

# THE JOURNEY TOWARD THE BELOVED COMMUNITY

*A guide for conference leaders*

An offering from the Star Island  
Beloved Community Project

# Foreword

March, 2021

On behalf of the Star Island Corporation, we are excited to present The Journey Toward the Beloved Community: A Guide for Conference Leaders.

This guide is an important part of our Beloved Community Project, which began in 2017. In October 2020, the SIC Board of Directors adopted a [Strategic Resolution](#). A top priority of this resolution is our Community Goal, which includes:

- A commitment to continuing the work of the Beloved Community Project, furthering the conversation about racial injustice, and demonstrating action around anti-racism and the end of white supremacy culture in our communities;
- Reviewing and revising the policies, processes, organization, and structures of the Star Island Corporation to ensure that they do not present barriers to inclusion;
- Through the lens of dismantling white supremacy culture, reexamining the history of the Isles of Shoals, the events and people that we celebrate, and our ongoing traditions.

This resource guide is an explicit and important step in our ongoing journey, and it is a central priority for the Star Island Corporation. This guide is not only



a practical handbook – it also represents a statement of values and call to action that comes at a pivotal time of rebirth for Star Island. We are enthusiastically making this important and timely resource available to all conference leaders, as well as to others. We invite conference leaders to review this guide carefully, and to use it as you plan and implement your conferences. We anticipate that, like us, you will find it to be an essential and helpful resource.

This guide represents different voices from across the Star Island community designed to help us act in the present and invest in the future. It is made possible by many contributors, and we are deeply grateful to them for sharing their wisdom and guidance to help move us forward on our journey. We offer special and heartfelt gratitude to conferees, Lucia Green-Weiskel, Steve Lee, and April Rosario, together with Conference Center Director Justina Maji, our editorial team for this project, without whom this resource guide would not have been completed.

Star Island has been a source of hope and comfort for so many – a place where community is formed, sustained, and deepened. Star is a light that can be available for all who come to its shores. We recognize that we need to be intentional and put in the important and sometimes messy work to make this happen. In the now famous words of Amanda Gorman, "...there is always light if only we're brave enough to see it, if only we're brave enough to be it."

With Star Spirit,

Reverend Debbie Duval, SIC Board Member  
Joe Watts, SIC Chief Executive Officer



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**Thanks to photographers: Sean D. Elliot, Celeste Magliocchetti,  
Brett Marshall, Kristen Simard and Sarah Whalen**

# Introduction

What is a beloved community?

The term “Beloved Community” was popularized by Martin Luther King Jr. It describes a society based on justice, equality and love for all people. According to the King Center:

*“Dr. King’s Beloved Community is a global vision in which all people can share in the wealth of the earth. ... Racism and all forms of discrimination, bigotry and prejudice will be replaced by an all-inclusive spirit of [community]”*

How do we find our path toward King’s vision?

This is a question that we will ask ourselves throughout this journey. When the Beloved Community Task Force first convened to begin the conversations that ultimately led to this document, we started with this question: How does our beloved Star Island community fall short of King’s vision? And perhaps more importantly, what could we do about it?

These are not easy questions. The decisions we eventually made encompassed a variety of approaches and interpretations regarding both the need for change on Star Island and what to do about it. Our goal then was twofold. First, we sought to identify areas of broad agreement and to outline clear action related to those goals. But in other areas where there appeared to be a wider range of opinions, we sought to define the parameters of continued discussions that – we hope – might lead to greater clarity down the road.

## How to use this document

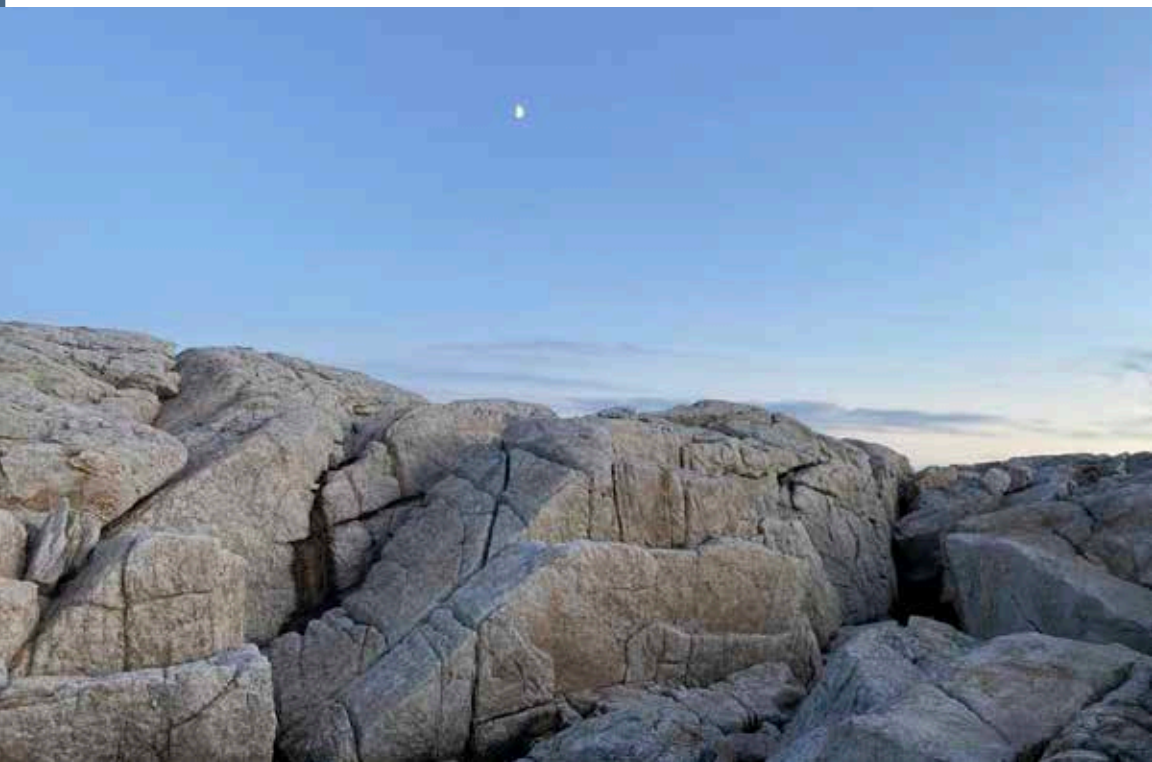
This document is intended to be a resource for conference leaders – that is, anyone who is responsible for the programming, planning or registration of any conference that takes place on Star Island. It will also be made available to the Star Island community more broadly, but the specific intention of this document is to help conference leaders incorporate the goals of anti-racism and inclusivity into specific aspects of the conference.

This guidebook is organized around the annual planning process of each con-

ference. We recognize that each conference does things slightly differently, and so you may need to skip around between sections to better match your conference's planning schedule.

The first section focuses on marketing and outreach to be used as a starting point for your annual planning, whether you start as soon as you leave the island the previous year or wait until the fall or winter. The second section focuses on programming to help you incorporate anti-racist elements into your planning around workshops, speakers, youth program, social hour and chapel services. The third section is on conference registration and provides guidance on communication with conferees in preparation for your time on Star.

The guidance provided in these chapters varies from general advice that seeks to set a helpful mindset to detailed examples of messaging that conference leaders can use. How conference leaders choose to apply the guidance depends on where they are in their journey in adopting an inclusive mindset, as well as where their conferees are in that journey as well.





## Our goals and guiding principles

There are three broad and overlapping goals to this guidebook. The first explicitly addresses racism and white supremacy. Our goal is to make Star Island conferences more welcoming to people of color. Second, in keeping with King's notion of a Beloved Community and Ibram X Kendi's notion of anti-racism work, we want to help the Island become more welcoming of all people – all ages, abilities, genders, religions and sexual orientations. Third, and most broad, we want to work towards helping the Island become more welcoming to all people who come to the island for the first time no matter his/her/their race, gender or age. While these goals overlap, they are also distinct, and this guidebook reflects that dynamic.

This guidebook is a product of many hands and minds as well as months of conversation and debate. Through this experience, the Beloved Community Task Force identified six core principles that guided our work as we drafted the sections of this guidebook and reached out to potential contributors. They are as follows:

1. This work is necessary and important. And now is the time to do it. In fact, some say it is overdue. 2021 is a crucial year in the long history of Star Island. Not only have we faced a pandemic that prompted the shutdown of the 2020 season, but we have also witnessed racial violence and police brutality, emergent nativism and resurgence of white supremacy. We have also just seen, in 2020, the uprising of the largest social movement in American history – a multi-racial, multi-generational movement of Americans standing together to support Black Lives Matter.
2. This project is an effort to enrich our community and invest in its future. We want to keep the Star Island tradition alive by reproducing the values we stand for and taking actions that reflect a deliberate and planned effort to make diversity a key value of the Star Island community. By so doing, we hope to make Star Island a more enjoyable place that offers a richer and more complete experience for new people and for families that have visited for decades. We recognize that we need to do work to make sure our values are reflected in our actions and the way we live. We invest now to ensure Star Island is as vibrant and relevant



in 2070 as it was in 1970.

