican Party won the Presidential election of 1860. The following year, eleven Southern states seceded from the Union. The Civil War began in 1861. Early in the war, President Lincoln, who feared that emancipation of the slaves would prevent an early compromise or motivate the wavering slaveholding Border States to also secede, let it be known that the purpose of the war was *not* emancipation of the slaves (Bailey, 1967). Nevertheless, two years later Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863.

On the date of issue, the Proclamation failed to free a single slave. The Proclamation only applied to slaves in those Confederate states “still in rebellion.” Loyal slave-holding Border States (Missouri, Kentucky, West Virginia, Maryland and Delaware) were not affected (Bailey, 1967). Although no slaves were freed, President Lincoln accomplished his purpose: to strengthen the moral cause of the Union (Bailey, 1967).

Obtaining this moral high ground was not without costs. The Lincoln administration received opposition in the North against fighting an “abolition war.” Desertions from the Union army went up sharply. Congressional elections went heavily against the Lincoln administration in New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio and Illinois (Bailey, 1967).

### Transition of the Former Slaves to Citizenship

On April 9, 1865, General Robert E. Lee surrendered to General Ulysses S. Grant, marking the end of the Civil War. The Emancipation Proclamation freed slaves in the rebelling Southern states as the states were conquered. Eight months after the war ended, the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the Constitution freed slaves in the loyal Border States. The War Department had created the Freedmen's Bureau to protect, aid in the transition, educate, and feed the former slaves. Many of them were "bewildered and unsettled" by their new found freedom. Naïve and inexperienced, they were preyed upon by greedy white swindlers (Bailey, 1967).

New state governments were quickly formed in the South. In 1865–66, they hastily passed "Black Codes" intended to restore a variation of the old slave system, and insure that whites had special privileges and accommodations (Bailey, 1967). This enraged the Congressional Radical Republicans, who quickly passed the Civil Rights Bill of 1866, a precursor of the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment, under which former slaves would get full rights as citizens. They also passed and implemented the Military Reconstruction Act of March 2, 1867, which abolished all state governments, and divided the rebelling states into five military districts each headed by a general.

In order to be readmitted into the Union, the rebelling states had to adopt the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment and write new state constitutions that authorized the former slaves the right to vote (Bailey, 1967). The former slaves received the right to vote in the new state constitutions at a time when many of the states in the North prohibited African-Americans from voting. They did not get the right to vote in all the states in the North until the 15<sup>th</sup> Amendment, passed by Congress in 1869, had been ratified in 1870.

During military reconstruction, former slaves ascended to leadership roles in the state governments, from doorkeeper to Speaker of the House and from Lt. Governor to U.S. Senator. Former white leaders of the rebelling states were denied the right to hold state or federal office. Secret societies began to emerge to "keep the negro in his place." In 1866 the Ku Klux Klan began in Tennessee, using terror and threats to discourage the former slaves from voting or participating in government. Those former slaves who, nevertheless, attempted to exercise the franchise did so at the risk of mutilation or death. For example, in 1868, in a community in Louisiana, the Klan "in two days killed or wounded two hundred victims; a pile of twenty-five bodies were found half-buried in the woods." (Bailey, 1967)

The Southern states' efforts to disenfranchise, terrorize, and discourage African-American voters and their participation in the political process increased to a point that the former slaves were effectively eliminated from the political process. By 1877 white southerners had "redeemed" all the state legislatures. In the same year the military reconstruction came to a

close as a part of the Tilden-Hayes Compromise which brought back “home rule” to the South (Bennett, 1968).

### Former Slaves Suffered Harsh Retribution of Jim Crow Laws

The period of military reconstruction, 1867-1877, presented extraordinary opportunities for African-Americans. For this brief period they served as Governors, Lt. Governors, United States Senators, Mayors, Adjutant Generals, solicitors and judges (Bennett, 1968). These opportunities came at the expense of the disenfranchisement of former white leaders. When the former white leaders redeemed the state houses, municipal, and county governments they let loose an extraordinary hatred toward the African-American “citizens.”

The 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment granted African-Americans privileges and immunities of citizenship that could not be abridged without “due process of law” and granted “equal protection” of the laws. Even so, state legislatures, and municipal and county governments adopted and implemented laws akin to the Black Codes, called “Jim Crow” laws, intended to keep blacks in their place. These laws imposed segregation between white and black citizens. However, Southerners did not rely solely on these laws to impose segregation. Secret societies, including the Ku Klux Klan, enforced segregation by terror, intimidation, mutilation and lynching throughout the South.

The Supreme Court supported and set the stage for Jim Crow laws by its decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson*. In 1896 the Supreme Court held that “separate but equal” accommodations did not violate Plessy's rights and that the law did not stamp the “colored race with a badge of inferiority.” The Supreme Court provided further support for separate accommodations when it ruled in *Cumming v. County Board of Education* in 1899 that separate schools were valid even if comparable schools for blacks were not available. One historian described the ridiculous results of segregation:

The deaf, dumb and blind were separated by color. White nurses were forbidden to treat black males. White teachers were forbidden to teach black students. South Carolina forbade Negro and white cotton mill workers to look out the same window. Florida required “Negro” textbooks and “white” textbooks to be segregated in warehouses. Oklahoma required “separate but equal” telephone booths. New Orleans segregated Negro and white prostitutes. Atlanta provided Jim Crow Bibles for Negro and white witnesses. (Bailey 1967).

Government sponsored racial segregation lasted well into the 1960s.

### Native American Historical Setting

In the 1790s, the U.S. government developed a policy to “civilize” the Indians in order to avoid costly conflict and to acquire more land. Some tribes, like the Cherokees, accepted the “civilization” policy as a means of survival, seeing it as the only way for them to live in peace and prosper. Many Cherokee became farmers, had plantations, and even owned slaves. At this time, the Cherokee owned great tracts of land in the southeast, as well as west of the Mississippi.

Thomas Jefferson, in contrast with his view of “black racial inferiority,” saw Indians as somewhat similar to Europeans. He felt that the problem with them was not a matter of race, but rather culture. He, along with others of that time, felt that Indians could be educated or civilized into assimilation with whites.

The Indian Intercourse Act of 1790 specified that Indian land could be acquired by the United States only when given to them by treaty. However, peaceful intentions and hopes for the assimilation of Native Americans yielded to the pressure of westward expansion, which shaped Indian policy. Most of the eastern Indians lived in the South. Whites called them the “five civilized tribes” and they included the Creek, Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, and Seminole. While these tribes sought to live peacefully with the whites, as the cotton kingdom spread west, whites began to take Indian land.

In 1828 Andrew Jackson was elected president and, as a champion for the “common man,” made the removal of all Indians east of the Mississippi part of his agenda. In 1830 Congress passed, and President Jackson signed into law, the “Indian Removal Act” allowing the president to trade land in the west with tribes, in exchange for their land in the east.

The Indian Removal Act and Jackson’s articulation of the rationale for his policy regarding the Native American demonstrate a shift in thinking about Native Americans. According to Jackson: “They have neither the intelligence, the industry, the moral habits, nor the desire of improvement which are essential to any change in their condition. Established in the midst of another and superior race, they must necessarily yield to the force of circumstances and ere long disappear.”

Some tribes moved willingly, but others resisted. One of the most tragic was the removal of the Cherokee nation from their homes in Georgia. They first tried to challenge the Indian Removal Act at the Supreme Court, in *Cherokee Nation v. State of Georgia* (1831), and in *Worcester v. State of Georgia* (1832). President Jackson refused to enforce the Supreme Court decisions that favored the Cherokee, and demanded that they be forcibly removed. The U.S. Army marched some 17,000 people west of the Mississippi. Nearly one-quarter of the people died along the way. This became known as the “Trail of Tears.” (Linder)

In 1862 the Homestead Act was passed by Congress. The passage of the Homestead Act was the culmination of more than 70 years of controversy. From 1830 onward, groups called for free distribution of public lands. This became a demand of the Free-Soil party, which saw such distribution as a means of stopping the spread of slavery into the territories. It was subsequently adopted by the Republican Party in its 1860 platform. The secession of the Southern states, the most vociferous opponents of the policy, cleared the way for its adoption.

The Act became law on Jan. 1, 1863, the same day as the Emancipation Proclamation. It allowed anyone to file for a quarter-section (160 acres) of free land. The requirements were that the person “have resided upon or cultivated” the land for five years from the time when they applied for it.

To be eligible, a person had to be 21 years of age, or the head of a family, or have met certain military requirements. He or she also had to be a U.S. citizen or have filed a declaration of intention to become one. And the final requirement was that he or she must not have borne arms against the U.S. or given aid and comfort to its enemies — a significant restriction at the time of enactment with the Civil War well underway.

In the 1850s, the Minnesota Territory, stretching from the upper Mississippi to the Missouri River, was still mostly Indian country. At that time, the Sioux Nation stretched from the Big Woods of Minnesota to the Rocky Mountains. There were seven Sioux tribes, including three western tribes, collectively called the Lakota, and four eastern tribes living in Minnesota and the eastern Dakotas called the Dakota. The conifer forest and lakes of Northern Minnesota belonged to the Ojibway (or Chippewa), while the deciduous forests and prairie of southern Minnesota was shared by the Dakota and a much smaller number of Winnebago. (Linder)

In 1851 the Dakota by treaty agreed to give up most of southern Minnesota. The land was ceded to the United States in return for two 20-mile wide by 70-mile long reservations along the Minnesota River in southwestern Minnesota, and annuity payments totaling \$1.4 million dollars over a fifty-year period. Seven years later, in exchange for increased annuity payments, the Dakota ceded about half of their reservation land. About 7,000 members of the four Dakota tribes lived on that reservation bordering the Minnesota River.

Annuity payments were late in the summer of 1862. Rumors circulated that payments, if they would be made at all, would not be in the customary gold because of the ongoing Civil War. The Dakota planned to demand that future annuity payments be made directly to them, rather than through traders. Traders, learning of the plan, refused to distribute provisions held in agency warehouses to starving Dakota until the annuity payments finally arrived. At a meeting called by Indian Agent Thomas Galbraith to resolve the impasse, Andrew Myrick, spokesman for the traders, said: “So far as I am concerned, if they are hungry, let them eat grass.”

