

**On June 6, 2021,
the First Congregational Church of Hopkinton, NH, UCC, voted to
become a Racial Justice Church**

With this vote the Congregation commits to the following covenant:

“We, the members of the First Congregational Church of Hopkinton, NH, United Church of Christ, covenant to become a Racial Justice Church and to engage in an ongoing process of being: Learners, in a community of mutual accountability, about slavery, white privilege, implicit bias and all aspects of racism in our midst; Witnesses and Interrupters of the continued cycle of racism; and Allies with People of Color in challenging race-based injustice in all its manifestations.”

The journey that brought our congregation to this vote

In July of 2020 we formed a Racial Justice team. The original team members were acting church deacons. The team was tasked with reviewing the document put forth by the Racial Justice Mission Group of the NH Conference, UCC, “The Process for becoming a Racial Justice Church.” The team then began its own education and discernment process and determined that we very much wanted to move forward and lead the congregation through a process of learning about what it means to be a Racial Justice Church.

The team’s journey

- We began by acknowledging that we, as a team, had much education and discernment of our own to engage in, before we could involve the congregation.
- We recognized that we would have to seek outside guidance on how to move forward with evocative and informative resources.
- We noted that Covid-19 would affect our ability to be together as a congregation and might present unique challenges to how we would reach out and involve the congregation in this process.
- We also said that, though Covid-19 presented a challenge, that this was the time for change. We were determined to find ways to engage the congregation and move forward.
- We reviewed team rules and expectations:

- Though the general information and guidance from our team should be shared, individual stories and struggles of team members should remain private.
 - To facilitate honesty and full participation, we agreed to respect confidentiality and the vulnerability invoked by looking at white supremacy, implicit bias, and systemic racism in ourselves and in our systems.
 - Though we would be spending some time educating ourselves, we would soon be looking for a plan to lead the congregation toward the commitment of becoming a Racial Justice Church.
- The work of the team occurred over five months:
 - Completed the Implicit Bias Inventory form Harvard University.
 - Read and discussed:
 - *White Fragility*, Diangelo
 - *Waking Up White*, Irving
 - <https://lynchinginamerica.eji.org/report/>
 - [UCC history of Racial Justice:
https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/unitedchurchofchrist/pages/8479/attachments/original/1591386943/OFOV_One_Page_Racial_Justice.pdf?1591386943](https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/unitedchurchofchrist/pages/8479/attachments/original/1591386943/OFOV_One_Page_Racial_Justice.pdf?1591386943)
 - History of Lynching:
https://docs.google.com/document/d/1tYCq_S5vTyegw7A6M62fBhDPOLVieRBjRPM-RgFbJc/edit?ts=5f71e265
 - <https://www.concordmonitor.com/Systemic-racism-34834198>
 - https://www.unionleader.com/news/social_issues/activists-say-whites-don-t-realize-how-pervasive-racism-is-in-nh/article_47ff1df0-b7ea-5186-8504-145914c69b02.html
 - <https://scholars.unh.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1067&context=thesis>
 - Other articles regarding white privilege, racial bias, systemic oppression, and white responsibility (See website for a more complete list).

- Watched or listened and discussed:
 - YouTube video: *The Cross and the Lynching Tree, UCC Requiem for Ahmaud Arbery*
 - Withoutsanctuary.org
 - <https://onbeing.org/programs/resmaa-menakem-notice-the-rage-notice-the-silence/>
 - *Freedom Riders*
 - *Suppressed 2020: the Right to Vote*
 - *Race: The Power of an Illusion* (series of 3 films)
 - *13th*

After these months of intense education, discussion, discomfort, and debate, the team determined that it was time to begin the journey with the congregation. Although the more we learned as a team, the more we realized that we had so much more to learn and unlearn, waiting to educate our congregational family and really begin to act as committed learners, interrupters, and allies just could not wait for our “readiness.”

We dedicated ourselves to outlining a curriculum for the congregation that would, at our annual meeting in June, inform the vote about whether to become a Racial Justice Church.

In preparation for the start of our church-wide journey, our minister, Rev. Dr. Gordon Crouch, offered numerous moving and provocative sermons addressing racial justice. Also in preparation for our journey toward the decision, our book group read and discussed:

- *Caste*, Isabel Wilkerson
- *The Sum of Us*, Heather McGhee
- *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, James H. Cone
- *White Too Long*, Robert P. Jones
- *The New Jim Crow*, Michelle Alexander

The congregation’s journey

Our vision was to educate the congregation about racism, white privilege, and systemic privilege, by making the information easy for people to access online, and to provide easily accessible facilitated small group discussions in which people could begin to expand their awareness of themselves and the world we live in.