3. We can't shy away from certain truths, no matter how harsh or persistent. Deeply woven into the fabric of our beloved island are symbols and legacies that affirm and support racism, white supremacy, violence, and oppression. There is a core truth that we must always keep in our minds: Many of the rituals and traditions on Star Island provide a sense of belonging to many people, but also these same traditions can convey a sense of otherness. We feel that by keeping tradition alive – participatory and changing – there is a way to celebrate tradition without excluding others.
4. This project is not without weaknesses and shortcomings. And we are just beginning to understand them.

This project is part of a broader effort to move Star Island into an anti-racist and more inclusive future. The Beloved Community Task Force has also recommended that Star Island hire a professional consultant to perform an institution-wide audit. We envision a coupled process – top down, bottom up – drawing from the formidable professional strength and guidance of subject matter experts, but also recognizing that anti-racism, pro-inclusion work is the responsibility of the people who already make up this community. We are all in the driver's seat, which requires a willingness to subject ourselves to the process as part of our own development to become a better community. The work starts now.

We recognize that in doing this project we are reproducing some challenging dynamics of racism. We have had lengthy discussions about the implication of asking the contributors, some of whom were people of color, to volunteer their time to write sections of the report – to take on the extra work or even burden to become educators to mostly white people. We aren't sure this is the right thing to do. But the alternatives seemed to impose more separation. We also recognize that everyone in this group is investing in something, which we hope will benefit all.

5. This guidebook will be produced following an iterative process. This guidebook is crowd sourced, building on the expertise and skills of our community, orienting ourselves through our principles and recognizing when we may need to course correct.



6. We are not looking for a finish line. There is no point at which we can say we have arrived at becoming the perfect Beloved Community we envision. It is a journey, a life-long commitment. Most important, it is the process of acknowledging to ourselves that we must do better. We will not always agree or know what path is right or wrong. But we can agree to commit ourselves to learning, evolving, growing in ways that support anti-racist awareness and development. We are deciding to engage in discourse – but we also realize that we can not only engage in discourse. We must also commit ourselves to concrete action.

It is possible this is the beginning of a 100-year project, perhaps even longer. We are excited to be starting it here, now, with you all.

-The Star Island Beloved Community Task Force

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# Outreach and Marketing

One way to broaden your conference's exposure is to adopt marketing strategies that have the potential to reach new audiences with diverse populations. This can be done through churches, schools, universities, and community centers by hanging posters with pull-tabs that include your conference's website or a link to the Star Island registration page. You can also use social media to get the word out about your conference to a broader audience. If your conference offers a financial incentive to new people, make sure to include that information in any marketing material. Marketing material can be simple – just the name of the conference, a picture of Star Island with a website letting people know how they can get more information. If conferences do not adopt active marketing measures, by default they rely on the informal word-of-mouth communication between friends and family to spread the word about their conference. While this is not inherently a bad thing to do, it does often have the unintended result of creating a less diverse conference composition, limiting conferee growth to the people who are already socially connected to existing conferees.

## **How to market your conference in such a way that you can attract new people from diverse backgrounds**

While relying solely on personal connections can be problematic, as it could result in perpetuation of homogeneous community, sometimes it can be effective. Some ways to encourage conferees to engage in this kind of recruitment while promoting diversity are:

### **Designate leaders, encourage everyone**

For conference chairs, designate 3 to 5 volunteers to act as "Recruitment" or "Outreach Coordinators." These people can take on the role of recruiting in and beyond their circles off-island: reaching out to members of their congregations and local clubs, sharing stories of their experiences on Star Island, and maintaining a goal of diversity while being sensitive to any cultural differences and being honest about the racial make-up of Star Island (mostly white). If you are interested in recruiting from specific communities, select volunteers who know those communities best. Be sure your Outreach

Coordinators check back in regularly with people who express an interest in Star Island, and help answer any questions they might have. Provide space and time for these volunteers to meet and share what is or what is not working in their efforts, and dialogue with the Star Island staff to determine opportunities for collaboration or support.

### **Pick specific people to reach out to**

Think about who you know in your life that you think would love Star Island. Ask your Outreach Coordinators to do the same. Make sure that you are reaching out to specific people, not just doing generalized announcements. Follow up with your specific people to see if they have any questions. Make sure as you pick who you are going to reach out to that you are thinking about building a diverse community, and spend your time intentionally reaching out to people who will help us become a better reflection of who we want to be. Make sure to be upfront about all expenses, knowing that the cost of a week on Star can be prohibitive to some families. Also provide information about financial aid.

### **Utilize your contacts**

If you are in a church, ask the minister about bringing Star Island and/or your specific conference into a worship service or an event. Some ways to do this might be hosting a slide show and presentation at your church coffee hour, suggesting an Isles of Shoals book for your local book club and most of all, explicitly asking your friends to come and join you on Star Island. As you are doing this, be sure to reach out to people who are from diverse socio-economic and racial backgrounds -- perhaps even offer marketing materials to churches with predominantly BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) congregations. If you have a contact with a specific skill or talent, connect that person with a conference chair to determine how this new person could participate in conference events; for example, an artist who might lead an afternoon workshop.

### **Use testimonials**

Humans usually respond better to stories and emotions than facts. Consider using testimonials, either in written or video form, on your website and other communications platforms. Have people talk about why Star Island and/or their conference is important to them, what it means in their lives off-island.

Use testimonials that focus on experiences and aspects of Star Island using concrete detail that may have broad appeal and keep people coming back. If it is helpful, write down a few key phrases or sentences to use frequently when talking about a Star Island experience. For example:

*"Having a peaceful spot on the porch to read and look at the harbor puts me at ease."*

*"My children love the island itself, whether visiting the Marine Lab for hands-on learning or exploring tide pools around East Rock, they always look forward to returning."*

*"The natural beauty of the island can be inspiring. Some of my best thoughts have come to me while paddling across the harbor using the sea kayaks."*

*"Whether it's joining in a musical jam session on the porch, seeing the children by candlelight attending an evening chapel, or learning a new hobby, there are so many opportunities to partake in meaningful moments at Star and share them."*

*"It's rare to come to a place like Star Island and be transported to a rustic and simple communal lifestyle. It helps me reconnect with a part of myself I thought was lost."*

## **How to talk about Star Island to people who don't know it**

For many, Star Island is a place to unplug and reset. Stresses from the mainland are often muted by the physical beauty of the island, its remoteness and its historical environment.

Star Island can also represent a place to reunite with friends and welcome new ones with open arms, with the hope that these new faces will find their own reason to return each year. People usually visit to get away and enjoy a week-long vacation, sometimes without the intention of anything more than just to relax, but by the end of the week, people leave with a sense of belonging and new-found family/community.

While the Island can offer a refuge for many, it can also represent an intim-



idating or anxious time for others. When talking about Star to prospective visitors, it is helpful to acknowledge the challenge of visiting a new place with a well-established community. Keep in mind that Star Island has a unique culture that can require a significant shift in mindset, which for some of us happens unconsciously on the boat, or for others, not until their first step on the island, or their first chapel service.

It is important to try to prepare New Shoalers for this shift before they arrive on island. Whether through encouragement about people bringing their whole selves to the island or focusing on common interests that can be found on island (e.g., hikes, bird watching, reading on the porch, etc.), find a way to start at shared understanding before introducing some of the more unique or rustic aspects of Star Island living.

## **How Star Island is taking responsibility for white supremacy**

Star Island is working hard to build a multiracial community and decentering whiteness. Star has always celebrated its old fashioned New England liberal religious tradition and is working hard to realize our commitment to a multi-racial, multi-cultural society, both in our larger world and on Star. Doing that work requires us to keep learning about our own bias, to engage in ongoing dialogue with one another, and to listen to feedback and implement changes that make us more welcoming to the people who join our community and our conferences.

Whatever we are doing on Star, whether polar bear swimming, participating in theme talks and workshops, or dining together each meal, we believe everyone's Star experience will be enriched by intentionally building a welcoming community for people who have not historically been well represented on Star. It is slow and often imperfect work, but we are deeply committed to the journey.

We are taking active steps toward that goal, in big and small ways. That work has included reflection on the stories of our historic community, and finding ways to engage in truth telling as we work toward justice. We are reviewing our hiring processes, and working to shift our programming and fee structures as well as our outreach strategies, to better realize that beloved community.



# Programming

## Social justice conference programming

All conferences are encouraged to incorporate social and racial justice programming into their schedules. We encourage week-long conferences to include at least three activities that would relate to this category. Five-day or weekend conferences may choose to schedule one or two social or racial justice events into their programs.

Speakers, workshops, and other programs are an exciting and oftentimes an educational part of many conferences. Inviting compensated Ministers, Speakers, and Workshop leaders of color (and/or LGBTQIA+) is a great way to build diversity in a conference, especially those who will come with families with school-age kids that are likely to fall in love with the Island.

Before you start brainstorming potential speakers, think about your audience. While Star Island is a place of inclusion and belonging for everyone, recognize that people are at different places in their journey of understanding, appreciating, and advocating for racial and social justice. Reach out to coordinators and leaders in your conference whom you trust to get a sense of what needs the conferees might have when it comes to the topics of racial and social justice. Try to incorporate speakers and workshops on the topics that they would find engaging, educational, and fun during their time on the island.