Two days later, four Dakota killed five settlers near Litchfield. Councils were held among the Dakota on whether to wage war. Despite deep divisions on the issue, war was the chosen course. The Dakota attacked the Redwood Agency and the federal troops coming to defend it. They also attacked the town of New Ulm and Fort Ridgely, among other sites. 2,000 refugees from New Ulm headed for Mankato, thirty miles away.

Minnesota Governor Ramsey named Col. Henry Sibley to command volunteer Minnesota forces. Major General John Pope, having recently lost the Battle of Bull Run, was appointed commander of U.S. troops in the Northwest and charged with suppressing the Dakota uprising. By late September, the American forces had prevailed. On September 26, Col. Sibley occupied the Dakota reservation and took 1,200 Dakota men, women, and children into custody. Later, another 800 Dakota surrendered. In 37 days of fighting, the Dakota Conflict had claimed the lives of over 500 Americans and about 60 Dakota.

Sibley appointed a five-member military commission to “try summarily” Dakota and mixed-bloods for “murder and other outrages” committed against Americans. Over the following six weeks, the military court would try a total of 393 cases, convicting 323 and sentencing 303 to death by hanging. The 303 condemned Dakota were moved from the Lower Agency to Camp Lincoln, near Mankato. While passing through New Ulm, the captives were attacked by an angry mob. A few Dakota were killed and many injured. Meanwhile, the 1,700 uncondemned were moved to Fort Snelling, near St. Paul. (Linder)

At President Lincoln's cabinet meeting in October, the ongoing Dakota trials were discussed. Lincoln and several cabinet members were disturbed by General Pope's report on the trials and planned executions, and moved to prevent precipitous action. The final decision on whether to go ahead with the planned mass execution of the 303 Dakota and mixed-bloods rested with President Lincoln. He was concerned that to prevent any executions might well condemn all 303 to death at mob hands. After reviewing all the cases, thirty-eight Dakota were hanged in Mankato on December 26, 1862, under Lincoln's order of execution written on December 6, 1862. It is the largest mass execution in American history.

In the aftermath of the Dakota Conflict, more than 6,000 Dakota survived by escaping westward, while more than 1,700 were imprisoned at Fort Snelling. After suffering through a harsh Minnesota winter, the prisoners were transported by steamboat down the Mississippi to Camp McClellan, near Davenport, Iowa. In April, 1863, Congress enacted a law providing for the forcible removal from Minnesota of all Sioux. "More than any single event in our state's history, the Dakota Conflict defined racial relations between Native American and non-Indian peoples in Minnesota. Once the Dakota were exiled, Minnesotans heard little of their fate." (Berg)

The Dakota Sioux Conflict of 1862 began three decades of warfare between the United States and the Plains Indians. The greatest Sioux victory was at Little Big Horn. But all ended as the first, with a defeat of the Sioux. The final one was the Massacre at Wounded Knee. (McClymer)

## **B. The Historical Setting in St. Paul**

In the 1850s, St. Paul was in a “rough frontier stage. Confidence men haunted the steamboats, roughs had possession of the night. Vigilance committees had to be formed for public safety” (Wingerd, 2001). Treaties which took lands from the Native Americans had recently opened the area to more settlement. The government was urging white people from the East to settle here. Savvy capitalists had for some time been making land deals and readying for an influx of settlers and workers. Population growth was the order of the day. From 1850 to 1900, the population of St. Paul grew from 1,700 to 163,065.

As we have already established, slavery was legal in our country at the beginning of this period, but Minnesota was a free-soil territory. In St. Paul, a November 15, 1854, editorial in the *Daily Minnesotian* reported rumors that a colony of Virginians was planning to move into Minnesota Territory with their slaves and expressed disgust at the prospect of the introduction of this institution.

The Supreme Court’s *Dred Scott v Sanford* (1857) decision would have been of great interest to Minnesotans, given that Scott had based his plea for freedom on the fact that he had lived here, in a free-soil territory.

The Dakota Conflict of 1862 would have been news of concern to white people in St. Paul. The forced march of 1,700 Dakota Sioux, mostly women, children and old men, in November 1862, brought them to Fort Snelling where they were kept just a short distance from where St. Paul citizens were living. This march is remembered by Native Americans today as Minnesota’s Trail of Tears. After a harsh winter in brutal conditions they were crowded onto open boats and shipped to the prairie.

Two years later, in 1865, the 13th Amendment was passed, abolishing slavery in the U.S. This amendment was followed in 1868 by the 14th Amendment, declaring that all people born or naturalized in the U.S. are citizens (except for the Native Americans); and in 1870 with the 15th Amendment, which made it unlawful to deny any American (male) the right to vote on the basis of race (except for the Native American).

In 1877, the Jim Crow laws, segregating and disenfranchising African-Americans, began to be passed in the South. African-Americans were denied their legal right to vote in many states until the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

In St. Paul there was a small population of educated African-American professionals which had developed during this time. They recruited other professionals from other parts of the country, ran a newspaper, and created a lively cultural, social and political community. We have no evidence of any relationship between them and the people of Unity.

### **C. Foundation of Unity Church of St. Paul**

#### Original Constituency

##### *Old Stock Americans*

“Old-Stock” Americans were members of white European families whose ancestors had resided in North America for a number of generations before they made the trek to Minnesota. Most were little more than 200 years removed from their homelands across the Atlantic. They differed from the newer immigrants who were part of the great Atlantic Migration of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in at least two respects. First, their culture was founded primarily, though not exclusively, on the cultures of the British Isles. Second, after the Revolutionary War, the regional subcultures of Colonial America began to come together west of the Appalachian Mountains to form a distinctive *national* culture. Clearly British in origin, this emerging synthesis nevertheless contained new values developed in the American environment.

Central to the significance of the Old-Stock Americans was their singular ideology, to which United States citizens eventually subscribed. This political philosophy involved “sovereignty for the individual, delegation of powers to the central government, protection of civil liberties, sanctity of private property, freedom of enterprise, and separation of church and state. ... Their convictions and optimism regarding the perfectibility of man were embodied in the American constitutional system” (Holmquist, 1981).

“According to some interpretations, Old-Stock Americans in the 19<sup>th</sup> century did not comprise an ethnic group. They were not a minority consciously preserving a distinctive culture in the midst of an alien society. They were the host society, the bearers of a new national culture. For them there was no foreign language to preserve, no national church to form, no debate within the group about cultural issue. They took it for granted that their ways would become the ways of all Americans. Their literary skills enabled them not only to record their own story but also to impress their own interpretation upon the stories of other groups. Since they had nothing to be defensive about, the Old-Stock Americans produced no self-conscious “ethnic” literature. Nevertheless they represented a distinctive culture group” (Holmquist, 1981).

### *Old Stock New Englanders*

The group of Old-Stock Americans, which we determined were the original constituency of Unity Church, came from New England.

“New England culture had a mission. To the New Englander, a democratic society meant an educated society, and his passion was the school. A large number of the colonists were very well educated for the day. Many [of them] had attended a university while others were drawn from the minor landholders and bourgeoisie. Not only was their culture distinctive but they themselves were acutely conscious of it. When they began to move westward in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, they were intent on making their values the values of the entire nation” (Holmquist, 1981).

Mrs. Newall, an original Unity member, referring in a letter to life in St. Paul with the early Unitarians in 1858, says that “New England might well have been to us called the ‘old New England’ for the larger part of the audience of that 1<sup>st</sup> church gathering...were persons from Boston and vicinity.”

They were highly literate and strongly middle class. Temperance was a value of many in the early Unity congregation. According to A.H.Wimbish, in a letter dated June 11, 1877, William Channing Gannett, the second minister of Unity Church, was “strictly a cold water man personally and sympathizes with the temperance movement: but objects to having children take the pledge for life. He thinks the pledge should be for one year and renewed annually until they arrive at maturity. He sees no fearful sin in taking a glass of beer or cider and finds no fault with those who do not take the pledge, provided they are strictly temperate and teach their children temperance. But he thinks on the whole the total abstinence principle is the safest and most exemplary. He recommends his congregation to take active part in the temperance movement.”

When they began to move westward in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, they were intent on making their values the values of the entire nation. The New England Puritan was “especially called and chosen by God for some great work on earth.” (Harriet Beecher Stowe). Old Stock Americans led the settlement of Minnesota—especially in the 1850s.

### *Old Stock New England Unitarians*

Unitarianism had split from the Congregational Church as its own theology developed. Unitarianism was well known and tolerated in Boston and the rest of New England. This was not the case here in the “west.”

Benjamin Drew, an early St. Paul Unitarian, states in 1858: “although there were very few of our denomination in the city, we had better have a rallying point for our own benefit and for immigrants of our faith who would otherwise be merged perhaps into existing societies.”

Establishing a solid foundation for a continuing church proved to be somewhat of a struggle. There was “prejudice felt against us by a large majority of people” wrote Joseph Sewall in a letter to the American Unitarian Association in 1873. According to him, the reason was because “we reject what they regard as essential doctrine of Christianity...total depravity and atonement and everlasting punishment.”

### Assumptions and Surmises

It is our firm assumption that our Unity ancestors were all Caucasian. They were most probably educated people from a position of “privilege.” By “privilege” we mean to say that they had education, some family connections in the east, and material goods that they brought with them. They had the attitude, expectation and skills to start businesses, and the ability to envision a new city and believe strongly that they could make it happen. And they had the legal and social system on their side to help make their dreams happen. Their families had probably been in America for generations, they were not new immigrants. They had a strong allegiance to British culture. They had been Unitarian in their thought and beliefs before they came west, though they did not come here as a group.

They had a belief in the perfectibility of mankind through education and culture. They thought of themselves as more enlightened than other churches by virtue of education and the use of reason in their religious faith. Their assumptions were probably that their way was the best way.

We surmise that the early members of Unity were abolitionist in their thinking, but we have no direct evidence to support that assumption. Many Unitarians of New England, along with their churches, had been very actively abolitionist. Our church was established a decade after the Emancipation Proclamation, so the actual institution of slavery was perhaps no longer a live issue. Reconstruction, however, was very much an issue in the country and, by 1877, so were Jim Crow laws.

We wonder and try to imagine the stance of our early church with regard to race and race issues. We know that William Ellery Channing, a well-known Unitarian, was repelled by slavery but also by the violence and lawless behavior of the abolitionists in New England. He wrote a book titled Slavery, in 1843, which put him on the side of the abolitionists. It became a best seller.