Our offerings are listed below.

- Announcement of the Racial Justice initiative

Sunday, January 17 (MLK Weekend)

- Sermon: "Changing the Narrative Around Race"
- Fellowship hour: talk it up with folks

- Creation of a website presence on the church website. Here we posted and continue to post recommended educational resources, challenges and opportunities for action.

<https://firstchurchhopkinton.org/racial-justice-no-justice-no-peace/>

- Watched and discussed the film series *Race: The Power of Illusion*

Wednesday, January 27, *Part 1: The Difference Between Us*

Wednesday, February 3, *Part 2: The Story We Tell*

Wednesday, February 10, *Part 3: The House We Live In*

- For each of the small-group discussions of films in our education effort, each group consisted of 7-8 participants and met for 1 hour
 - Participants watched the film on their own beforehand
 - We created an online platform so participants could watch the films more easily online
 - We recruited volunteers from the team and from the congregation as a whole to facilitate the small-group discussions
 - Working with materials available online, we created discussion guides for facilitators
 - After each small-group discussion, we met with the facilitators to debrief
- Watched and discussed the video series *Uncomfortable Conversations with a Black Man*
- Sundays, February 7, 14, 21 and 28
- In honor of Black History Month, we screened the videos over Zoom for the congregation as a whole, then broke into small groups to discuss them.
- Promoted, and several attended, the webinar sponsored by the Racial Justice Mission Group of the NH Conference of the UCC

Saturday, February 20

“White Nationalism, Contemporary Racism and the Christian Church,” offered by Rev. Dr. Velda Love

- Conducted a Lenten Film Study

After each film we had small group discussions facilitated by team members and recruited outside facilitators who were better able to create moments of growth and change.

- Wednesday, Feb. 24, *Freedom Riders*

- Wednesday, Mar. 3, 13th

- Wednesday, March 17, *Suppressed*

For the discussion of *Suppressed*, we welcomed panelists from the Washington DC UCC Public Policy and Advocacy Office. Sandy Sorensen, Director, Jessi Quinn, Online Communications Specialist, and Katie Adams, Domestic Policy Advocate, presented on current and historical voter suppression efforts and highlighted our call, as Christians, to be active against, and informed about, policy and systems that harm and marginalize people.

- Wednesday, March 24, *The Color of Fear*

The congregation viewed the movie on their own and we broke into small facilitated groups to discuss. We also made the related film, *Last Chance for Eden*, available on our film website.

- Sunday, March 21, *Caste* and an interview with Isabel Wilkerson

We asked the congregation to read *Caste* and to watch an interview with Isabelle Wilkerson. We again broke into small facilitated groups for discussion.

- Sent Letter to the Congregation

Thursday, March 25

We sent a letter to the congregation outlining all we had done thus far and what was ahead of us as we prepared to vote on becoming a Racial Justice Church in June of 2021.

- Facilitated Uncomfortable Conversations with Each Other

Tuesday, April 13

Tuesday, April 27

We organized facilitated small-group discussions about any facet of racism or white privilege that congregants wanted to discuss. Some congregants wished to further unpack the understanding that racism, as a social construct, has shaped the lens through which we see the world and respond to it. We discussed the reality that implicit or unconscious bias is inevitable in all of us as we grow and learn steeped in the beliefs and ideas of our family, friends, community and national culture.

Among the learnings from these small groups was the awareness that awakening to the bias that may exist in yourself is to give yourself the opportunity to become conscious and powerful over your thoughts and behaviors. From here we can give ourselves the option of change and growth. As community and connection can facilitate such growth, we offered these meeting times as unscripted opportunities for exploration and learning.

- Presented a webinar: What Does It Mean to be a Racial Justice Church?

Wednesday, April 7

We offered congregants a panel discussion followed by a question-and-answer opportunity. The panel included our own Rev. Dawn Berry; Rev. Renee Rouse, pastor of the Northwood Congregational Church and co-chair of the Racial Justice Mission Group of the NH Conference of the UCC; and Kira Morehouse, member of the Racial Justice Mission Group of the NH Conference of the UCC, member of Brookside Congregational Church, and a delegate to NHCUCC.