Sometimes this part of listening and understanding the needs of your conferees can be the most challenging part of your programming. Keep in mind that the act of bringing anti-racist programming can potentially reinforce feelings of "otherness" by those you are trying to include in the community. To help you plan, consider the following aspects of programming:

### Community subject matter experts

Whether you call them "Talks on the Rocks" or "Timely Topics," small presentations by conferees are a great way to crowdsource the deep and impressive experience of the Star Island community. Consider asking one of your conferees or contacting Justina for a conferee contact to do a talk about a racial or social justice issue.

### **Book discussions**

If your conference is interested, another possibility is to have a conferee lead a book discussion on a book that relates to racial or social justice. You can announce this with your welcome letter, so people who want to engage in the discussion have time to read it. Some possibilities could include "Waking Up White" by Debby Irving, "Just Mercy" by Bryan Stevenson, "How to Be an Antiracist" by Ibram X. Kendi, "In the Shadow of the Hanging Tree" by Katherine Baxter, and "Braiding Sweetgrass" by Robin Wall Kimmerer.

### **Other Activities**

Some conferences have had success in encouraging conferees to write postcards or letters, for example to people recommended by Amnesty International or to people in prison. You could also present films on racial and social justice, followed by discussion. Some good candidates would include "Crash," "Do the Right Thing," "All In" (about Stacey Abrams), "13th," "I Am Not Your Negro" (about James Baldwin), and "Mirrors of Privilege." If your conference has regular morning and/or evening Chapels, you could encourage choosing Ministers of the Week or Chapel leaders to address these issues.

Keep in mind that these events can serve as important channels for collecting feedback from conferees about how your conference is covering social and racial justice issues. You may even want to schedule a community forum to allow conferees to discuss and provide feedback on the approaches and suggestions in this guidebook! If so, make sure a member of your conference planning team attends the events and takes notes so that, with the permission of the group, feedback can be incorporated into future conference planning and future iterations of this guidebook.

### **Speaker and Presenter review**

If you are already considering a speaker to present on topics outside of racial and social justice, review their background for any potential conflicts with themes of inclusion. A broad scan of any news articles or social media accounts of speakers can help uncover potential issues worth further consideration.

### **Discussions of sensitive topics**

Discussions of racial and social justice can get emotional and complicated. It

is good to have leaders who have some experience with these kinds of dialogue. It is good to have the group come to an agreement about a mutual covenant during these conversations. These can include having people speak from their own experience and use "I" statements, monitor their air time (giving everyone space to speak), maintain confidentiality ("what's said in the room stays in the room, but what's learned should be shared"), listen to each other with interest and caring, and in general showing respect and concern for each other. For more suggestions and guidance in this area, see [NYU Global Inclusion's training video on "Facilitating Anti-Racist and Other Difficult Dialogues"](#).

### Outside speakers/program resources

The following is a list of people who have offered to be programmatic resources related to racial and social justice for conferences on Star. Feel free to reach out to them directly if you are interested in bringing them to your conference. If you have a name you would recommend adding to this list, please email Justina Maji, [jmaji@starisland.org](mailto:jmaji@starisland.org).

#### Yuri Yamamoto

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Yuri co-edited the book ["Unitarian Universalists of Color: Stories of Struggle, Courage, Love, and Faith"](#) with Chandra Snell and Tim Hanami. It includes stories of diverse UUs. From the book jacket: "Yuri Yamamoto, Chandra Snell and Tim Hanami started a project to publish stories of Unitarian Universalists of color in an effort to lift up voices from the margins and to make our congregations more welcoming. Fifteen contributors share their stories of love, challenges, faith journeys, hope and despair. Also included is the transcript of a panel workshop based on the stories at the Unitarian Universalist Association General Assembly in 2015."

#### Paula Cole Jones

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Paula Cole Jones is the founder of ADORE (A Dialogue on Race & Ethnicity), a former president of DRUUMM (Diverse and Revolutionary Unitarian Universalist Multicultural Ministries) and an independent consultant specializing in multicultural competencies and institutional change. She lives in

Washington, D.C. She served as an Interim Congregational Life Consultant for the Central East Region from 2018-2020. She is the co-author of the 8th Principle (on dismantling systemic racism and other oppressions), and could present about the 8th Principle, Communities of Communities (her Fahs Lecture at GA in 2019), and Sociocracy (inclusive decision making). For 2021, she may only be available remotely.

### **Meck Groot**

*Congregational Consultant, UUA New England Region, Boston, MA*  
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Meck Groot has worked for many years at the intersection of faith and social change. As Justice Ministries Lead for the region, she inspires and supports congregational leaders for vital, faith-centered justice ministry within and beyond the congregation through spiritual leadership practice. She could do presentations or workshops on building Beloved Community with the practices of spiritual leadership.

### **Naomi Yanis**

*Amherst, MA*  
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Naomi has toured the Southern United States civil rights sites through a UU programming that takes people on such tours. She has pictures and videos and ideas for programming and people to invite as speakers on Social Justice. Naomi has been coming to Star Island, especially to the International Affairs conference, for decades, and has led book discussions related to racial justice.

### **Woullard Lett**

*UUA New England Region Lead, Manchester, NH*  
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Woullard has been the Regional Lead of the UUA New England Region for a number of years. He is active in N'COBRA (the National Coalition of Blacks for Reparations in America) and NAACP-NH. He could speak about Reparations and other topics of racial and social justice.

### **Bruce Pollack-Johnson**

*Associate Professor of Math & Statistics at Villanova U., Philadelphia, PA*  
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Bruce is a co-author of the 8th Principle (on dismantling systemic racism and other oppressions), Assistant Moderator and Chair of the Justice Council at the UU Church of the Restoration in Philadelphia, and is trained as a facilitator in Inter Group Dialogue. At Villanova, he created a course on Math and Fairness and a math major research seminar on Math & Social Justice. He plays guitar and sings songs of racial and social justice in church services, rallies, and marches. He could lead programs on the 8th Principle, racial justice, gerrymandering, economic inequality, and could do a Chapel service related to any of these. Bruce has been a Pelican, met and married his wife Linda on Star, was Assistant Manager in 1986, and is a member of the Star Island Corporation, where he is helping with the Beloved Community project. His family has come regularly to the International Affairs conference since the 1990s, and both children have been Pelicans.

### **Rev. Josh Pawelek**

*Parish Minister of UU Society: East in Manchester, CT (near Hartford)*  
*revpawelek@sbcglobal.net*

Josh is a straight white male minister very active with social justice ministries. He could serve as a Minister of the Week, or could speak about his anti-racism work with the UUA in the late 90s and early 2000s on the Journey Toward Wholeness (anti-racism) Transformation Team, or about how predominantly white congregations can be active in racial and social justice in their communities, sharing successes and failures as lessons learned.



# Youth Programs

## **“Brave” spaces for sharing: trauma, personal stories, and community**

For all age groups, baseline safety assumptions should be discussed and agreed upon by facilitators, including:

1. Respect for self and others
2. Using I-statements
3. Confidentiality agreements
4. Refraining from talking about the experiences of others that have not been directly witnessed
5. Refraining from bullying
6. Refraining from shaming

Creating a “safe space” is not always possible. Instead, you may try to create a “brave space” for children and teens, which is always possible. A safe space is the idea that we can prevent challenging and difficult things from hurting anyone else in the group. That is not always possible. A brave space is the idea that we can support one another as we learn and grow by acknowledging that certain challenges are painful and that we can go through them together. The creation and stewardship of a brave space requires empathy and a sense of ownership.

It is helpful for leaders of all age groups to be in contact in advance via email with children and teens and their caregivers and families about expectations and “things to bring” (if there will be special trips, activities and the like). It can also be useful for workshop leaders to know background information that might be helpful (i.e. have there been any recent crises, identity considerations, concerns or behaviors that leaders should know about). At the same time, autonomy is important, especially for senior teens, so it may be more appropriate to email them directly as well as parents for this infor-



mation. The covenant is strengthened when the youth have control of their social environment.

Facilitators and youth group participants can work together to create the level of safety/bravery/inclusivity that is age appropriate. For instance, the senior teens are better prepared to create a more challenging and growth-oriented environment than some of the younger groups. Stronger facilitators may be able to create braver spaces than others. Finding comfort levels and balance is key. Everyone can participate in this process. Finding group norms and group values can be a fun process, especially if you are invested in getting to know one another along the way. The important thing is to be committed to the healthy growth of everyone in the room. Some key themes for groups to consider while creating a covenant are: Trust, honesty, integrity, responsibility, commitment to the wellbeing of the group. It also may be important to include the basic safety assumptions (listed above), that facilitators have discussed and agreed upon ahead of time.

Youth leaders may choose to have their pronouns on their name tags and, without asking the youth to do the same, (as this might be beyond the group member's readiness and comfort level,) create an accepting space and an open door for youth to follow suit.