We know that he wanted the rule of law to eventually overturn slavery and that he avoided joining the abolitionists for some time, in part because he did not want violence to ensue. When he finally wrote Slavery, he used meticulous reasoning to make clear that slavery is totally wrong. At the same time, however, his work includes assumptions and speculations that

clearly suggest that he saw both the African and the Native American as different in traits and tendencies from himself and those with whom he was most familiar, the white New Englander. His image of the white New Englander was superior to either of the other “two races.”

Some of his statements would perhaps shock or startle us today, but they help to reveal the lens through which he saw the African and the American Indian. Regarding the slave versus the American Indian, Channing writes: “he watches the life of a master whom the North American Indian, in like circumstances, would stab to the heart. ... The African is so affectionate, imitative and docile...”

At the same time, Channing acknowledges that slavery has the capacity to degrade the human ability to connect with another. He seems to be trying to understand any of the positive behavior that he has seen from slave to master, and he does it by deciding that the African is “most susceptible to attachment.” He also notes that “The colored race are said to be peculiarly susceptible to the religious sentiment.”

His godson, William Channing Gannett, was hired as the second minister of Unity church and served from 1877-1883. During the Civil War, Gannett had served, not as a combat soldier, but with the Freedmen’s Bureau. He lived at Port Royal and worked to assist freed slaves as they took on the task of farming, becoming educated, and living independently. Based on his observations of this group of people, Gannett says: “I have no doubt that, under conditions of peace, three years would find these people, with but few exceptions, a self-respecting, self-supporting population....nearly all their moral and mental weaknesses can be traced naturally and directly to slavery....at my close view I cannot make them out to be characteristic traits.”

Many people of the times subscribed to the “race theory” that certain capacities and morals of the Negro were not sufficiently high to warrant any condition other than slavery. To them Gannett replied, “Ignorance and vice necessitate servitude (they argue) but (they) omit the other half of the circle,—slavery produces vice and maintains ignorance.”

We surmise, then, that Gannett subscribed to the “perfectibility of man” theory, and that he saw the freed slaves as men (and women) with the capacity of participating in the process of self improvement and development. His life experiences clearly brought him into much closer contact with the freed slaves than William Ellery Channing ever had. Gannett is prophetic when he states that “it is our treatment of the Negro on which depends all that the historians of the next century will sum up as the permanent result of the war.”

While minister at Unity Church, Gannett began a project with the Sunday School children which paired them with a “little sister” Sunday School of children, “white and black, among the mountain folk of Georgia,” which they supplied with Sunday School papers and supplies. He also prepared lessons entitled, “A Nation’s Sin and A Nation’s Punishment; or, Slavery in the U.S. Its Growth, Consequences and Abolition.”

Years later, after he had left Unity and was serving a parish in Rochester, New York, he and his wife Mary, developed a reputation as reformers, became friends with Frederick Douglass and were eventually instrumental in having a statue of Douglass installed in the city.

We suspect that the early members of our church saw themselves as more enlightened than other churches by virtue of their education and the clear emphasis on reason in their religious views and practice. It is important for us today to realize that “liberal” religion, in those days, meant the use of reason, rather than the reliance on religious authority, in the development of one’s religious views. This is not to be confused with the meaning of liberal in the current political parlance.

### Original Structure

On March 10, 1873, Unity Church was incorporated under Minnesota State law. The Preamble to the original Articles of Association, created in 1872, state the mission of the new organization:

Recognizing the Fatherhood of God, Brotherhood of Mankind, receiving Jesus as Teacher and seeking the Spirit of Truth as the guide of our lives, in the hope of immortal life, we the undersigned, associate ourselves to maintain the public worship of God and promote the welfare of humanity.

In order to become a voting member, an individual needed to make a donation. The congregation as a whole voted to hire a minister. Men and women alike were listed as members; the Board of Trustees was made up of both men and women.

The choice of leadership was in the hands of the membership. They hired a minister who they believed would provide the leadership that they wanted. The power of the church rested in the people of the church and their minister, whom they could retain or not. Though there was a larger denominational organization, it does not seem to have had control over the church but to exist in a supporting and resourceful role. This structure seems to validate and emerge from an identity of a group of people who are confident in their abilities and in their power.

### Original Purposes(s)

It is clear that a primary purpose for the establishment of the church was to create a community within which the constituency could maintain a public worship of God and work to improve the welfare of humanity in the manner that fit them. It is also clear that they meant to establish a “rallying point” for others like themselves. Furthermore they and their ministers saw the importance of the establishment of liberal religion in the “west,” which is what Minnesota was in those days.

The Unity Club began at Unity Church in 1877 during Gannett's ministry. It was an effort "to get good and to do good;" to get good times by giving of hospitality and service. There were 10 branches that included study classes, a Sunday reading room, and a glee club. They offered a "round table" (magazines and papers), as well as groups for social events, music, drama, art study, and history. They held reading circles. One year it was the first volume of Emerson's essays, another year it was Dickens and English literature. Other topics included Tennyson, 16<sup>th</sup> Century gentlemen's life, Thackeray, the Court of Elizabeth/Jesuits, and recent American novelists.

The Unity Club was also the locus of "relief work" organized by the congregation: help for the Protestant orphanage, Thanksgiving baskets, a home for the friendless, a church cupboard (food shelf), and a Ladies Benevolent Society which gave employment to needy women to sew clothing for sale. The Unity Club and its various branches were "an effort to bring religion into all aspects of life." Among its goals were to deepen the moral tone of the community, inculcate good citizenship, education to enrich life, and charity work. As was stated in Club documents: "some are saved by prayer, others by philosophy."

Rev. Clay MacCauley succeeded Gannett. He had a strong interest in the "advancement of rational religion of Liberal Christianity" (evangelizing, in a sense). He had given speeches in other parts of the city about such things as charity reform. He took part in various "movements for social welfare." He thought that the church should be "especially concerned in working outward to help the community." In 1886, MacCauley chose to leave Unity Church rather than cause a rift in the congregation. A letter from him to a member of the congregation suggests that the conflict was over the way he saw his ministry vs. what some of the congregation wanted. According to that letter, some members of the congregation disagreed with the way he balanced his outreach work with the work of ministering to them.

In 1896, Rev. William Lord of Unity facilitated the visit of Booker T. Washington of the Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute to give a lecture at the People's Church on his work. The next day Washington met with the ladies of Unity Church in the church parlor. For years after that, the women of the church sent goods and money, which they raised, to the Institute.

#### **D. Our Assessment for the period 1850–1900**

With regard to the issue of racism, where was Unity Church of 1850–1900? Did it stand with racism in this country or was it part of the resistance to racism? Did it build institutional walls of racial exclusion and segregation, or did it recognize racism in its various forms and actively move to end it? These are the questions we asked ourselves as we read and learned about these people, our Unity ancestors, and the foundation of our institution.

It is our conclusion that people of color were excluded from the community of Unity Church. We do not think that it was done in such an overt manner as to post signs or to include race as a requirement for membership, but we think that there was a culture of such exclusion.

It is our belief that our Unity ancestors were of the part of American society that was protected by the government law at that time. They were the people for whom the land had been taken away from the Native Americans. The rule of law was very important to them. The law mistreated people of color. To include people of color in the community would necessitate noticing that the rule of law was unfair. It would have required the community to take stands and actions that challenged the government.

We found no evidence that any such stands or actions ever happened here, even though the period of Jim Crow laws began in about 1877, four years after our church began. These laws essentially undermined the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> amendments of the Constitution. This period saw the lynching of two or three people a week in the United States. Our Unity forebears must have known of this. There was a middle class African-American community in St. Paul. There was an African-American newspaper in St. Paul. The issues must have been in the public domain.

Our Unity ancestors believed strongly in education. They held to a theory of the perfectibility of man as a possibility and goal. At the same time, we believe that they viewed society in terms of classes. We suspect that they considered themselves superior to others by virtue of their background, education and the uniqueness of their religion in the larger religious context of the day. They clearly had an interest in class as it existed in England. We see this in some of their Unity Club study group topics. We see this in the language used to describe one of the projects of their women's group, that of providing sewing work for poor women.

We notice that, while Unity Church was evidently supportive of the 1896 visit of Booker T. Washington to St. Paul, when he was invited to Unity, he was invited to meet with the women in the church parlor. He was not invited to meet with the men or to speak to the congregation as a whole. So, on the one hand, the church may "feel good" because they did a good thing by inviting Washington and responding with goods and money to send on a regular basis to Tuskegee. On the other hand, the church welcomed Washington and the issue of the racial injustice of the time, which he represented, only into the parlor to meet with the women rather than to the pulpit to talk with everyone.

As we put this together with the mission of the Unity Clubs ("to get good and do good"), and with the mission of the Old Stock New Englander to civilize the wilderness, we begin to see in the identity of our institution threads of what can be called "noblesse oblige" — the obligation of those of high rank to help the less fortunate.

Shortly after this era ends, the new church building on Portland and Grotto is dedicated in 1905. Reverend Boynton, in his talk at the dedication, mentions the help that has gone out from

Unity Church to good causes in the city and state. He mentions such things as the flower mission to hospitals and jails, employment for poor women, baskets for the needy, and a public reading room on Sundays.

Notable, for the purposes of this institutional audit, is that there is no mention made of any actions taken to challenge racism and its injustices. We are confident that, if Unity Church, its Clubs, or its people had taken stands or actions to confront racism or to bridge racial divides in this community, there would be evidence of it. It would have been such an unusual step to take. There is no such evidence.

We conclude that our Unity ancestors, if they acknowledged racism at all, wanted to see it as something outside of themselves. It is possible that they did not think of racism as affecting them or of themselves as being the beneficiaries of the racist system. It is also possible that they *did* know that they benefited from a racist system, but that they explained their privilege to themselves in terms that made it somehow acceptable. At any rate, Unity Church of the time was not a part of the resistance to racism in this country. The institution was, instead, a silent supporter and, since it was white, Unity Church and its members were beneficiaries of the racist system.

