

## **Black Lives Matter at FPC**

**Stow, MA** – After a thoughtful discussion, a vote to raise a Black Lives Matter banner on the church building at First Parish Church (FPC) in Stow passed by an overwhelming majority this January. While some members expressed concern about standing up for just one issue or just one group of people, longtime member Shirley Farmer countered that standing against racism was worthy of the church's focused attention. "It's the most intractable problem our society has," she stated.

The vote was the culmination of over a year of discussion and activity on racial justice and equality undertaken by both the church's Racial Justice Task Group, which was formed in Dec. 2014, and FPC minister Tom Rosiello, who preached a sermon that month comparing the story of Advent to today's racism. "The story of Advent is a story of a people who have been through a rough time but have endured for generations in spite of oppression and injustice," he preached. "(They) held onto hope for the coming, that is, the advent, of a better world, a world where fairness and justice will reign and peace will come."

The Racial Justice Task Group has been working towards just such a world through outreach, book groups, and discussions. Its members started several education-related programs at the church this year, including an online discussion group open to the greater community, a free lending library of racial-justice books for people of all ages, a workshop on white privilege, and facilitated book discussions. Group members attended the Anti-Racism Summit at UU Urban Ministry in Roxbury last month.

While some believe the Black Lives Matter movement is biased against police officers, Rev. Rosiello, a former assistant district attorney who has the utmost respect for police officers and the important, courageous, and often dangerous work they do, has a different perspective. "I know my use of the saying 'Black Lives Matter' will result in someone characterizing me as anti-police," he stated in a sermon last November. "Those of you who know my history, which includes eight years as an ADA, working with police every day and sometimes depending upon them for my safety, know that is not the case. I'm not anti-police. I am anti-racism."

The banner will be raised on Sunday, Feb. 14, after Rev. Rosiello delivers a sermon on the Christian commandment to love your neighbor as yourself: "Inherent in this commandment is the idea expressed in our principles that every human being has the same worth and dignity and we are called to treat all our neighbors with the same love and compassion we want for ourselves. Loving your neighbor as yourself means that you proclaim that their life matters as much as yours. On this Sunday, when we hang our 'Black Lives Matter' banner in front of our church, we explore what it means to truly love your neighbor as yourself."

Rev. Rosiello insists that such love requires recognizing the true reason behind the "Black Lives Matter" movement. "Black folks need to proudly proclaim 'Black Lives Matter' because they have felt time and again that their lives did not," said Rev. Rosiello in his November sermon. "They need to claim their dignity and worth. They need to speak out to the institutional racism that permeates this country and so do we. All of us white people need to proclaim 'Black Lives Matter' as a way of saying we get it, as a reminder to ourselves to do what we can to push our

society to divest from the structural racism that taints so many of our institutions. Saying all lives matter won't do it. You have to look it in the face and say the words. You have to name who is being left out of 'All Lives Matter' in our country right now."

"These are struggles I cannot even begin to understand," said member Margaret Tucker during the discussion preceding the banner vote. "But I am here and I am listening."

First Parish Church of Stow & Acton is located at 353 Great Road in Stow. All are welcome to join our services as well as our Racial Justice Task Group's discussions, book group, and activities. For more information, call 978-xxx-xxxx or visit [www.fpc-stow-acton.org](http://www.fpc-stow-acton.org)

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