## **Fostering an inclusive and anti-racist youth culture**

### **Creating a covenantal relationship**

To foster an inclusive youth culture within children's programs, group leaders can take the proactive approach of creating a "covenantal" relationship among the group from the start. The initial meeting of the group should have a time set aside to collaboratively form a group covenant outlining how they all want to be with one another when gathered. This can be done with toddlers through high schoolers (and of course could happen with adult groups as well). All voices should have the opportunity to contribute. Group leaders may want to suggest one or two to start the process (for example, be kind to one another, help everyone to feel included etc.). This covenant should be written on a large piece of paper and posted for the week in the space where the group meets. It can be revisited at the beginning of each day and should be adjusted as needed. Talk about the process for how members of the group can remind each other of the covenant when needed - encouraging conciliatory rather than adversarial approaches.

## Examining the youth program

Invite feedback from the group leaders and children. Invite your youth leaders to think about how they might examine the culture of their program. Youth group leaders should be careful about making assumptions about people's experiences and identities that might make someone feel unseen.

## Representation

Representation is key in fostering an inclusive and anti-racist youth culture. One way to do this within children's programming is to offer books during story time that include BIPOC characters and families. Star Island has taken the first step in making this possible by updating the libraries in Louise's Barn and in the 2nd floor kids room of the Oceanic. Youth group leaders are encouraged to choose from this new section of books at least half the time when reading stories to their class.

## Youth Programming

Anti-racism, social justice, and inclusion are not just topics for adults. By including activities that focus on these topics in youth programming, children and youth are a part of moving Star Island towards becoming a Beloved Community. That being said, knowing how and where to find good quality age appropriate anti-racism/social justice curricula may be hard for youth staff volunteers, especially if they are not familiar with it.

For younger children, such as nursery and lower elementary, this programming can come in the form of story time by choosing books mentioned in the above section.

For older youth groups, such as Upper Elementary, Junior and Senior High, it is suggested that youth staff plan at least one day that includes anti-racism training/workshop/activities for kids.

## Anti-racism, Social Justice, and Inclusion Curricula and Activities Ideas for All Ages

### Lower Elementary Curricula and Activities

*Activity 1:* [Pairing Penguins](#), *Activity 2:* [Family Badges](#), *Activity 3:* [Story - Tango's Family](#).

The goals of these activity (taken from [Tapestry of Faith](#)), geared towards lower elementary kids, are to reinforce inclusion and help children recognize that families come in all shapes, colors, and sizes.

### [Lower Elementary Anti-Racism Lesson Plans and Activities](#)

The above google doc contains multiple activities, games, and group discussion prompts with an Anti-Racism focus that can be used with youth groups. These activities were taken from the 2020/2021 Soul Matters curricula. They can be used all together or as standalone activities. Soul Matters created this curriculum with the intention of using them in a virtual setting, however they can be easily adapted to in-person.

## **Upper Elementary Curricula and Activities**

### [Session 14: Justice](#) (taken from [Tapestry of Faith](#))

The goals of these activities are to explore and release tension about difficult justice issues through play, express hope for justice using the symbolism of shining ones own light, and to create a personal "light" to symbolize the light in each of us.

### [Activity 2: Counting Circle](#) (taken from [Tapestry of Faith](#))

This game focuses on the importance of listening to others, and how. By listening and really hearing those around us, we can create a more just, fair, and peaceful world.

### [Upper Elementary Anti-Racism Lesson Plans and Activities](#)

The above google doc contains multiple activities, games, and group discussion prompts with an Anti-Racism focus that can be used with youth groups. These activities were taken from the 2020/2021 Soul Matters curricula. They can be used all together or as standalone activities. Soul Matters created this curriculum with the intention of using them in a virtual setting, however they can be easily adapted to in-person.

## **Junior & Senior Youth Group Curricula and Activities**

### [Workshop 1: The Call for Awareness](#) (taken from [Tapestry of Faith](#))

This workshop helps youth see themselves as social activists or justice makers. It explores the first quality: awareness. Youth become more aware of their personal history of justice work and how awareness can influence their com-

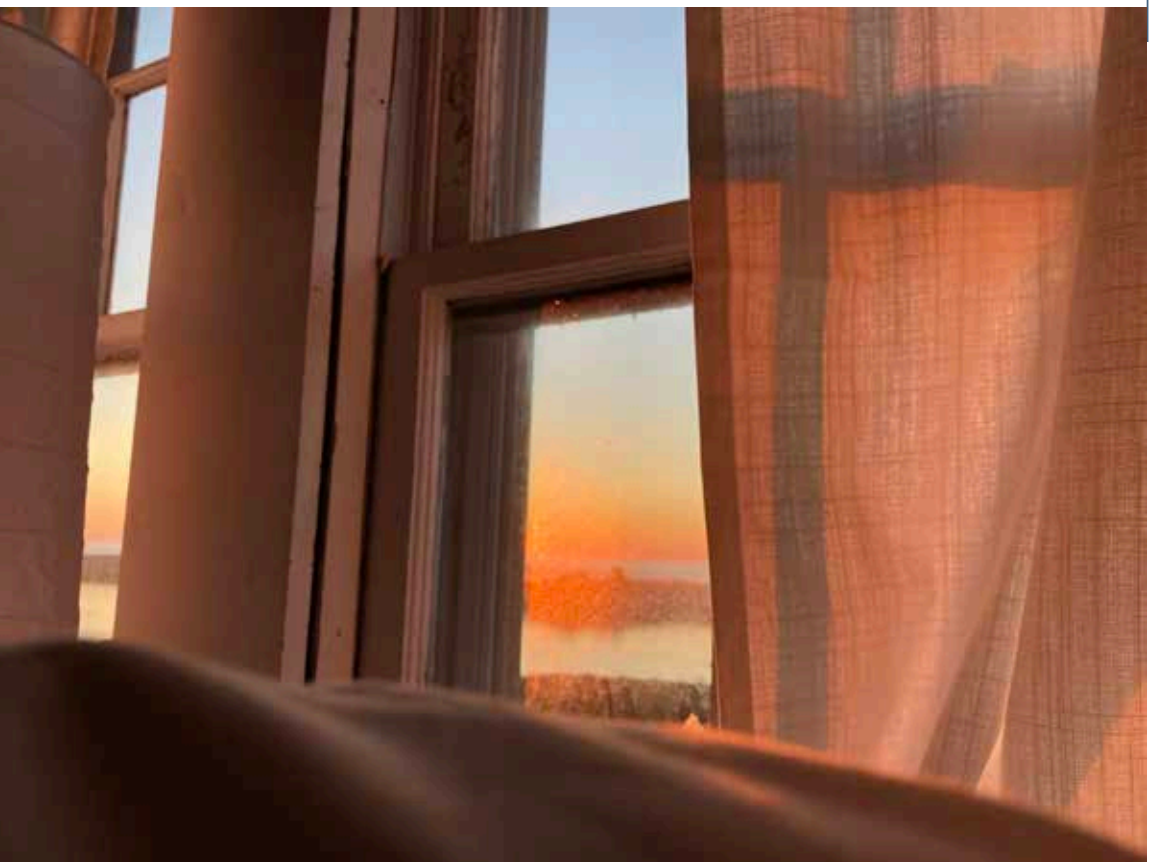
mitment to this work.

*Activity 4: [Light Crafts](#) (taken from [Tapestry of Faith](#))*

This activity focuses on the potential we each have to shine our own light for Justice

[Youth Group Anti-Racism Lesson Plans and Activities](#)

The above google doc contains multiple activities, games, and group discussion prompts with an Anti-Racism focus that can be used with youth groups. These activities were taken from the 2020/2021 Soul Matters curricula. They can be used all together or as standalone activities. Soul Matters created this curriculum with the intention of using them in a virtual setting, however they can be easily adapted to in-person.



## Reading List

When planning youth programming on anti-racism, consider including some of the following books, which are geared toward Pre-K and Elementary age children and can be found at different locations on Star Island.

