

First UU's History and Our Involvement in the Fight for Equality

1830-1875 – The **First Unitarian Universalist Society of Richmond** was formed, the first group of its kind in the antebellum South. When they dedicated their meeting house at 207 Mayo St, they chose the name **First Independent Christian Church of Richmond**, agreeing upon a constitution with no denominational slant. Their first settled minister, **John Budd Pitkin**, was ordained by Unitarian minister Bernard Whitman and Universalist minister Otis A. Skinner. This cooperation of clergy from the two denominations was the first of its kind on record. Unfortunately, the Civil War South proved a difficult place to sustain a liberal religious community. Membership declined steadily and the church closed in 1875.

1890's - Unitarian leaders began to promote their liberal denomination aggressively. The newly formed American Unitarian Association (AUA) sent missionary educators into the field with a **mandate to organize churches and establish public schools and libraries open to all people regardless of their race, class or gender.**

1893 – The **Rev. George L. Chaney** met with 18 people to sign a Bond of Union as the foundation for the **First Unitarian Church of Richmond**. The Bond of Union read, *“We unite for the worship of God and the service of man, in the Spirit of Jesus.”*

1906 – Under the leadership of **Rev. John L. Robinson**, a new church building at the corner of Floyd and Harrison was dedicated and work on social justice issues became a focus of volunteer projects.

1935 – **Alice Jackson Stuart**, a member of First Unitarian, was the first black student to apply to a master's program at the University of Virginia (UVA). She was denied admission, but with the support of her church and family, the NAACP, and Thurgood Marshall, she challenged the denial. The case resulted in tuition supplements for black students to attend graduate school out-of-state, and 15 years later, when the tuition supplements were ruled unconstitutional, to black students attending graduate school at UVA.

1951 – **First Unitarian** voted to integrate.

1954-1962 – **Rev. Eugene Pickett** led resistance against pro-segregationist initiatives, such as the Gray Commission and Virginia's Massive Resistance to the desegregation of public schools, actively participating in the Save Our Schools program that defied Massive Resistance. First Unitarian's Women's Alliance sponsored speakers to educate members about integration, separation of church and state, and civil rights issues, and white female members of First Unitarian partnered with black women in the community to challenge segregation by going together to the restaurants in Thalheimer's and the Virginia Museum.

1961 – **First Unitarian** voted against a proposal to merge the American Unitarian Association and the Universalist Church of America, doing so on principal because a number of Universalist churches in the Deep South refused to incorporate a desegregation statement into their bylaws.

1963 - **Joseph Jenkins** was elected as First Unitarian's first African American Board President.

1966 - **Lena Whitt** was elected as First Unitarian's first female Board President.

1972 – During **Rev. William J. Gold's** tenure, the growing congregation funded construction of the current church building in a neighborhood location selected intentionally for its racial and cultural diversity.

1975 – 1987 – **Rev. David Hicks MacPherson**, a lifelong civil rights advocate, participated in denominational conferences and local groups that worked toward improving human rights.

Oct. 1995 – First Unitarian created a **Diversity Subcommittee** of the Membership Committee.

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1996 – The **Diversity Subcommittee** co-sponsored a **Promoting Racial Harmony Forum** with the Urban League, an event attended by nearly 200 community members.

1997 – The Diversity Subcommittee was moved under the umbrella of the Social Responsibility Council and renamed the **Racial Harmony Committee** (RHC).

May 1998 – The **RHC** proposed an **Anti-Racism Resolution** which became the first social justice-focused resolution adopted by in the congregation's history.

Feb. 1999 – The **RHC** hosted a special service about institutional racism featuring Steve Watkins, author of *The Black O: Racism and Redemption in an American Corporate Empire*, a book based on the landmark racial discrimination suit against Shoney's in 1988.

Nov. 2001 – The **Alice Jackson Stuart Endowment Fund** was established to support anti-racism work.

Feb. 2002 - The RHC hosted a Reparations Dialogue facilitated by **Rev. William G. Sinkford, the first African American President of the Unitarian Universalist Association** (UUA).

June 2002 – The **RHC** helped fund publication of *Seeing the Scars of Slavery in the Natural Environment: An Interpretive Guide to the Manchester Slave Trail Along the James River of Richmond*, written by First Unitarian member Ralph R. White. This brochure is still used by groups (such as Richmond Parks & Recreation and the Richmond Slave Trail Commission) who facilitate walks along the Richmond Slave Trail.

Nov. 2002 – The **RHC** organized a **Community Unity Meeting** to take a stand against the anti-Jewish, anti-black philosophy of the World Church of the Creator who was holding a meeting in the Richmond area.

Feb. 2003 – **First Unitarian** hosted the Thomas Jefferson District's 14th Annual Anti-Racism Conference featuring **keynote speaker Rev. William G. Sinkford**, whose address was *The Changing Face of Racism*.

March 2003 – The **RHC** hosted *An Open Conversation with Rev. Chester McCall on Anti-Racism and Non-Oppression*.

2004 – **First Unitarian** changed its name to **First Unitarian Universalist Church of Richmond** (First UU), symbolizing its full participation in the UUA.

Jan. 2009 – The Racial Harmony Committee became **The Committee for Racial and Ethnic Unity** (CREU).

May 2009 – **CREU** sponsored a resolution (which was adopted) for First UU **to spend two years studying what it would mean for us to become a more multicultural, diverse congregation.**

Feb. 2010 – **First UU** hosted the TJ District's 21st Annual Anti-Racism Conference – *Building the World We Want: Race, Place, and Community*, featuring **keynote speaker Professor John A. Powell, J.D.**, an internationally recognized authority in issues relating to race, ethnicity, poverty and law.