## **II. THE BEGINNING OF A NEW CENTURY, 1900–1944**

In 1898, the United States took possession of Guam, Puerto Rico, Cuba, and the Philippines after defeating Spain in war. When a popular magazine published the poem “The White Man’s Burden,” Americans seized on the phrase as an imperative to civilize “our little brown brothers,” justifying the suppression the Filipino independence movement. The 1904 World’s Fair in St. Louis, Missouri, was a showcase of America’s triumph of civilization, imperialism, and racial justifications. “On display for all to see were the subjugated people of American’s recent past,” on display in their so-called natural habitats — a human zoo. “World’s Fairs are very adept at organizing categories of human beings on this continuum from savagery to civilization.” (Estebanez & Cheng) It buttressed the idea that “those people” are different and not entitled to the same rights and privileges as white people, an idea that was in the very much present during this period.

At the turn of the century, St. Paul and the surrounding communities continued to experience tremendous growth and extensive change. In 1870, St. Paul had a total population of 20,030. By 1905 it had become a major urban center with a population of 197,023, growth of nearly 900%. Much of this growth was the result of a large influx of immigrants from Europe, Asia, and Mexico. Almost 29% of St. Paul’s population in 1905 was foreign born. In addition, many African-Americans were migrating to the Midwest. As a result, there were growing ethnic communities and communities of color developing in St. Paul and Minnesota.

During this period, Unity had four ministers: Richard Wilson Boynton (1900–1907), John Dumont Reid (1908–1917), Fredrick May Eliot (1917–1937), and Wallace W. Robbins (1938–1944).

### **A. The Historical Setting**

Segregation of blacks and whites was in operation everywhere — it was the law of the land. The early part of the century saw the use of violence and terror to enforce segregation in the South. The movie “The Birth of a Nation” portrayed blacks as subhuman and the Ku Klux Klan as the protectors of white womanhood. It was shown at the White House for President Woodrow Wilson, his Cabinet, and the Supreme Court, and Wilson had high praise for the movie. Between 1890 and 1920, 2500 African-Americans were lynched in the South. Even Minnesota saw the lynching of three black men in Duluth in the year 1920. The NAACP was organized to resist these efforts, and Frederick McGhee, a local African-American lawyer who lived in the Rondo neighborhood, helped to bring the NAACP to Minnesota.

Native Americans had lost most of their tribal land to make room for white settlers, and their children were forced to attend government boarding schools and denied their language, culture, and religion. Dakota spiritual beliefs were targeted for extermination, as white missionaries sought and obtained conversions to Christianity, making bonfires of sacred medicine bundles. It was not until 1934 that the Bureau of Indian Affairs finally recognized that the eradication of native languages was not necessary for the education of Native American children, and the official suppression of native culture, language and ceremonies was abandoned. (Berg)

This was also a period of time in which the U.S. fought in two World Wars. In between those wars, there had been the 1929 stock market crash and the Great Depression, which caused much economic hardship and geographic relocation.

#### Minnesota Native American-Ojibway Historical Context

The period from 1900 to 1920 was largely characterized by the failure of the federal government to act as trustees of the land of the Ojibway people. Instead, much of the land on their reservations passed into the hands of white people. In 1900, 3,800 Minnesota Ojibway were settled at the White Earth Reservation. In 1918, the Red Lake Ojibway Tribe adopted a written constitution that combined American and traditional Ojibway features. In 1924, citizenship was granted to all Native Americans. Under the U.S Reorganization Act, a new reservation was established at Lake Mille Lacs. (Holmquist, 1981)

#### African-American Historical Context

Between 1870 and 1890, the Black community in St. Paul had grown over six fold. They were most heavily concentrated in the city's commercial district along lower Jackson Street and along West 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, and 5<sup>th</sup> streets between Jackson and Franklin. However, growth slowed between 1910 and 1920, bringing the Black population in St. Paul to 3,376. Several Black churches were formed, including Pilgrim Baptist, St. Philip's Episcopal, St. James African Methodist Church, and St. Peter Claver Catholic Church.

Shortly after the turn of the century, many of the ethnic communities were migrating to particular areas within St. Paul: Germans to the west along West 7<sup>th</sup>; upper-class white Protestants and French and Irish Catholics to the east and below Dayton's Bluff; Germans, Swedes and a few Norwegians to the northeast. The only direction for the expanding Black community lay along the immediate north and northwest corridors leading to the western plateau. This area on the plateau along Rondo, St. Anthony, Central, Carroll and University Avenues east

of Dale became the principal center of Black residential life. By 1930, 47.8% of the Rondo area was black.

At the same time this major migration of communities was occurring within St. Paul, ghettos were also being created. By 1920, restrictive housing covenants were being used extensively to contain and isolate Blacks of both cities: in Minneapolis on the North Side and Seven Corners and in St. Paul along Rondo Avenue. In addition to Rondo, the river flats and tenement district in the shadow of the state Capitol also contained Blacks, as well as Jews, Italians, Irish and Mexicans.

Employment opportunities were limited. There were entrepreneurs and professionals in the Rondo neighborhood, but most Blacks were limited to service-related jobs — primarily on the railroads or as servants in the homes of white families.

A network of support started to develop to assist a number of those migrating to Minnesota and the Twin Cities area. Many of these organizations were outreach efforts by white churches to immigrants and the Black community. The Neighborhood House was started in 1897 as an outgrowth of Mount Zion Temple's work with Russian Jewish Immigrants. Welcome Hall Community Center was formed by Zion Presbyterian Church in 1916, and Christian Center, a nondenominational center, was formed in 1926 by Reverend Joseph Walter Harris. In addition to these organizations, the Black churches in Minneapolis and St. Paul offered a wide range of social and recreational activities to the Black community.

In 1899 the first African-American was elected to State Legislature. J. Frank Wheaton, a lawyer, represented the 42<sup>nd</sup> district in Minneapolis in the State House of Representatives. It would be another 74 years before another African-American would be elected to serve in the legislature.

There was a growing migration of Southern Blacks in search of better opportunities. In 1923, the Twin Cities Urban League was founded to help new Black arrivals find housing and work. The Chamber of Commerce objected; they felt it would only encourage further Black migration.

### Mexican American Historical Context

Mexicans were drawn to the U.S. by the promise of work, chiefly agricultural fieldwork. In 1907, the first Mexican and Mexican-Americans came to Minnesota as migrant or seasonal workers. The sugar plant in Chaska recruited many migrants to the state and was the largest employer of Mexican labor in the U.S. in those years. The living conditions for people working in these plants were appalling. Between 1912 and 1916, some Mexicans “settled out” of the migrant stream and became permanent residents of the state. They settled principally on the West

Side of St. Paul or in Swede Hollow. Others settled on the east bank of the Mississippi, often living in boxcars along the railroad tracks.

In 1920 the Mexican population in Minnesota was 237; by 1936 the Mexican population in St. Paul had increased to 1,459. During the depression years from 1930–1938, one third of the Mexican population in Minnesota lived in Ramsey County.

The depression brought recruitment of migrant labor to a standstill. Growing competition for jobs, and the subsequent displacement of the Mexican migrant worker by white labor, resulted in a movement to deport Mexicans who were not naturalized citizens of the U.S. In 1934, 328 Mexican people were deported to Mexico from Ramsey County. This included many children who had been born in the U.S. and thus were citizens.

After the depression, from 1938 to 1941, the recruitment of migrant workers resumed in Mexico and Texas and subsequently in Minnesota. One writer noted that “In addition to the disruptions caused by the Depression,” they also “faced the problems of adjusting to a settled way of life in an urban community.” The International Institute, founded in St. Paul in 1919 as an information center and service bureau for foreign people of all nationalities, considered “race prejudice a threat to the employment future of the Mexican young people.” It expressed the opinion that prejudice and lack of education appeared to be “the two outstanding problems faced by the Mexicans in this period.” (Holmquist)

Neighborhood House became a non-sectarian agency in 1903 and also began serving the Mexican-American community. In 1931, Our Lady of Guadalupe Church was founded as a Catholic mission church and became a center for Mexican-American social life.

## **B. Unity Church-Unitarian History from 1900–1944**

At the turn of the century and against this backdrop of frontier settlement and a diversifying population, Unity Church approached its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary. By 1902, plans to build a new church began to be discussed. Many of the congregation had moved out of the downtown area and “up on the hill.” In addition to following its members, another reason for moving the church from the previous location on the corner of Summit and Wabasha Street was that the area was becoming a less desirable location. “The neighborhood was deteriorating. It had become noisy with streetcars, and dirty” (Otto, 1972). Unity Church built a new building in a relatively fashionable white neighborhood.

From 1900–1910, the church continued to support the work of Tuskegee Institute via communications between Booker T. Washington and Rev. Richard W. Boynton. Washington was well-regarded by white politicians and business leaders. However other black leaders, most

notably W.E.B. DuBois, opposed Washington's message of accommodation and his reliance on wealthy white Northerners.

Boynton kept a journal in which he recorded that, in 1902, he preached on the "Moral Issues of the Coal Strike" and spoke at a meeting of the Associated Charities on "Human Society." In 1903 Boynton was elected president of the newly re-organized Neighborhood House Association and was a public advocate of its mission of helping the poor and immigrants. His letters promoting this fledgling organization were printed in four area papers, three of them with editorials favoring the project.

During the ministry of John Dumont Reid, there was not much to be found. Apparently the church was in the doldrums — numbers were dropping off and the budget was met through the generosity of a few wealthy members. In 1914, at the start of World War I, the women of Unity Church became involved with American Aid for French Wounded. Then when the United States entered the war in 1917, "they organized the Unity Church Auxiliary of the St. Paul Chapter of the Red Cross and devoted their meetings to making surgical dressings and hospital garments." (Otto, 1972).

Shortly after Frederick May Eliot became Unity's next minister in 1917, he was called to serve as a chaplain in World War I. He took up his ministerial duties at Unity Church in April 1919. Eliot was an example of an Old Stock New England Unitarian. Prior to coming to St. Paul, he had been an assistant in Cambridge to Samuel McChord Crothers, a previous well-loved minister at Unity in the 1890s. It was Crothers who encouraged Eliot to go into the ministry and advocated for his call to Unity.

After the war, many individuals within the church were involved in activities in support of the major immigrant communities. In 1920, with the encouragement of Mrs. Elizabeth Eliot and church member, Mrs. George Morgan, Unity started the practice of placing gifts near the manger as a "concrete expression of the Christmas spirit of giving" during the annual Christmas pageant. These gifts were then delivered to Neighborhood House, where they were distributed among the children living in the Neighborhood House area who were in need.