### Nursery

*The Skin You Live In* by Michael Tyler and David Lee Csicsko  
*One* by Kathryn Otoshi  
*Antiracist Baby* by Ibram X. Kendi  
*An ABC of Equality* by Chana Ginelle Ewing  
*A is for Activist* by Innosanto Nagara  
*The Crayon Box That Talked* by Shane DeRolf  
*All Are Welcome* by Alexandra Penfold

### Lower Elementary

*Antiracist Baby* by Ibram X. Kendi  
*I Need a Lunch Box* by Jeannette Caines  
*And to Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street* by Dr. Seuss  
*I Have a Dream* by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr and Kadir Nelson  
*We March* by Shane W. Evens  
*One* by Kathryn Otoshi

### Upper Elementary

*A Kids Book About Racism* by Jelani Memory  
*Separate Is Never Equal: Sylvia Mendez and Her Family's Fight for Desegregation* by Duncan Tonatuih  
*Around Our Way on Neighbors Day* by Tameka Fryer Brown  
*I Need a Lunch Box* by Jeannette Caines  
*And to Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street* by Dr. Seuss  
*I Have a Dream* by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr and Kadir Nelson  
*Rosa* by Nikki Giovanni  
*Malcolm Little: The Boy Who Grew Up to Become Malcolm X* by Ilyasah Shabazz  
*Preaching to the Chickens: The Story of Young John Lewis* by Jabari Asim and E. B. Lewis  
*Something Happened in Our Town* by Marianne Celano  
*The Other Side* by Jacqueline Woodson  
*Each Kindness* by Jacqueline Woodson and E. B. Lewis

# Registration and Early Planning -- Welcoming New and Old Shoalers

One of the most important ways we can help new people – of any background! – feel welcomed on Star Island is to make sure they arrive well prepared and knowing what to expect. Star Island is an unusual place that provides a unique experience. It is important that we all do a good job of being forward, thorough, and transparent about what someone might experience when they come to a Star Island conference. Too often key details have been omitted from conference welcoming kits leading to a situation where a new Shoaler comes to the island only to realize they are not totally prepared or did not bring the things they needed. In response, one could imagine an empathetic old Shoaler responding, “well, you learn these things after you have come here for a few years.” We want to eliminate that conversation. It is our duty as conference leaders to make sure all conferees arrive informed and prepared. In the section below, resources are presented that will help you keep your new and old Shoalers in the loop. If you decide to use this guide for your conference, please credit the original authors, April Rosario and Nika Lopez.

## Intentional Welcoming of New Shoalers

Welcoming new folks and making them feel that they are a part of the conference is one of the most important things you can do as a conference leader. Star Island can be a strange place at first, and it's easy to feel excluded, especially when folks around them are so happy to see one another after a year apart.

Some conferences set up a buddy or new Shoaler/old Shoaler system where new members of the conference are paired up with older ones. It is good when the families or individuals have something in common, for examples, kids of similar age, or they are both ministers. You can pair single people with other single people and couples with couples. Some ideas to greet new

Shoalers include:

1. Old Shoaler/Buddy can send an email before the conference to introduce themselves to the new Shoaler and ask if they have any questions about Star Island or need any help with anything.
2. Old Shoaler/Buddy can find and greet the new Shoaler at the dock in Portsmouth and make sure they are settled and oriented on the boat. They can also offer to help with luggage and finding their room.
3. Some conferences have a new Shoaler Social Hour that is attended by conference leaders, new Shoalers and their greeters that starts 15 minutes ahead of regular Social Hour.
4. Check in throughout the week with new Shoalers as needed.

## **Not Knowing the Lingo can Be Unwelcoming**

Including a list or glossary of special Star words and phrases (Pel/Pelican; Fire & Water; Polar Bear; etc.) in an introduction letter or in a dock packet to help new conferees avoid confusion.

Review the "New Shoaler Guide" on page 24 for helpful ideas to send to conferees before the conference starts. You may print and or/copy and paste these guides to send out on listservs, add to newsletters, or post on social media.

## **New Shoaler Guide**

Using Social Media, Newsletters and/or Emails to Help New Shoalers Feel Welcome and Included Before Their Conference

Conference Facebook Pages, newsletters and/or direct emails can be an effective way for new conferees to learn more about their upcoming visit to Star Island and who they might meet there.

As longtime Shoalers and leadership, we may forget what it feels like to be a first timer (or someone returning after years away). Let us try and remember how easy it is to feel out of place as new Shoalers, just by not having as much information as the people around you.



The goal of this section is to provide a list of potential posts that can be used on conferences' social media pages in the months and weeks leading up to the conference, as a way to help new conferees feel in-the-know. This is easily done by creating a "Fact of The Week" section on social media accounts and/or emailed newsletters from mid-spring through the conference.

Much of this information can be found on the Star Island website, however adding it to your social media make it more accessible to conferees. It is best if each post is accompanied by a picture or reference link.

### Introduction Posts

Welcome post for each new person (after obtaining their permission/consent). This is a great way for old Shoalers to connect with new Shoaler before they ever set foot on the dock:

*Let's welcome our new member:\_\_\_\_\_ Please make sure you scroll through the page to see all the FAQ, info and tips about \_\_\_\_\_& Star Island and links to registration and discounts.*

[Star Island 2018 Video](#) and [Staying on Star: What to expect](#) Video:

*A must see video for anyone wondering what the Island is like!*



### Reminder Posts

*Reminder for everyone new to Star Island this year! Don't forget to fill out your discount application after you register [Add Link to [Application](#)].*

*Reminder for everyone to fill out Star Island's Registration Raffle [Add Link to [Raffle](#)].*

*Reminder: Your luggage will be lifted, tossed, and passed by several people. Try to not use hard-sided suitcases or ones with wheels. A duffle bag style is best. All bags must be under 40 lbs – multiple small bags are preferable.*

### Wondering Question Posts

*Are you wondering what the days will be like on Star Island during the \_\_\_\_\_ Conference? Check out this sample schedule! Things are happening from 6am to midnight!! As always people are encouraged to be as involved or uninvolved as they wish [Add picture of or link to schedule].*

*Have you been wondering what the accommodations/rooms are like on Star Island? [Add Link to [Island Accommodations Page](#)]*

*The Star lifestyle is based in part on our commitment to conservation of resources. Although some bedrooms are accessible by ramp, most are located up at least one*



*flight of stairs, or over a rocky path.*

*Most rooms do not lock, and keys are not available.*

*Bedrooms are furnished with platform beds made on the island, a dresser that you will need to share with your roommate(s), a wash stand, a small mirror, and a row of hooks for hanging anything that needs to be hung (some hangers are included).*

*There are no closets in most rooms..*

*Rooms have either shutters or curtains.*

*Bed linens, towels and washcloths, a pitcher of drinking water and a glass for each family member, a wash basin for sponge bathing, and a small bar of soap are all provided.*

*Towels and sheets can be replaced by request, and extra towels are available outside the shower rooms on shower days.*

### **Frequently Asked Question Posts**

*FAQ: What happens after we get to Portsmouth?*

*You will be directed where to park in the Steamship Company dock, check in and unload your luggage. Finally board the ferry and you're on your way! For more details check our [Getting Here](#) page. [Add Link to Getting Here Page]*

*FAQ: What do we do once we get off the ferry?*

*Once you have disembarked the boat, head up the road and up the steps of the Oceanic Hotel (main building, follow the crowd). Next, head into the hotel where you will confirm your room assignment at the lobby desk. Your luggage will be dropped off at living areas by island staff.*

*FAQ: What is a shared room?*

*A shared room simply means a room with more than one person. Families, couples, or two+ people who would like to room together. A shared room does not mean you will be sharing with someone you don't know.*

*FAQ: How are the rooms laid out?*

*Different rooms offer different options. Some are the perfect size for singles or couples, others can accommodate a whole family. Most rooms can also fit a pack n play, and adjoining rooms are also an option. If you're looking for a little bit more*

*privacy then the cottages or motel rooms may be more to your liking. But there is always something for everyone!!! [Post picture of room layout]*

*FAQ: Can I apply for both a discount and a financial grant?*

*Yes You Can!!*

*FAQ: What is the hall monitoring service?*

*The island staff provides hall monitors every evening from 8 to 11 p.m. for families with children 8 and under. This is a group sitter service. Hall monitors are stationed in the hallways near the children's rooms to listen, to see that the children are safe, and to see that the parents are sent for if their child/children need them. For more information, see the Youth and Families webpage. All families with children under 8 will be charged 1-\$25 or ~ \$50 -depending on the length of your conference for this service.*

*FAQ: How will I know my way around the island?*

*Click the link below to see a map of the island. [Link to [Island Map](#)]*

*FAQ: How will I know what to pack?*

*Please see the packing list in your welcome email.*

*FAQ: What kind of shoes should I bring?*

*It is best to bring a few different kinds. While flip-flops are great for the showers and in your rooms, they definitely won't hold up outside. Closed toe sandals are best for kids! For adults, if you plan to stay on the paths the slip on sandals with thick soles are best. If you plan on adventuring off the path, or out on the rocks, you'll want something that straps to your foot securely. It can be cold and rainy, so it's good to have something waterproof and warm as well. If you plan on going swimming then water shoes are best, as the beach is very rocky.*

*FAQ: Can I bring a stroller to the island?*

*Strollers are not recommended on Star Island, as the island walkways are not paved and have very uneven terrain. However, baby carriers/backpacks work wonderfully.*

*FAQ: Does Star Island provide over-the-counter medicines (pain reliever, Pepto Bismol, etc.) if I get sick?*

*The best option is to bring a small first aid kit with everything you might need. However there is a small store in the lobby of the Oceanic Hotel, they will have a small array of personal care items. The First Aid station will also have medication in case of illness or injury.*

*FAQ: Are there curtains in the rooms?*

*Most rooms have curtains, others have roller shades or wooden shutters.*

*FAQ: Can I print something on the Island before or after a workshop?*

*Yes! There's a business center with wireless internet access, computers, printing, and copying capabilities available for your use.*

*FAQ: Who are the Pels?*

*The Pels (short for Pelicans) are a crew of 100 or so employees (many are college students). They spend the summer on the island and do everything from house-keeping, maintenance, gardening, and cooking, to help ensure all guests have an amazing week!*

*FAQ: What About Taking Showers on Star Island?*

*Availability: 6:30 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. (closed in the middle for cleaning) any day. Location: Men's and women's shower rooms, beneath the lobby. Gender-neutral and first-floor accessible showers are available for those who aren't able to use the main showers. It is best to bring a bathrobe or cover up to get back and forth from the showers to your room. To conserve resources, conferees are asked to limit showers to roughly every other day. Towels and soap are available outside the shower rooms. There is also a rinse-off shower located at the end of the pier for conferees wishing to rinse off after a swim.*

*FAQ: What is the candlelight chapel service?*

*Experience some of the magic of Star Island! What could be more peaceful than a candlelight chapel service accompanied by the sound of waves crashing against the rocks and music? Candlelight services are a cherished Star Island tradition. At the close of each day, Shoalers gather at the foot of the hill and form a procession, carrying candle lanterns as the villagers of long ago carried their whale-oil lamps up the same winding path to the meetinghouse. Inside the chapel, the candle lanterns*

are hung on brackets from the walls, providing the only source of light. Whether you attend every night, make it to a few, or experience it only once it is not something you want to miss.