During this time, we sought to clarify the meaning of becoming a Racial Justice Church, discussing how to become a church that moves away from myth, towards truth, away from harm, and towards justice and peace.

- Presented a webinar: Connecting God's Word and God's Love with Being a Racial Justice Church

Wednesday, April 21

Rev. Dr. Gordon Crouch, Rev. Dr. Dawn Berry, Rev. Dr. Jim Howard, and Rev. Richard Slater discussed the presence of race and oppression in theology. They answered questions regarding the presence of the call for justice, peace, love, and compassion in the messages of the Bible.

- Presented a webinar: Racism: Present and Powerful in NH

Wednesday, May 5

We shared articles and videos that represent the presence of racism in the individuals, policies, and systems of New Hampshire now, today. We looked at

the hate groups in existence in NH. We brought attention to our responsibility, as people of faith, to educate ourselves and take action when there are efforts to weave and strengthen the hold of racism into our lives, laws, and systems.

James T. McKim, PMP, ITIL offered a presentation followed by questions and answers on racism in NH. Mr. McKim is the acting president of the Manchester NAACP.

Articles about racism in NH:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/26/opinion/speech-racism-academia.html>

<https://www.concordmonitor.com/Education-bill-would-ban-teaching-racism-sexism-38821767>

<https://www.nhpr.org/post/unh-professor-allegedly-behind-offensive-twitter-account-resigns>

<https://www.nhpr.org/post/nh-audubon-reports-white-supremacist-vandalism-concord-preserve>

<https://www.concordmonitor.com/Systemic-racism-34834198>

<https://www.nhpr.org/post/covid-19-data-shows-racial-disparities-nh-cases#stream/0>

<https://www.nhpr.org/post/data-shows-racial-disparities-increase-each-step-nhs-criminal-justice-system>

<https://www.cnn.com/2020/09/09/us/manchester-police-refuse-reinstate-officer-racist-messages/index.html>

The vote

Sunday, June 6

Will we be a Racial Justice Church?... YES!

The tally was 68 in favor, 9 opposed, 1 abstention. Throughout the journey we have been so blessed to have had a total of over 100 participants in the various educational offerings and discussions. About 50 participants partook in nearly all the materials and opportunities we offered. To our surprise Zoom proved to be a gift in many ways as folks from far and wide were able to participate and even assist us, online. Covid-19 was a reason for folks to have just a bit more time on their hands and seemed to make participation for some more possible.

This beloved church community came to understand that it IS because we are a predominantly white church that it is our responsibility to become a Racial Justice Church. As a UCC Church we must do our part to correct the wrongs of so many past churches that have stayed silent and even actively furthered racial injustice and oppression. We acknowledge that we too have been silent too long.

The future

For the Racial Justice Team

We will go forward to form a standing Racial Justice Team and will ask members of our congregation to join us. Our outreach for the leadership of this new team will specifically include members whom we know have lived experience as people of color in this country.

Our plan is to conduct a facilitated strategic planning session this summer to draft our mission statement, clarify our vision and goals for the next three years, and outline our next steps and priorities. We will form sub-committees to take action on each of our strategic goals. This strategic framework will allow us to focus and prioritize our efforts and to assure that we continue a steady forward momentum.

For the Congregation

We have prepared a summer education challenge that will facilitate growth for those who have participated in much of the material offered and will reach out to those who have yet to participate.

- *Seeing White* podcast series, with a series of 3-4 facilitated small-group discussions
- Summer reading and viewing suggestions from the team (*The Sum of Us, Caste, Waking up White, and others to be posted on our website*)

Additional offerings for the congregation will grow out of the Racial Justice team working with our strategic plan. Our expectation is that we will have a vibrant series of offerings and outreach opportunities to facilitate our commitment to grow as learners, witnesses and interrupters, and allies.

Appreciation

Throughout this first chapter of our Racial Justice journey a few folks of note went above and beyond to till the soil, hand us the seeds, and correct us when we might have gone astray. We wanted to say a special thank you and blessing for Rev. Dr. Gordon Crouch, Rev. Dr. Dawn Berry, and Jessica Quinn. Gordon led with light and grace, Dawn patiently provided guidance and endless hours of consultation, and Jessica offered a plethora of resources and guidance throughout.