With the growing communities of color in St. Paul, racial issues were closer to home. There was little in Unity's records to show awareness or concern. Here are two things we found:

The Laymen's League of Unity Church was formed in the 1920s. A pamphlet from the League showed 57 suggested topics for chapter meetings. The only one on race was titled "Race Problems in the United States" and addressed the following questions:

What is happening to the Negro in the United States? What are his educational and social opportunities? What are the points of friction between White and Black? Have we an Oriental problem in California and Hawaii? Does science recognize "superior" racial and national groups?

There is no record of whether the suggested topic on “Race Problems” was addressed at a meeting of the League and, if so, what was said.

In 1935, Unity established the Business and Professional Women’s Club, later renamed the Elizabeth Eliot Club, with specific goals to help small Unitarian churches in the state, to help the minister, and to give assistance or sponsorship to local social agencies, such as Neighborhood House. Between 1935–1940, the Elizabeth Eliot Club featured two speakers who spoke on race-related issues: Walter Ridley, from Virginia State College for Negroes, who spoke on “Segregated Education, Pro and Con,” and Clarence Mitchell, from the St. Paul Urban League, who spoke on “What Democracy Means to the Negro”

Eliot revitalized the church, increasing numbers and commitment. The building was expanded from the original sanctuary and bell tower with the addition of the Parish Hall and the Chapel. During his ministry, there were ongoing partnerships, including pulpit exchanges, among four neighboring churches — House of Hope, First Methodist Lutheran (Holly & Victoria), Mount Zion Temple, and Unity. They were all white, religiously progressive churches with similar services.

Eliot was a member of the founding board of the Twin Cities Urban League. He also served on the boards of numerous social services agencies, such as the Community Chest, and the city welfare board. He was also a director of the American Civil Liberties Union.

In 1937, Eliot left Unity to become the President of the American Unitarian Association (AUA) in Boston, the forerunner of the present-day Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA). His admonition to the search committee choosing his successor was to “choose a minister with whom religion is the primary interest and to avoid a destructive radical.”

Wallace W. Robbins was selected to follow Eliot in the pulpit of Unity Church. In his previous church, Robbins had spoken out against the selling of arms to Japan in a town where the main industry was the manufacture of arms and munitions. Not an absolute pacifist, he was concerned the arms would be used against Americans in the future. He also warned about the evils to come out of the Nazi regime.

In a letter he wrote in 1971 (to Ellie Otto as she was writing a book on the history of Unity), Robbins says: “The persecution, torture, and murder of the Jews was generally not believed to be true, even in Unity Church, . . . I organized the first and the only Christian attempt in St. Paul to take care of German Jewish refugees.”

In 1939 in St. Paul, he was elected president of the St. Paul Urban League. He remained extremely active in the organization while in St. Paul. Robbins’ involvement, however, did not seem to generate the same commitment and energy from the church.

Robbins was also chair of the Municipal Housing Commission, served on the mayor’s Committee on Slum Clearance along with George Morgan, a Unity member, and served the city

and state in a number of other roles. Just before leaving St. Paul, he began laying the foundation for a Committee on Human Relations.

### **C. Unitarian Universalist Historical Context during this Time Frame**

The American Unitarian Association (AUA) was experiencing its own struggles around the race issue. In 1938, the AUA had four black Unitarian ministers in the entire church denomination. What follows are some excerpts from a sermon delivered by the Rev. Mark D. Morrison-Reed in 2001. According to Morrison-Reed's research, these four ministers were "men of substance, each struggling in isolation."

Egbert Ethelred Brown had his ministerial fellowship, which had been revoked by the AUA in 1929, reinstated after the ACLU threatened to sue the American Unitarian Association.

Lewis McGee was told by a Unitarian minister in 1927 that, "If you want to become a Unitarian minister, you had better bring your own church." In 1939 McGee was still serving African Methodist Episcopal churches in the Chicago region.

Jeff Campbell, a Universalist, who had also gained fellowship as a Unitarian in 1938, told Morrison-Reed that Frederick May Eliot 'would start making excuses as soon as he saw me at the other end of the corridor.' This was because Campbell had not yet been settled, that is, been hired, as a minister to a Unitarian church. It would be another 30 years before he would be.

"Meanwhile there was W.H.G. Carter who, like Brown, was a community activist and, like Campbell and Brown, ran for office, but unlike any of them he was an entrepreneur. He had been a Unitarian since 1918 and was ministering to a congregation of 50-60 in a Cincinnati storefront at 732 West 5<sup>th</sup> St." (Morrison-Reed) The local Unitarian ministers knew of his stature and work, but his Unitarian Brotherhood Church was not known to, or supported by, the denomination.

In 1938, in addition to the above four Black ministers, "there were only two black Unitarian churches, one here (*Cincinnati*) and the other in Harlem, unknown to one another and receiving minimal or no support from the AUA. It seems Unitarian attitudes had changed little since 1860, when an African-American, the Rev. Mr. Jackson, had presented himself to the autumnal meeting of the Boston Unitarian ministers. He told of his conversion and it is stated that they took a collection and sent him on his way. No discussion, no welcome, no expression of praise and satisfaction was uttered, that the Unitarian gospel had reached the 'colored'. Like the Rev. Mr. Jackson, what Carter, Brown, McGee, Campbell and others that followed them experienced instead of an 'expression of praise and satisfaction' was, at best, official indifference and often-active discouragement." (Morrison-Reed)

## **D. Our Assessment of 1900–1944**

### Government Enforced White Supremacy

During the period of 1900–1944, the superiority of white people over black people was commonly assumed and nearly universally accepted by all white Americans. White racial supremacy was supported by the most advanced scientific theories of the 19th and 20th centuries. American leaders incorporated white superiority into institutions and laws and into the day-to-day interactions of white people with black people. Supreme Court decisions at the turn of the century affirmed and reinforced this white supremacy concept. This “race construct” formed the cultural, moral and sociological underpinnings of a national U.S. character based upon “whiteness.”

The “race construct” was fully operational in the United States during the period 1900–1944. Under the race construct, anyone whose skin was white was considered superior to anyone whose skin was black. It accorded power, privileges and immunities to white people based solely on the color of their skin. The race construct was recognized, preserved and enforced by government.

During this period, resistance to white supremacy was met with imprisonment, terror, mutilation or death. With the cost of nonconformance being so high, it is not surprising that there was little resistance to the white supremacy racial construct.

### White Supremacy Received Little Resistance from Unity Church

Very little is written about what Unity Church as an institution was thinking at this time on matters of race. Based on what we found, it is our conclusion that not much had changed from the early years. The law of the land still supported exclusion based on race. Denominationally, Unitarians operated as an exclusive racial club. Nothing we found led us to think that Unity Church was substantially different. While Unitarians saw themselves as religiously progressive, they were not necessarily socially progressive.

Most of the examples found regarding the work of the church around social issues demonstrate a commitment by church members to get involved in charity work, a continuation of the thread of noblesse oblige found in our beginnings. However, there is little evidence that the church was committed and involved in social change. Efforts to bridge racial divides and address issues faced by communities of color were primarily the work of the minister, in particular Wallace Robbins.

“It was largely through Robbins’ influence that Unity Church for the first time in its history became actively involved in the welfare and racial problems of the black people. He

received some support from a few members of the church ... some church members as well as civic leaders were unsympathetic to any efforts towards remedial action.” (Otto, 1972)

Particularly telling are Robbins’ comments on the lack of support for racial equality, expressed in his 1971 letter to Ellie Otto:

“For many years, Father Gilligan, Harry Huse and I were the only white men willing to serve on the Board of the Urban League. Not all, by any measure, but many of the city leaders, one from the church, did all they could to prevent the coming of equality and true freedom for Blacks.”

### III. SEGREGATION AND THE CIVIL RIGHTS ERA, 1944–1970

#### A. National Events that Sensitized the Public to the Issue of Race

This period saw the end of the Second World War and the commencement of the Cold War. The Korean “police action” and the later Vietnam War were both characterized as part of the battle of democracy against a Communist push for world domination.

The concentration camps of Nazi Germany had come to light, as well as the inaction of the Allied countries in helping Jews in particular to escape the Hitler regime. The anti-Japanese propaganda during WWII had been particularly virulent in its race-based demonization, which perhaps made it easier to decide to drop atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Segregation was very much alive and well, and returning Black veterans, who had risked their lives for the country, were increasingly ready to risk their lives for equality at home. Civil rights efforts began to build and, over time, the violence used to stop them became national news. There were multiple assassinations of leaders, murders of activists and children, and riots as Blacks lashed out in frustration.

As we look back over this time period, we note some of the pertinent events:

**1940s** Red Cross keeps blood donations from Blacks and whites separate

**1942-46** Internment of Japanese-Americans in the U.S.

**1943** Detroit riots in reaction to substandard housing, white antagonism to Black defense workers.

**1948** President Truman ends segregation in the U.S. military

**1954** In *Brown v. Board of Education*, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the “separate but equal” doctrine is unconstitutional

**1955** Montgomery bus boycott begins

**1960** North Carolina AT & T students sit in at a Woolworth’s food counter. In just two months the sit-in movement has spread to 54 cities in 9 states.

**1961** Integrated groups of protestors join Freedom Rides on buses across the South to protest segregation.

**1963** August march on Washington; 250,000 attend.

**1963** May: Sheriff Bull Connor responds to protests in Birmingham with fire hoses and dogs, jailing thousands of schoolchildren.

Sept.: Bombing of 16<sup>th</sup> St. Baptist Church, four young Black girls killed.

Nov.: President Kennedy assassinated in Dallas, Texas

Dec.: The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) resolves to obtain the right for all citizens of Mississippi to vote.

Fair Housing legislation passed the California legislature.