FAQ: I'm an early riser, what's the best way to start my day?

Whatever your speed is, there is something for you. Maybe you're the get up and go type...If so, take a run around the perimeter road, or the polar bear plunge. [mention if your conference offers morning yoga, communion, meditation etc.]. Or maybe a cup of coffee or tea on the front porch is more your style. Either way you're bound to have a great day!!

FAQ: What is there to do for the rest of the day?

The short answer: It's like summer camp for all ages!!!

The more detailed answer:

When people talk about Star Island, they talk about it as both a "place to unplug" and a "place where something is always going on." As hard as it is to believe, both are completely true. The morning programming for adults will focus on

-----  
While the adults are in their morning programs, children and youth 0-18 will get to enjoy-----

(These answers will be different and specific to each conference)

There are lots of other programs and activities on our schedule [give examples], and you may want to spend some of your time exploring the island, taking out a kayak, or creating some artwork. Check out the links below for more details:

[Add Link to Conference Website and <https://starisland.org/faq-category/activities/>]

FAQ: What's for dinner?

Good food is a must for a great vacation! Check out these [sample menus](#) to see what the dining is like on Star. Vegan, vegetarian, gluten free and allergies can all be accommodated. Please speak with the registrar.

[Post picture of dining room and snack bar]

FAQ: I see on the schedule there is an Underworld Tour, what is that?







*Underworld Tours (offered for both adults and kids/youth) offer a "behind the scenes look" through the kitchens, laundry, staff dining areas, and other areas of the island operation on these interactive tours! Ask questions and chat about how the island is run as you walk.*

*[For conferences June-August] FAQ: I see on the schedule there is a Botany Walk, what is that?*

*The Island Naturalist will conduct a tour of the vast island flora, including a discussion on edible and medicinal plants native to the Shoals.*

*FAQ: Are there games and/or sports equipment on the Island?*

*Of course!!! The following island equipment may be signed out at the Front Desk: Frisbees, ping-pong paddles (table is in Brookfield attached to the marine lab), volleyballs, basketballs, horseshoes, corn hole, hula-hoops, kick balls, tennis rackets, softballs, bats & gloves. Keep in mind that children under 12 cannot use softball equipment without an adult present. Or feel free to bring your own!*

*FAQ: What is the swimming/beach like?*

*The beach is rocky so water shoes are a definite plus. You can also jump off the swim platform that is attached to the dock and go for a swim. Lifeguards are on duty during swim hours.*

### **Fun Fact Posts**

*Fun Fact: Are you a runner, look no further!!*

*The perimeter road's varying terrain provides a moderately challenging course for runners. Whether you take an early morning jog as the sun rises, or an afternoon run through front lawn games, the perimeter road engages you beyond just the physical. Terrain can be rocky, and sometimes muddy in parts during June, so please only run with proper gear and precaution.*

*How long is the perimeter road?*

- Perimeter Rd: 2590 feet (.49 miles)
- w/ summer house path: 2720 feet (.51 miles)
- w/ pier: 3218 feet (.59 miles)
- w/ both: 3348 feet (.63 miles)

*Fun Fact: No island vacation is complete without a massage!*

*Guests can enjoy a massage from a professional massage therapist during their stay on Star. Interested guests may request a 1-hour session through the front desk. The massage fee (~\$80) can be added to individual room & board bills. Massage rooms are located on the third floor of the Oceanic Hotel. A large portion of the massage program proceeds go directly to Star Island.*

*Fun Fact: Star Island houses New England's largest off grid solar array!*

*It provides the majority of the Island's electricity.*

*Fun Fact: Recycling is just one of the many conservation methods used as part of the Green Gosport Initiative.*

*Fun Fact: There is nothing like starting your morning with a hot cup of coffee...or tea or hot chocolate!!*

*At morning coffee (6am -8am), early risers enjoy coffee, tea, and hot chocolate on the Oceanic Front Porch before breakfast is served. Need a pick me up through the day? Don't worry, midday and evening coffee breaks are generally scheduled to coincide with an intermission in a conference event and activities.*

*[conferences June-August] Fun Fact: The Marine Lab is definitely a hotspot on the Island for kids and adults alike!! Located just behind the tennis courts.*

*The littlest conferees can come by the lab to hang out in the kids' corner, which features age appropriate experiments, coloring books, reading materials and more! Children in the toddler program all the way through the senior teen program also enjoy the display tanks where they can get up close and personal with sea creatures of all varieties.*

*Fun Fact: Are you the creative type? If so then you definitely want to stop by the Art Barn!!*

*The Art Barn is a place to create anything your imagination brings to you? Arts and crafts supplies are provided, and people are also welcome to bring in their own projects. Spending time in the Art Barn is great fun for all ages*

*[If applicable] Fun Fact: Most conferences have some kind of Talent Show/Stunt Night/Variety Show that features the talents of your fellow conferees!!*

*Everyone is welcome to participate and show off any talent they have. Not quite ready yet to hop on stage and perform? No worries, watching the show is just as fun as performing in it. Either way it's not something you want to miss!!!*

*Fun Fact: Star Island is one of the nine Isles of Shoals located seven miles off the coast of New Hampshire and Maine.*

*So how will we get there... The Thomas Loughton Ferry of course!!*

*\*\*\*Fun Facts about the Thomas Loughton Ferry\*\*\**

*The Thomas Loughton is a 90-foot vessel with three decks- two fully heated and enclosed cabins and an open sundeck with seating and will hold up to 300 passengers.*

*There is a galley bar that includes hot dogs, candy, chips, drinks and alcoholic drinks for our 21 and over guests.*

*There are four bathrooms aboard the vessel.*

*Be sure to dress in layers. Remember that it is 10 to 15 degrees cooler on the water than it is on land. Also be aware that the sun is bright. Don't forget your sunblock!*

*[for conferences June-August] Fun Fact: Softball is an Island Favorite!!!*

*One afternoon during our week, conferees will be pitted against the Pelican squad (employees) in this long-standing tradition. All games use low-flight softballs and are generally "slow pitch." So bring your glove, borrow one from the island, or find a spot on the porch to watch the game. Not an afternoon you want to miss!!*

*Fun Fact: Star Chant*

*As the boat approaches the Star Island dock, there is a much-loved campy cheer that is initiated by the greeters on the dock. It goes like this:*

*S-T-A-R, S-T-A-R!*

*Oceanic, Oceanic, Rah, rah, rah!*

*You DID come back, You DID come back, You DID come back!*

*And everyone on the boat cheers back:*

*S-T-A-R, S-T-A-R!*

*Oceanic, Oceanic, Rah, rah, rah!*

*We DID come back, We DID come back, We DID come back!*

*It's fun, you'll get the hang of it, even if you are a newcomer.*

## Follow Up Emails

Has someone responded to a social media post or a newsletter blurb asking for more information about Star Island? In addition to pointing them to the website, you can use some of the text below for a useful explanation of what a New Shoaler can expect on their first visit.

