



**Ann Heidkamp**

## **Black Lives Matter to Wisconsin UU's: Greater Milwaukee Metro Area**

Living in the most segregated metropolitan area of the county, my plan will strengthen justice building by bringing together the commitment, talents, and resources of five Milwaukee area UU congregations to better understand our own racism and the structural racism of our area so we can work as allies with community based partners to address that racism.

### **Project Goal**

To develop a collaborative social action network for Black Lives Matter with with active participation from the six UU congregations in the Greater Milwaukee Metro area, based on sustained and sustainable commitment, with at least 5 congregations involved in public witness, educational engagement, and significant participation (visible presence) in local racial justice efforts/organizations by September, 2017. Milestones on our way to success include:

- The presence of sustainable structures to hold the congregations together.
- Reports that individual congregations have participated in at least one or two witness events.
- Establishment of a Rapid Response Network to help with immediate needs around Racial justice.

### **Personal Reflection**

The JBI program has provided me with an accountability structure and support resources to help us approach this project in a consistent and systematic way. Having Mary as a partner with her relationships and experience with local grassroots justice organizations and national BLM actions has enabled our collaboration group to engage in Black Lives Matter work in a way that we could not have achieved without her. Being engaged with these grassroots groups has deepened my understanding of and commitment to Black Lives Matter – and made me much more willing to take leadership risks in terms of speaking and action. I am growing and stretching as a leader through this project.

### **Project Update**

#### *Successes*

- 4 of 5 congregations in greater Milwaukee area actively participating; core collaboration planning group is developing into an open and effective team. 5<sup>th</sup> congregation will become

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more involved again when new Minister arrives in late August. He has already been contacted and indicated his involvement.

- Held 2 very successful Beyond the Banner Workshops and witness events attended by 100 people and 60 people respectively. Great newspaper coverage of first workshop.
- Held 2 other BLM collaboration events – a Banner Blessing and Witness at UUCW which had great publicity in local TV media; providing children’s activities at the Dontre Day community event sponsored by the Coalition for Justice (which was unfortunately shortened by cool, rainy weather).
- Brought UU’s to various partner sponsored BLM rallies, protests, and educational events. Anywhere from 10 – 25 UU’s from various congregations at each event.
- Increased awareness of BLM2WUU’s as partner organization with local grassroots justice organizations.
- Initial outreach to other denominations and ally groups to increase our effectiveness in local racial justice work.
- Added participation in actions around the police involved shooting of Jay Anderson on June 23<sup>rd</sup> to our activities.

### *Challenges*

- Involving members of the 5<sup>th</sup> congregation and the local UU fellowship.
- Ministerial changes at 2 of the congregations.
- The impact of local and national events on local efforts – need to remain flexible and responsive to changing situations.
- Realization after 2<sup>nd</sup> workshop that congregation members are more fearful and hesitant to go into unfamiliar city neighborhoods or to take action that was not initially anticipated.
- Resulting difficulty in getting larger numbers of members engaged in actions like rallies or protests.