- 1964** Civil Rights Act passed by Congress  
On February 15, two hundred Klansmen gathered to establish the White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan of Mississippi as a statewide organization. They adopted a forty-page constitution and a plan of projects, including one simply labeled “extermination.”  
On June 21, Chaney, Goodman and Schwerner murdered in Neshoba County, Mississippi, by the Ku Klux Klan including a deputy sheriff. They were part of Freedom Summer program in Mississippi, where young civil rights workers organized Freedom schools and voter education/registration campaigns. The state of Mississippi has never charged the identified perpetrators.  
Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. is awarded Nobel Peace Prize
- 1965** Selma to Montgomery march for voting rights  
Voting Rights Act passed by Congress
- 1966** Black Panther Party formed in Oakland, CA
- 1967** The Supreme Court rules that the ban on interracial marriage is unconstitutional
- 1968** Civil Rights Act passed by Congress; Headstart and Legal Aid authorized  
Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. assassinated in Memphis  
Fair Housing Act passed by Congress

## **B. Actions of the National Unitarian Organization**

Early in this period, there was a token statement of criticism by the American Unitarian Association (AUA) of a Unitarian church’s policy on segregation. In 1948, the Rev. Isaiah Jonathan Domas had resigned after the Liberal Christian Church of Atlanta refused membership to Dr. Thomas Baker Jones, an African-American Unitarian who chaired the Department of Social Work at Atlanta University.

In 1961 the Unitarians and the Universalists merged, forming the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA). In 1962, the General Assembly (GA) passed a Civil Rights Resolution denouncing segregation and discrimination and urging all UUs to work against it.

The 1963 GA was asked to deny voting privileges to those churches or fellowships that practiced racial discrimination. The measure failed. Opponents contended that the denomination favored integration, but shouldn’t implement it in ways that violated the UU tradition of congregational autonomy. Supporters said local people pushing for integration needed support from the national church. The GA resolved instead to notify congregations seeking UU affiliation that the denomination discouraged racial discrimination. The GA established a Commission on Race and Religion to promote the integration of blacks throughout UU churches and national ministries.

“[Whitney] Young was profoundly disappointed in the actions of the General Assembly. As a national civil rights leader, he was appalled that his denomination would not enact legislation which unequivocally required racially recalcitrant congregations to integrate. Although Young accepted membership in the newly created Commission on Race and Religion, his faith in the racial liberalism of his denomination had been dealt a serious blow.” (Dickerson 1998).

Young, then head of the National Urban League, was asked to be on the newly formed Commission on Religion and Race, which he agreed to do “as long as I see evidences of positive and immediate effectiveness.”

In 1965 over twenty UU ministers and lay people responded to Dr. King’s call for clergy support during the march in Selma. One of them was the Reverend James Reeb, who was attacked by white racists and died. It was his death that prompted the UUA Board of Trustees, which was meeting in Boston at the time, to adjourn and reconvene the meeting in Selma. In addition, over 200 additional UU ministers and laity traveled to Selma to participate in the marches.

In a 1966 GA resolution, UUs pledged themselves to eliminate all vestiges of discrimination and segregation in their churches and to work for integration in all phases of life in the community. This resolution spoke comprehensively about the areas that needed to be addressed, including urging UUs to support efforts dealing with the right to vote and equal opportunities in education, housing, public accommodations, and employment. The document ends with an acknowledgement of the freedom of individual members and that “strong differences of opinion may exist on specific questions.”

In 1967 following racial rioting in Newark and Detroit, the UUA called an emergency conference on the “Unitarian Universalist Response to the Black Rebellion.” The UUA made a commitment of significant money to Black self-determination efforts. Financial difficulties and internal dissension eventually lead to a vote not to provide the funding. By 1970 it became clear to many involved that what came to be called the Black Empowerment movement in the UUA had failed.

In 1968 only 1,500 blacks belonged to UU congregations. Between the years 1889 and 1969, only 14 black clergy had been fellowshipped. In 1970, Whitney Young told the minister at the Unitarian church he had been attending that he would be going to church more in the black community, partly because of his exasperation with the UUA’s clumsy efforts to attract blacks and address racial issues.

A general resolution to end discrimination against homosexuals & bisexuals was passed by the UUA in 1970.

There was little evidence that activities at the national level of the denomination were part of the consciousness of Unity Church.

### **C. What Was Happening in St. Paul during this Period?**

The Black population in St. Paul increased by 40% from 1940 to 1950, mostly in the Rondo neighborhood. Between 1950 and 1970, it increased 388%, with the biggest jump between 1960 and 1970. The majority of the migrants came from the South and the north-central states. However the racial climate in the Twin Cities was not qualitatively better than in other northern cities, and employment opportunities had not improved dramatically.

Employment for Blacks was still limited to certain jobs, but opportunities were starting to expand. During WWII, President Roosevelt issued an order forbidding discrimination in defense industries. This, plus pressure applied by Cecil Newman, publisher of local black newspapers the *Minneapolis Spokesman* and the *St. Paul Recorder*, opened up the Twin City Ordinance Plant in New Brighton to Black workers. Efforts were made to introduce Fair Employment Practice legislation on the state level, but none was passed until 1955.

Solomon Hughes, a top golfer on the United Golfers' Association tour, was unable to enter the PGA's 1948 St. Paul Open tournament. From 1943-1961, the PGA excluded African-Americans from its tournaments. He had moved to Minneapolis in 1943, but no public course or private country club would hire him as a golf pro. Instead he worked as a Pullman porter on the Great Northern Railroad.

Racial discrimination in housing continued. Restrictive covenants in real estate transactions had been limited by a state law passed in 1937, but unwritten agreements often prevented Blacks from obtaining housing or inflated their costs above market value, and home loans and insurance were difficult to obtain. In the mid-1940s, the Governor's Interracial Commission found that "the overwhelming number" of Blacks could not hope to buy or rent outside of definite neighborhoods to which white persons "expect Negroes to be restricted."

Wartime housing shortages led to the conversion of large homes into sleeping rooms and small apartments. Housing stock deteriorated in the area between Summit and University Ave. and middle and upper-class, white families began moving away from the city. Urban renewal, which tore down many deteriorating buildings, and the construction of I-94 displaced many residents of the Rondo neighborhood and they began to move into the Cathedral Hill/Summit-University area. (Young and Lanegran, 1996)

Rev. Floyd Massey, the minister at Pilgrim Baptist Church from 1944–1965, was the first Black to serve on the City of St. Paul Planning Board. Unable to stop the construction of I-94 through the middle of the Rondo neighborhood, he was a leader in the battle to alter plans for it.

As a result, the freeway was built below ground level to reduce noise and pollution in the surrounding neighborhood.

While a junior at Mechanic Arts High School in 1944, Evelyn Fairbanks and some of her peers organized a sit in at Bridgeman's on 7<sup>th</sup> and St. Peter, which “did not serve Negroes.” Eventually they were successful in changing the store’s policy. She comments: “our anger ... would remain unnoticed by most of the white society until the “surprise” riots of the 1960s.” The civil unrest of the 1960s helped to underscore the disparity in opportunity for Blacks nationally and in Minnesota. (Fairbanks, 1990)

#### **D. Unity Church-Unitarian History from 1944-1970**

After Wallace Robbins left to take on the presidency of Meadville-Lombard Theological School, Unity Church specifically recruited Arthur Foote II, who was known to the search committee and recommended by Robbins. Approximately a year after Robbins announced his resignation, Foote, an Old Stock New England Unitarian, was in the pulpit.

In 1946 Foote was the chairman of a state Unitarian committee formed to investigate mental hospitals. Elizabeth Eliot Club volunteers visited mental institutions. Foote spent a week-long stint working incognito in a mental hospital. These efforts, combined with then-Governor Luther Youngdahl’s efforts to reform state hospitals, resulted in the improvement of Minnesota mental health services. This initiative is significant because of the concentrated effort by Unity Church, in partnership with others, to effect a change in the larger society.

Forrest Wiggins was the first African-American to become a tenure-track professor in a major research program at the University of Minnesota. In 1951 he was fired. There was a lot of controversy about why — allegations of his being a Communist, suspicions that it was because he was black. Eventually the University tried to make a case that he was incompetent, even though he had previously received positive performance reviews.

Early in the controversy, Arthur Foote was quoted in the newspaper supporting Wiggins. Unity’s board chair wrote a letter to Foote chiding him for bringing Unity Church’s name into the middle of a controversial matter. The chairman also wrote to Frederick May Eliot, then head of the AUA, essentially asking him to bring Foote into line.

This incident reminds us of Rev. Clay MacCauley’s decision to resign in 1886. It seems to highlight an ongoing tension at Unity Church between an outward-focused public ministry versus an inward-focused congregational ministry. It is clear that Foote was committed to a public ministry.

Over the course of his ministry, Foote was a member of the board of the Minnesota Council on Religion and Race, the St. Paul Urban League and the NAACP. He was also very

involved with the St. Paul Council of Human Relations, which had been initiated by Wallace Robbins with a mission of improving race relations. Foote brought church support to the organization, and several church members were either on the board or active volunteers.

We've been told that several black families attended Unity Church during this time period. In the late 40s/early 1950s, some black friends invited Whitney and Margaret Young to attend Unity Church. Young was then employed as the industrial relations secretary of the St. Paul Urban League and already knew Arthur Foote through his involvement with the League. Young did not join Unity Church, but he developed relationships with Unitarian whites, like Foote, who supported the League and its efforts to break down racial barriers in employment, education, and housing. He also continued to attend Unitarian churches and identify as a Unitarian until 1970. (Dickerson, 1998.)

In 1956 the Elizabeth Eliot Club voted on General Alliance Resolutions for action or study on race issues. The most votes for action were to “foster education and vocational training, recreation and decent living conditions for Indians (American), and oppose discrimination against them, especially in employment and housing.” The Action that received no votes stated: “under guidance from the General Alliance, work in our respective communities for the elimination of racial segregation, as being contrary to the principles of religion and democracy alike.”

Growth of the church led to the addition of the Eliot Wing in 1956. Foote reminded people that the new building is a “wonderful new tool with which to be about our business, which is *not* building walls, but people.” Foote often spoke about race from the pulpit, but there were few examples of institutional support or action. One example was the church-sponsored efforts prompted by the construction of I-94 through the Rondo neighborhood.

#### Open Housing and the Construction of I-94

By 1957, several Unity Church members were involved in the issue of “open occupancy,” that is, ensuring equal access to housing regardless of race. A research report published in 1962 discussed the difficulties of finding housing for Blacks even before the displacement caused by the construction of the freeway:

In the spring of 1958 the St. Paul Urban League estimated a non-white population of about 7,450, which seems a conservative figure, and guessed that over nine-tenths live in the Selby-Dale area. ... Rental housing for non-whites was extremely scarce, and much of the housing available for purchase in the Selby-Dale area was sub-standard.