*Dear (Name),*

*Thank you for your interest in Star Island. It's a special place for many people.*

*When planning a visit to Star Island, people have a few options: day tripping, personal retreating, or staying for a week-long conference. Each experience is slightly different, but all give you an idea of what makes Star so special. If you are headed out to Star for just a few hours, it's easy to take in the immediate physical beauty of the island, the large green front lawn great for picnics and softball games, the ocean and views of the surrounding islands, and the historic Oceanic hotel. Even being here for only a few hours, you're still able to participate in many activities such as: renting kayaks or row boats to visit Smuttynose Island, head over to the marine lab to visit with some sea creatures and grab a snack at the snack bar! People often love a historical tour of the island as well. By the time you've fit in enough activities, it's time to get back on the boat.*

*Some people experience the day trip and realize they haven't had enough! So, they plan an overnight stay. In addition to participating in activities available to day trippers, personal retreaters experience another aspect of the island, a glimpse of the tight knit community. As an overnight guest, you are able to experience family style dining, sleep over in the main hotel or surrounding cottages and even get the chance to participate in conference events if interested. If you in fact get to experience what happens at a conference, it is likely you may be inspired to take a look at what you can experience over a few nights or even a week long stay.*

*Staying a week on Star is always relaxing but there is always something to do, if you want to. All conferences have a different focus, and there are so many to choose from that many find themselves on Star a few times over during the season. Some come to enjoy time with their families and friends, and some come for conferences*

*that have a specific purpose like yoga, creative exploration, connecting with nature and so much more. It is easy to be inspired to stay busy all day with conference activities, but everyone finds lots of time for the most beautiful and traditional activities at Star: porch sitting, photographing the beauty of Star, participating in lantern lit chapel services and taking long walks around the island.*

*Mornings are filled with sleepy conversations on the front porch while having a first cup of coffee and looking at the beautiful ocean scenery as you sit in a rocking chair to greet the day. Star is truly one of the best places to unplug and restore. The mainland and any of your troubles feels so far away and it really gives you time to think and just be human without the distractions of everyday living. The conference activities allow for uninterrupted time to fully engage with the topic that brought you to Star. Daily meals are shared in the community, and values are shared among both visitors and island staff. Evenings will bring starry skies, and you can sit on the porch with a Lime Rickey from the snack bar for a late night chat with new friends or just lay on the front lawn and drink in the night sky and all its beauty.*

*The amazing Pelicans and the fabulous Star Island team, are also such a great part of this experience. They take such amazing care of this special island, keep things running smoothly and offer so much insight to the important work that is done on Star. The pelicans also prepare an amazing show for the Star Island community to share together as the week comes to an end. When you have a great week on Star, you'll leave feeling that you are in the beginnings of building lifelong friendships and being a part of a community that you will look forward to seeing every summer. It is our hope that you leave Star beginning the countdown to the day you will return and although your heart is already longing to stay, you undoubtedly know, you will come back!*

### **Extra Expenses**

Not everyone coming to Star has disposable income or the privilege of being able to put unplanned purchases on a credit card. It is imperative to be very clear on "hidden" costs. By providing conferees with a list of all the extras (and their prices) that can be enjoyed on Star, conferees can better budget and plan what is or is not doable without feeling caught off guard.

Here is a list of extras that should be sent to both new and returning Shoalers after they register. We also suggest sending a payment schedule as well detailing what and when everything is due.

#### *The Bookstore*

*The Bookstore has a wide variety of books on subjects related to conference topics, and the Isles of Shoals, as well as a smattering of novels and children's books. Postcards, note cards, and stamps are also sold in the bookstore.*

#### *Lobby Store*

*The Lobby Store does not have abundant stock, however, for its size, it does have an amazing array of personal care items including toiletries, small stationary, sunscreen, diapers, nail care items, batteries, shaving supplies, shoelaces, feminine hygiene supplies, sunglasses and more! No tobacco products are sold on the Island.*

#### *Gift Shop*

*The Gift Shop, also for its size, has an impressive stock of clothing, jewelry, souvenirs and toys. Gift shop buyers do a great job of including both high end souvenirs/clothing/jewelry, and affordable, interesting small toys that children can easily buy with their own money.*

#### *Snack Bar & Grill*

*Oh, the snack bar! The snack bar is not open during meals. But in between meals, many Shoalers enjoy everything from the famed Lime Rickey to a cupful of Swedish fish. Beware if you are bringing children to the island – you can drop a lot of cash at the snack bar, even on day one! It is a wonderful place to park for a while and enjoy an ice cream cone. Also, on the menu are bagels, hot dogs, fruit, candy, coffee, tea and many other delights.*

#### *Lobster Night*

*Wednesday evening is Lobster Night for those so inclined. Sign-up for Lobster Night happens on the island, and local rates prevail. ~\$16/lobster (added to conferee room and board bills).*

#### *Appledore Island Visit*



*On Tuesday afternoon, we will have the opportunity to boat over to the largest shoal, Appledore Island, for a tour of the Shoals Marine lab and a chance to see Celia Thaxter's splendid garden. We may also have the chance to circle Duck Island to see the seal population (500+ seals!). This trip is suitable for children over the age of 8 with a caregiver (or back-pack babies), and those who are able to walk on rough terrain (rougher than Star). Strollers and wheelchairs will not be able to navigate the rocks. Also, the boat trip is standing room only, and the waves do knock you around a bit! The cost is around \$25/adult, \$12/youth.*

#### *Sunset Cruise*

*Monday night enjoy a spectacular Star Island sunset aboard the Utopia while cruising around the Isles of Shoals. Cost is around \$30/adult, \$15/youth.*

#### *Massage*

*Enjoy a massage from a professional massage therapist during their stay on Star. Interested guests may request a 1-hour session through the front desk. The massage fee can be added to individual room & board bills. A large portion of the massage program proceeds go directly to Star Island. Massages cost ~\$80 for an hour. Reservations are made at the front desk.*

#### *Hall Monitoring Service*

*As mentioned previously, families with one or more children under the age of eight are charged around \$50 per family for full week conferences, and around \$25 per family for short conferences for the hall monitoring service offered by the Pels from 8 pm to 11 pm. This charge will be included on your island bill.*

#### *Parking*

*The parking fee for the dock in Portsmouth is \$15 per vehicle per night.*

#### *Fellowship/Social Hour*

*Let Shoalers know if your conference asks for donations at Fellowship Hour. You should also let them know if you sell tickets for a clams/mussels social, and roughly how much they cost.*

#### *Auctions*

*If your conference puts on a fundraising auction, let Shoalers know in advance they may want to bring an item to contribute, and/or plan to spend money to bid on items.*

### *Annual Fund*

*Star Island is a nonprofit organization. The money guests spend on the island accounts for less than 70% of the annual budget. Star relies on charitable support to make up the remainder. Making donations is not required but Shoalers should expect to hear about it when they're on the island, and may want to be prepared to make a donation should they choose to.*

*\*\*\*The Island accepts Visa and MasterCard for hotel invoices (which will include the weekly parking fee, and ferry tickets) at the end of the week, and at the bookstore, lobby store and gift shop. Personal checks, credit cards, and cash are accepted for items purchased at the auction. You can also cash a personal check, if needed, at the front desk in the hotel.*

## **What to bring to Star Guide**

*Even if we must adhere to the 40 lb. bag limit, there are some things that you can tuck into your luggage that will make your Star experience even better. We humbly present these suggestions.*

### **Clothing:**

*Extra for kids is always a good idea. Dress is casual except on Friday evening when some like to dress up for the banquet dinner.*

*Suggested packing list:*

- 1 Pair pajamas*
- 2-3 Pairs shorts/skirts*
- 1-2 Long sleeved shirts*
- 4-5 Short sleeved shirts*
- 1-2 Pairs long pants/jeans and or sweatpants/fleece pants*
- Bathing suits (especially for children) and Towels*
- Underwear & Socks (including one warm pair)*
- Something Warm—A fleece, sweatshirt, or the like. The nights can get cold.*

*Extra blankets for beds are always available, but something for your person is wise*

*Rain coat —a critical item on Star.*

*Bathrobe/Muumuu— for going back and forth from showers/swimming, etc.*

*Pair sturdy shoes (hiking shoes or sneakers with laces) and/or pair sturdy sandals (with straps — like Tevas)*

*Extra shoes —Shoes can get wet and muddy.*

*Flip-flops and/or water shoes—for going to and from shower and to and from the rocky swimming beach*

*Dress-up clothes for banquet night—Most people dress up for the Friday night event.*

### **Toiletries:**

*Though there is a Lobby Store (but NO pharmacy) that sells many personal care products, you should plan to bring a full array of toiletries for each family member including:*

*Hand sanitizer*

*Small first aid kit/Band-Aids/over the counter pain reliever*

*Daily toiletries - Toothbrush, Toothpaste, Dental floss, Mouthwash, Shampoo/conditioner*

*Deodorant, Feminine hygiene products.*

*Meds—if you take daily medication and/or allergy relief - pack a few days extra in case inclement weather strands us out on Star (unlikely, but possible!).*

*Baby wipes (in the convenient travel-sized pack)—helpful for cleaning up on non-shower days and after lobster night.*

*Sunscreen, Sunglasses, Sun hat—we're surrounded by the ocean and the glare, even on overcast days, can be quite intense.*

*Bug repellent & Anti Itch Cream*

*Hair dryers can only be used outside the shower room in the Oceanic!!*

### **Other necessities:**

*Flashlight or headlamp— for crisscrossing rocky paths in the dark. A reading lamp is also a good idea!*

*Chargers— for your kindle, iPad, phone. The front desk will happily charge*

*your electronics if you must bring them. DON'T charge them in your room please!*

*Cash—Even though the Front Desk & Gift Shop take credit cards, the Snack Bar won't, although you can charge things there to your room. The auctions take cash & checks.*

### **Nice to have:**

*White cotton clothing/sheets for tie dying.*

*Other items — binoculars, books, cameras, games, Journal/sketch pad, Cards, Reading material (good bookstore in the lobby, too), Pens/paints/markers.*

*Recreational supplies: kites, tennis rackets, bubble wands, any other small outdoor toys for sharing*

*Instrument(s) in carrying case, music, and/or props for the Talent Shows! (There is a piano available to all.)*

*Softball mitt for the always fun staff/conferee game.*

*Real Maple Syrup— for those who prefer that over pancake syrup*

*Adult Beverages — Aside from the daily fellowship/social hour, there may be occasions for those of legal age to imbibe responsibly in a convivial atmosphere.*

*Alcohol and cigarettes are NOT for sale on Star Island, and both may only be used in approved areas.*

*Some incidentals are available in the Lobby Store, and in some instances an Island messenger can be dispatched. The absolute best things to bring are an open mind, a love of the sea, a friendly smile, and a sense of adventure!*

## **Financial Accessibility/Financial Aid**

In order to fulfill our promise and potential, we need to do what we can to ensure that financial accessibility is not a barrier to attending conferences. Star Island has long recognized this, and has taken positive steps to encouraging prospective Shoalers to access financial aid. Our belief is that Shoalers and potential Shoalers are a family, and we are committed to fostering this relationship. As conference leaders, please make the following information available in all your marketing material. We encourage you to add a well publicized section of your website devoted to financial aid and to link to the Star Island website.

