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## **All lives are not equally threatened by violence in our society**

To the Editor:

At the end of April The Record-Review covered the repeated theft of banners reading "Black Lives Matter" from the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Northern Westchester ("Black Lives Matter banners reported stolen," April 29). At the time, I invited those who disagreed to engage in conversation rather than vandalize our property.

Last week, two people expressed their dissatisfaction with our banner -- one in an anonymous phone call and the other with an anonymous email. Both argued that we should affirm instead that "all lives matter." Because both were anonymous, and in light of the events of this past week, please allow me to respond publicly.

Of course all lives matter to us. Respect for the inherent worth and dignity of every person is the first principle of our religion. And yet, all lives are not equally threatened by violence in our society. To simply state that "all lives matter" ignores the very real inequities faced by many.

It is easy to issue a blanket condemnation of all violence. It is harder to realize

that a good deal of that violence is tied to systems and institutions that must be changed or dismantled.

It is easy to say that all relationships should be free of violence. It is harder to understand that the victims of domestic violence are overwhelmingly women, and that the misogyny in our society contributes to every blow.

It is easy to say that all children are precious. It is harder to understand that LGBT youth are given such negative messages about their self-worth that they are six times more likely than straight or cisgender youth to attempt suicide.

It is easy to say that we value a diverse society with people from all nations and ethnicities. It is harder to understand the anti-immigrant bigotry behind calls to separate the poorer, browner Mount Kisco schools from wealthier, whiter ones in Bedford and Pound Ridge.

It is also easy to say that no one should be shot dead for a broken tail-light. It is harder to understand that systemic racism leads us to a reality where unarmed black men are seven times more

likely than unarmed white men to be killed by police in a traffic stop.

I am not blaming individual officers for this. I would imagine that there is not a single police officer who signed up for their dangerous and necessary duty in order to perpetuate the racism built into our society. And yet, without different training, community accountability, and limitations on the use of force, that's just what is happening.

"Black Lives Matter" is a declaration that an emergency exists, not a statement that we value one race more than another. The emergency is that the lives of our black siblings are being taken at an alarming rate in a society that systematically devalues them. The killing must stop. The dehumanization must stop.

All lives cannot matter until black lives matter. For this reason, we stand behind our banner as well as our invitation to our community to be in a real conversation about racism.

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