The Urban League reported that the few Negroes who were able to buy outside the area of non-white concentration were paying a “color tax” as high as \$1,000.00. Thus the housing problem was already acute in the

Selby-Dale area, particularly for Negroes, before the freeway displacement.

Half of the Negroes who tried to leave the Area had difficulties in the attempt, many of a discriminatory nature. Some reported difficulty in getting an appointment to see a house, some in seeing the house, others in completing the transaction. Most of the barriers were experienced before a mortgage loan was sought. Some Negroes said they were quoted higher prices than whites were, and others felt they were used to help scare whites into moving out of certain blocks. (Davis, 1963).

In its annual report of October 1957, the Neighborhood Problems Committee of Unity Church reported that: "During the past year [this committee] has been concerned about the relocation of our neighbors who will be dispossessed by the Freeway. We do not want the present over-occupancy to be increased. We do not want our neighbors to feel afraid that no housing will be available to them."

This group had also sent a letter to St. Paul Mayor Dillon and other city officials in May, signed by the Board of Trustees, expressing these concerns and requesting that the City Planning Board and the Housing and Redevelopment Authority "make a survey of this area at once in order to produce a workable plan for relocation of our displaced church neighbors and better housing for those remaining in the Selby-Dale District."

They also wrote to the Principal of Marshall Junior High School (which was then across Holly Avenue from the church; the building is now part of Webster Magnet School) offering the services of the committee to any group "concerned with the further blighting and deterioration of our neighborhood." The committee reported that they were never called upon.

In its 1958 report, the Community and Social Service Projects Committee (C&SSP) stated that it had done a study of immediate community problems and noted that "many families in our church neighborhood faced an immediate housing problem due to the new freeway running through a heavily populated Negro residential section. It was felt that at least some of the displaced Negro families would wish to leave the "Negro area" and buy or build homes in other parts of our city, and that our church might well undertake to do what it could to facilitate these moves."

The freeway dislocation "generated such interest that the Relocation Committee was formed." The C&SSP Committee felt that the work of the Relocation Committee "properly represented the major project of our church in this area of community problems at the present time." The Relocation Committee was established on April 16, 1958, with its stated purpose being to determine, and to implement "what action the church can take to assist people who will be displaced by the expressway going through on St. Anthony.

In a newspaper article about the open occupancy ordinance efforts at the time, Foote was quoted as saying: “The most damning indictment of the church is that its principles are glorious but are largely unimplemented. ... Noble talk in generalities can be cheap substitutes for forthright action in concrete situations. ... It has always been easier to contribute money and used clothing to mission efforts in far places than to have concern for neighbors near at hand and about evils at one’s own doorstep.” At this time, Foote was chair of the Citizen’s Committee for Open Occupancy.

In its annual report in 1959, the Relocation Committee reported that it had sent a letter to the congregation urging those selling their homes to make them available to minority group members. Letters were also sent to several churches in the St. Anthony-Rondo area offering the services of the committee and requesting an opportunity to speak to the congregation.

Committee members met with the Housing and Relocation Committee of the Governor’s Human Rights Commission, the Minnesota Council for Civil and Human Rights, the Urban League and the local chapter of the NAACP. They visited real-estate and home building firms to acquaint them with “our interest in integrated housing and our willingness to assist in difficult situations.” The committee also began working with similar committees in other Twin Cities Unitarian churches.

The committee found that “few of the displaced Negro families expressed an interest in moving into non-Negro areas,” and so its function gradually changed. The last time the Relocation Committee shows up in Unity Church’s annual report is 1960. The committee spent the year working in coordination with other groups and discussing the possibilities of action in the areas of education and lobbying for open housing. It also showed the film, “The Burden of Truth,” which presented “Negro housing problems” at the May church dinner.

It was subsequently renamed the Unitarian Fair Housing Committee, “with the wider purpose of keeping in touch with other like-minded groups in the Twin Cities, and concentrating its energy on education for fair housing, it being always kept in mind that the committee would be ready to do everything it could to help relocate any family who needed and wanted its help.”

This issue of open housing continued to resonate at Unity Church. In an article published in the St. Paul Dispatch, Sept. 30, 1967, Fred Rutledge, who was an associate minister from 1967-1970, is identified as “one of 40 Twin Citians who marched for open housing in Milwaukee.”

Although one could take issue with some of the assumptions made and the approaches taken, this effort by Unity Church and its members to address the disparity in housing access for people of color is significant for its institutional focus and commitment.

In 1963 the fire in the sanctuary led to a discussion of whether to build a new building in a different location rather than repairing the damage to the old building. This question of

relocating had previously come up at the time of the Eliot Wing addition in 1956. Again, the congregation reconfirmed the reasons for remaining at the present site: 1) the location was accessible to the majority of members, and 2) it offered an opportunity for the church to help the surrounding low-income area by its presence in the neighborhood.

### **E. Our Assessment for the period of 1944–1970**

Arthur Foote preached a sermon in the mid-fifties in which he said:

“Why can't Unity Church address itself more effectively to the pressing issues of our time? Why is its witness so timid, so blunted by its own self-serving motives? Why do our worship services so largely fail to quicken our sense of sacred reality, or to sensitize us to the plight of so many persons in our Society? What good is it to fill our pews on Sunday, if church membership cannot produce more noticeable results in life-learning, in making us ever more greatly human, responsible, and free?”

In a period of history during which issues of race were prominent and compelling national news, it was difficult to ignore the effects of racial oppression. Many individuals within Unity Church were involved and provided leadership in areas of social concern. There was an effort from both individuals and the minister to reach across racial lines.

During Foote's ministry from 1945 to 1970, there was a sense of movement by the church towards becoming a more socially active, multi-cultural institution. The fair housing efforts were an encouraging example of an institutional commitment to confronting racism.

However, there was still a tension between individual freedom and the need for focused institutional responses to racial inequality. The history and philosophy of Unity Church and Unitarianism is based on the freedom of thought of individuals. This is interpreted to mean that the church should not tell people what to think or do. We heard from several long-time members that, “the pulpit gave us our values, but it was up to us how we lived them out.”

One example of these individual efforts was documented by Ginny Martin. In November, 2003, she met with Jim Robinson, director of the Summit-University Teen Center, also known as The Loft Teen Center. It has operated as a drop-in center for at-risk teens since 1967. She writes:

as I was getting ready to leave (and had turned off the tape recorder), Robinson said, “I want to tell you something about your church. The best board members we've had have been from your congregation. And it wasn't just in terms of money.” He said Unity had been one of the 13 founding church members of The Loft, and that Bernice Bailey,\* member of Unity and

\* N.B. The correct name should be Beatrice Bailey. Also known as Bea Reed after a later husband, Bailey's maiden name was Shuck.

a librarian at the St. Paul Public Library, had been part of that initial founding and a strong supporter.

This strong desire for independent individual thought and action has at times been in conflict with the need for an organized institutional response to the entrenched system of racism. In the words of Arthur Foote, “It has always been easier to contribute money and used clothing to mission efforts in far places than to have concern for neighbors near at hand and about evils at one’s own doorstep.”

## IV. POST CIVIL RIGHTS, 1970–2005

After the Civil Rights Movement had achieved the elimination of government-sponsored racial discrimination, the Movement stalled. During this period, beginning in the early to mid 1970s there was a lack of commitment to changing historical patterns of racial relationships between individual people of color and white people.

### A. The Nation Struggles to Establish a Society of True Racial Equality

- 1971** The Supreme Court upholds busing as a legitimate means for achieving integration of public schools. *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education*. Although largely unwelcome (and sometimes violently opposed) in local school districts, court-ordered busing plans in cities such as Charlotte, Boston, Minneapolis and Denver continue until the late 1990s.
- 1970s** Enforcement of public school desegregation around the country.
- 1978** Supreme Court rules that medical school admission programs that set aside positions based on race are unconstitutional (Bakke decision).
- 1979** Shoot-out in Greensboro, North Carolina, leaves five anti-Klan protesters dead; 12 Klansmen charged with murder.
- 1983** Martin Luther King Jr. federal holiday established.
- 1988** Congress passes the Civil Rights Restoration Act overriding President Reagan’s veto. The Act expands the reach of non-discrimination laws to private institutions receiving federal funds.
- 1989** Army Gen. Colin Powell becomes first black to serve as chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.
- 1989** L. Douglas Wilder (Virginia) becomes first black elected governor.
- 1990** President Bush vetoes a civil rights bill he says would impose quotas for employers; weaker bill passes muster in 1991.
- 1991** After two years of debates, vetoes, and threatened vetoes, President Bush reverses himself and signs the Civil Rights Act of 1991, strengthening existing civil rights laws and providing for damages in cases of intentional employment discrimination.
- 1994** Byron De La Beckwith convicted of 1963 Medgar Evers assassination.
- 1995** Supreme Court rules that federal programs that use race as a categorical classification must have “compelling government interest” to do so.
- 1996** Supreme Court rules consideration of race in creating congressional districts is unconstitutional.

- 1999** Riots in Los Angeles. The first race riots in decades erupt in south-central Los Angeles after a jury acquits four white police officers for the videotaped beating of African-America Rodney King.
- 2000** Colin Powell becomes the first black U.S. Secretary of State.
- 2003** *Grutter v. Bollinger* of the Supreme Court upholds Affirmative Action in University admissions. Case involved the University of Michigan Law School. It is significant that, in this instance, the federal government was openly challenging affirmative action.

### **B. How Were Racial Justice Issues Addressed by the Unitarian Universalist Association?**

- 1980** The book, “Black Pioneers in a White Denomination,” by Rev. Mark Morrison-Reed, opens eyes about the history of racial injustice in the denomination.
- 1981** The UUA Board institutes an affirmative action policy and resolves “to eliminate racism in all its institutional structures, policies, practices, and patterns of behavior, so that it will become a racially equitable institution and can make an effective contribution toward achieving a similarly equitable society.”
- 1987** The number of people of color among UU ministers reaches 15, up from 8 in 1968.
- 1993** More than 50 UU leaders reach consensus that integration and efforts to diversify have not ended racism and that the UUA should focus on anti-racism. The group embraces the concept of white privilege.
- 1996** The Racial and Cultural Diversity Task Force report, “Journey Toward Wholeness,” is presented to General Assembly
- 1997** The General Assembly approves a resolution entitled “Toward an Anti-Racist Unitarian Universalist Association,” requiring the UUA Board to “establish a committee to monitor and assess our transformation as an anti-racist, multicultural institution.”
- 2000** Persons of color among UU ministers now number 45, though growth lags in the number serving parishes.

