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Vandals repeatedly used spray paint to deface a Black Lives Matter banner at a Clearwater church last year.

The church tried to remove “x”s that crossed out the statement, but after multiple incidents, they were determined to find a more permanent solution.

So on Sunday the Unitarian Universalists of Clearwater unveiled a protected sign its leaders and members hope is less susceptible to damage. In this time of increased political tension, they feel the message needs to be heard now more than ever.

“Today, within a society growing steadily in the direction of deeper oppressions, we Unitarian Universalists recognize the dignity and worth of our siblings of color,” the Rev. Amy Kindred said before the banner was revealed. “We once again rededicate our symbol of affirmation.”

For years vandals have targeted a number of Black Lives Matter signs at places of worship across the country, from [Kingston, Massachusetts](#) and [Washington, D.C](#) to a church in [Delaware in 2016](#) and one in [Arizona in 2015](#).

Kindred said the police were unable to identify who had been painting their previous black-and-white banner. After a few attempts at repairing the sign, church members decided they needed to adapt — but not give up.

In the interim, the church hung a banner with rainbow lettering that reads “hate has no home here.” Now, the new black and yellow Black Lives Matter banner hangs next to it in a frame with protective glass, from which Kindred said she hopes will be easier to remove paint should it happen again.

The signs are on a terracotta wall facing the street at the entrance of the church campus.

“One of Unitarian Universalists’ values, or principles, is that everyone’s connected, and everyone deserves respect,” said Trude Diamond, team lead for racial justice at the church. “Everybody needs a safe space.”

Although most of the church’s members are white and female, the religious organization is socially progressive, leaders said. Members see it as a church, a congregation or simply a community. And they welcome a range of religious affiliations, including atheist, Jewish and Christian denominations. They also hold a monthly meeting for members of the LGBTQ community.

“We do not support oppression of any form,” Kindred said. “We are here to support a society that embraces diversity and the ultimate expression of love, and that doesn’t include excluding people.”



Church members Linda Stoller, left, and Carl Hanson, unveil a Black Lives Matter banner that will be less susceptible to vandalism at the Unitarian Universalists of Clearwater church on Sunday. [JEFFEREE WOO | Times]

Clearwater's Unitarian Universalists decided to install a security camera on a tree near to the banner, not as a form of punishment, but hoping that it may deter people from vandalizing again, said Vice President for the Board of Trustees Eliseo Santana.

"It's an unfortunate thing we have to have security" in places of worship, he said. "But it's the times we live in."

Santana remains positive about the future, he said, but is still worried about the current political climate, especially in Florida.

He said he is particularly concerned with recent immigration crackdowns and the racial profiling that often comes with it.

The church has been passing out slips of paper that lists constitutional rights for immigrants and provides guidance on what to do should law enforcement approach them or come to their home.



Eliseo Santana, vice president of the board of trustees for the Unitarian Universalists of Clearwater, speaks about a pamphlet that he hands out with regard to citizens and noncitizens knowing their rights. [JEFFEREE WOO | Times]

“What we do today is for them,” he said, gesturing toward two of his granddaughters who attended the ceremony Sunday. “I want to create a world that respects all of us.”