### **C. Unity Church in the Post Civil Rights Era**

- 1974** Unity allocated funds for drop-in center, 606 Selby Ave.
- 1975** Funds allocated for Selby Food Co-op.  
Social concerns group requests \$75 for Summit University Free Press.
- 1976** Unity no longer provides funds for drop-in center, 606 Selby Ave.  
\$4,989 donated to Loft Teen Center, Easter offering.
- 1980** Food donations collected for New Beginnings program.

- The Wider Ministry program begins. This was a program of lectures and performances designed to draw audiences from outside Unity's congregation.
- 1981** There was discussion over whether or not to install a sign in front of the church. Some thought that a sign identifying Unity Church and welcoming worshipers would be a way to be more open and welcoming to the surrounding community. The matter was referred to committee and later dropped.
- 1982** Indochinese Refugee Assistance Project (IRAP) is formed.  
\$50 seed money given to a program to aid low-income women who are heads of households.  
Board recognized a need for broader look at social concerns in the community.
- 1984** A Social Concerns Group sponsored forums on issues of peace and hunger.
- 1985** Programs on Nicaragua and on the African famine held
- 1987** Social Concerns Group collected clothing and household goods for the New Beginnings Center
- 1990** Relationship with partner church in Homorodszentpeter begins without church support.
- 1994** IRAP ended, Wider Ministry ended.
- 1995** Volunteers commit to provide the evening meal at a homeless shelter on a monthly basis.

#### Across the USA the Civil Rights Movement Stalled.

After the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s and early 1970s had accomplished the removal of government-sponsored segregation in employment, housing, education, and public accommodations, there remained much to do in order to accomplish equality in day-to-day living relationships between people of color and white people. Though the legal structures for racial discrimination were gone, there remained myriad patterns of unjust racial relationships.

The ideas of racial superiority and racial inferiority had become internalized by all of us. They were internalized in the way our institutions, our schools, our courts, our places of employment, and our places of worship functioned. They were internalized into the ways we interacted with each other. All over the United States, individuals, both white and of color, were confronted with this next challenge: how to live together as mutually respecting equals. Society and government lacked the tools and the willingness to commit to meet this challenge.

Our review of the history of this period suggests that both people of color and white people were poorly equipped to deal with a change in the cultural historical pattern of racial relationships. While the Nation generally understood the need to eliminate racial bias in employment, housing, education, and public accommodations, most people failed to understand

what the new “racial relationship” arrangement meant to them as individuals. Most were unaware of personal acculturation based upon historically unjust racial relationships. Most were unaware of the power of internalized racialized ideas. Most were unaware of the power and role of systems and institutions to perpetuate racism.

The Movement stalled for several reasons. Fear of, and discomfort with, new racial relationships was one reason. Another reason might have been movement fatigue. This time period, the late 1960s–early 1970s, also included the Women’s Movement and the Equal Rights Amendment, the Poor People’s Campaign and the Vietnam War. There appeared to be an exhaustion with outreach activities. Many people withdrew from outreach “movement” activities and turned inward to the personal or self development.

### Unity Church also Turns Inward

During the ministry of Roy Phillips (1971–1998), Unity Church also turned inward with a focus on personal, self development. Much of the data we collected for this period was from either Board Minutes or from our focus group discussions with current long-time members. The members described many social justice and social action activities they were involved in as individuals. Parents for Integrated Education is one example of a social action group in St. Paul which had strong leadership and involvement from members of Unity Church. But they pointed out that these were not church sanctioned or supported. So while many members of the congregation may have been involved in social justice activities, the church as an institution did not participate. One longtime member described this as a “dry period” in the area of social justice at Unity Church.

Whereas the era of Arthur Foote had seen church involvements that attempted to build bridges to communities of color, this period appeared to put more emphasis on individualism.

### **D. Our Assessment for the Period 1970–2005**

With regard to the issue of racism, what was the identity of Unity Church at the end of this period, in 1998? Had it changed as a result of the accomplishments of the Civil Rights Movement? Had it accepted the challenge of learning how to create true relationships of equality with communities and individuals of color?

It is our view that Unity Church as an institution did not change as a result of the Civil Rights movement. In fact, by 1998 we had become more “white” identified and focused. The question of installing an identifying and welcoming sign outside the church building had been tabled and never acted on. The lack of such a sign gave the appearance that the church was closed to the neighborhood.

An exception to this tendency to turn inward is Unity's endorsement of the Indochinese Refugee Assistance Project, which was strongly identified with Unity Church for many years. This effort continued a willingness on Unity's part at other times in history to give aid and support to refugees of war.

We respect and value this and other efforts to aid refugees over the last 150 years, but we think that there is an important piece of our identity to look at in these efforts. It is one thing to reach out and offer aid and support to an "other" who has been victimized by war, especially if that war occurred in another country far away. It is quite another thing to acknowledge the fact that we, the mostly white members of Unity Church, as white people in a white institution, live in and benefit from a society that continues to victimize people who are non-white and live next door.

Clearly, the latter would require a self examination — individual, institutional and societal — which would arouse great discomfort. It would challenge a characteristic that has been a part of Unity's institutional identity since the very beginning, the Old Stock American belief that we are the "host society," the bearers of the national culture as it is and should be.

Unity Church did not change in its willingness or ability to engage in the challenging work of developing authentic interracial relationships. As in the early years of Unity, we do not think the racial exclusion that existed here during this time period was intentionally racist in its origins. It was more a result of being oblivious to its existence and its impact. It was a result of feeling that we were fine as we were and not wanting to change.

We were reluctant to challenge the individualism that is at the core of American and Unitarian identity. We chose not to grapple with the tension between individual freedom and the need for an institutional commitment to confront racism. We continued to engage in charitable works instead of initiating a deeper exploration of racism and how we might be complicit in its continuing existence. That work would have forced us to feel a great deal of discomfort, and to be willing to be changed.

## Conclusion

An unvarnished, straight-forward examination of Unity Church-Unitarian's history with regard to racism leaves us with the following conclusions: there has been little activity within the body politic throughout the decades to ensure that Unity Church is a welcoming, inclusive institution. Moreover, the church as an institution has been complacent and undeniably silent on the subject of racism when, in fact, and especially because of its geographic location in a diversely populated inner-urban neighborhood, a leadership role in this arena might have been a logical outcome.

Certainly, individual members of the church have actively worked to erase bigotry and race-based hatred and ignorance in their respective communities outside of Unity Church. The Anti-Racism Leadership Team is resolved to put this work at the core of our congregational identity. It is no longer acceptable or desirable to maintain the status quo, allowing institutionalized racism to erode our liberal religious foundation merely because our "forefathers and mothers" were part and parcel of the dominant, privileged culture, as is the majority of our present congregation.

The time has come for us to turn outward, while at the same time we begin a thorough examination of our internal processes as a congregation. Although this may seem to be a contradiction, it is not. The freedom to explore our own individual spirituality, which is at the heart of our liberal religious faith, is not at odds with reaching outwards to discover what riches lie outside the comfortable confines of our church. Indeed, our success in this self-exploration is dependent on our ability to recognize our limitations and reach out to that which is unknown or unfamiliar to us.

The exhilaration we, as Unitarian Universalists, may experience in seeking to live more meaningful lives, as well as the deep reverence for all human beings that is an intrinsic part of who we are, should be evident in our actions outside the bounds of the physical church. We have a mission to promulgate authentic love and respect for our sisters and brothers within and without the church community. To intentionally seek to dismantle racism as a congregation is a moral imperative within the scope of this mission.

This document is a beginning. It is an invitation to the congregation to participate in work that is extremely vital for the health and future of Unity Church-Unitarian and Unitarian-Universalists everywhere. It is within our power to create a church that is not only anti-racist in word, but has genuine acceptance, respect, and love for all people as a recognizable part of its identity in this community.

However, we must have the will and determination to undertake what may at times be very painful work. We want to create a religious institution that is known throughout the

neighborhood, the city, and beyond as a place of loving, welcoming, joyous Unitarian-Universalists who are not afraid to live out their values. Can we imagine a day when Unity's bell peals and the whole neighborhood takes comfort, knowing what that ringing symbolizes?

The subject of racism is difficult and emotion-filled. As we begin this work together of examining white privilege and working to dismantle racism, we hope that we can be compassionate companions on the journey. Our team covenant includes the following statements, which remind us of that aspiration:

*We seek to create a safe and "liberated" space, where we can be open, honest, and vulnerable without fear.*

*Everyone is somewhere on a path of learning about racism and working to dismantle it.*

*Each of us has something to teach, each of us has something to learn.*

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The story of race in the church involves recognizing that there were people who were actively racist or complicit with racism. That group outnumbered the people who actively fought against racism. The analogy I use is of a football game. He calculated that he could be a more positive influence on race relations with audience of millions than risk losing all of them for the sake of some anti-racist standpoints. We're not in his shoes, so who knows what we would have done. But I think an honest historical accounting will simply take a realistic look at a man who's widely admired but, by his own admission, was not flawless. Unitarianism (from Latin unitas "unity, oneness", from unus "one") is a Christian theological movement named for its belief that the God in Christianity is one entity, as opposed to the Trinity (tri- from Latin tres "three") which in most other branches of Christianity defines God as one being in three persons: the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.[1] Unitarian. The term Unitarian is sometimes applied today to those who belong to a Unitarian church but do not hold a Unitarian theological belief.[19] In the past, the vast majority of members of Unitarian churches were Unitarians also in theology. Over time, however, some Unitarians and Unitarian Universalists moved away from the Unity, known informally as Unity Church, is an organization founded by Charles and Myrtle Fillmore in 1889. It grew out of Transcendentalism and became part of the New Thought movement. Unity is known for its Daily Word devotional publication. While it was originally considered as a "positive, practical Christianity" which "teach[es] the effective daily application of the principles of Truth taught and exemplified by Jesus Christ," Unity now describes itself as "for people who might call themselves