## Resources for financial assistance

### Financial Grants/Scholarships

Your conference may have a method to offer financial assistance. Additionally, Star Island has a [Financial Grants program](#). If you have questions, or need information, please feel free to reach out to our Registrar, Mike Bray at [mbray@starisland.org](mailto:mbray@starisland.org). Beginning in 2020, most conferences have agreed to coordinate their financial assistance resources with the SIC's Financial Grants process. We have found that we can do the most good for the most people by coordinating our available resources and eliminating as many barriers as possible. You may also consider identifying funds for furthering beloved community effort through financial assistance.

### Discounts

Star Island has offered a robust [discount program](#) as a marketing and outreach effort to bring new folks, and those who haven't been for a while, out to the island. The goal of this program is separate from the goal of the Financial Grants program – it's about bringing new people (regardless of their financial security) to growing conferences on Star. Nevertheless discounts can play a factor in financial accessibility.

### Conference staff stipends

Your conference may consider offering a stipend for a staff position (such as youth group leader) to cover some or all of the costs of attending.

### Clergy Grants

If you wish to extend assistance to a Unitarian clergy, you may also contact the ISA-UU and inquire about their [clergy grants program](#).

### Other Diversity/Social Justice Grants:

*For summer camps :*

[America's Promise Alliance  
Summer Fund](#)

*For churches/religious groups:*

[The Unitarian Universalist Funding Program](#)

## Lilly Endowment Public Understanding of Religion Grants

Church sponsorship from within your church or from other churches. (individual contributions or collection plate donations).

### **Communicating about financial assistance**

In your communications about the conference (email, website, social media etc.), inform and remind people about their options for financial assistance. Make the process normalized and visible in as many places as possible.

Consider that an individual's circumstances can be complex. We recommend that each conference designate a warm and inviting person, whether that be the Conference Registrar or another individual, who can become familiar with the process and all of the resources available to assist registrants in the process, while maintaining confidentiality.

The matter of financial assistance can be somewhat delicate. Some may be hesitant to accept what could be perceived as "charity" and feel undeserving or embarrassed. Your conference's communications and process surrounding financial accessibility should hold up the dignity of applicants as much as possible. Consider how you might convey to potential applicants that their presence is important to the conference, and it would be a better experience for everyone if they were able to contribute to the community experience. Funds have been dedicated for the purpose of helping build the island community, and it would be a shame if money was left over at the end, and at the same time individuals did not register because of financial barriers. Your conference may want to consider using the word "grants" in your language, rather than "scholarship," "aid," or "assistance."

### **Raising Funds to Expand Financial Aid Offerings**

To keep these options available and to expand on existing options, we encourage all conferences to organize a way to raise funds that can be used for a conference financial aid program or targeted scholarship program that supports families of color or families made up of demographics that are underrepresented at your conference. Some ways to do this include a silent auction or an art auction or whatever method of fundraising your conference prefers.





# Star Culture and Rituals: Your Time on Star

## Rules vs. Guidelines

The Island staff holds responsibility for setting “rules” that keep us physically safe while we are on Island, such as prohibiting open flames indoors. But, the responsibility to foster Beloved Community belongs to all of us.

Our behaviors and attitudes on island cannot be dictated by “rules”; they must be lived into because of our intrinsic motivation and intentional effort to be inclusive, self-aware and forever becoming better versions of who we are (as individuals and as a community). This guidebook is the product of contributors who love Star Island and long for us to grow spiritually together; it is about who we are, who we want to be and how we will be together. It is an invitation to reflect on our culture and traditions, and to bend our norms and practices towards inclusion and sensitivity, especially of marginalized populations.

This work will be ongoing, and suggestions here are offered to our leaders for consideration and discussion; perhaps as inspiration for initiating small but meaningful shifts in how we are together. They are not rules or mandates, but invitations into what we hope will be a long and spiritual conversation.

## Events and their Significance

Dispelling insecurities about a new place and the feeling of being an outsider should be a priority for all conference leaders. This is who we are, and conferees who welcome new Shoalers and make them feel included are doing a service to that person and the whole Star Island community. This is the spirit of Star Island – welcoming a stranger, and thereby giving that person permission to simply be.

Many old Shoalers have strong feelings about the traditions of Star Island, which can seem intimidating to new Shoalers. The more someone knows in advance, the more he/she/they can prepare themselves for engaging or observing those traditions. Be mindful of how we can share and adapt tradi-

tions in order to make them more inclusive.

Application acceptance and registration provides a logical jumping-off point for including conferees in existing traditions. This is the first opportunity a conference representative has to impart "insider" knowledge onto newcomers. Something physical, through regular mail, is more personal, and could supplement standard electronic communication. There could be a handwritten note from the Registrar and/or a veteran who has been chosen to be this newcomer's Shoalmate. This may go double for kids, with a little welcome gift, a name tag to decorate, or a project to complete (maybe a part of a greater community project). The latter two can become conference traditions that, by their nature, are welcoming and inclusive.

### Conference day

Imagine walking into a new school, part-way through the school year, or starting a new job. A go-to person makes all the difference in staying or leaving, especially with regards to social integration and the little things that add up to create a positive overall experience. Once a conference day arrives, a new Shoaler needs to be recognized, welcomed, and guided, as soon as he/she arrives at the dock. A conference's "new Shoaler liaison" (or a few, of varying ages) could be stationed at check-in, and connect new Shoalers with old Shoalers when they arrive. Therefore, old Shoalers would do well to arrive before check-in time gets busy, and be on stand-by for their connections to come. This can lead to introductions to other conferees, coffee or lunch in Portsmouth, etc. The idea is to provide a sense of familiarity and ease from the beginning of the in-person experience. There are some further suggestions about how new Shoaler/old Shoaler greetings on page 16.

Many conferences mark new Shoaler name tags to indicate their "new" status. While it could invite conferees to engage in conversation with him/her/them, it also singles him/her/them out. Conversely, those who are involved with conference governance should have clear designation on their nametags. Consider offering new Shoalers the option to have their name tags marked or simply include hometowns, as this can lead to conversation. All name tags should include pronouns.

On arrival to Star, new Shoalers should be shown where to check in and be shown personally to their rooms.

Each conference has a new Shoaler tour. A tour guide can provide insider and historical info that the new Shoalers might not otherwise learn. Entertain the option to have a separate tour for children, as they will want to know different things about Island living than their parents do. Involve several veteran conferees in this, so questions can be asked discreetly, if desired. After this tour, the group should be given detailed instructions regarding the day's schedule, including attending Fire and Water, and the rest of the evening's activities. This is also a good opportunity for new conferees to meet each other, as well. Many may have similar questions or reservations.

At the Fire and Water orientation, singling out new Shoalers can be embarrassing. Don't ask new Shoalers to identify themselves with a hand-raise or by standing. Simply ask the community to welcome them with their applause.

### **First night**

Plan an activity that recognizes that conferees may be tired from travel, but also provides an opportunity for them to meet others. Post-chapel music/gatherings, debriefs with conference leadership before bedtime, or meeting at the snack bar to solidify plans for the next day can help people feel welcome and hopeful for the week ahead. Note that this does not just apply to the first night; however, it is of most importance at the beginning of the week in order to set a welcoming tone.

### **Food and drink**

Rituals around food and drink can sometimes cause unnecessary exclusion. Ideally, at least two separate tables for alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages should be supplied at Social Hour. There should be a variety of mocktails available, too. Conferees (including new ones) can bring fancy juices or foods to contribute, or the team buying provisions for Fellowship/Social Hour can add this to their list. Many conferences offer a Friends of Bill/AA meeting in the Writing Room that meets at the same time as Social Hour. Make sure this meeting is well publicized but also make clear that it is anonymous and people should never need to make known their decision to attend a Friends of Bill meeting.

Offer Social Hour food that respects dietary restrictions. Considerations include gluten-free options, vegan foods, and nut-free selections. Those preparing for social hour should understand cross-contamination and inherent

risks involved for those with allergies/sensitivities.

The family-style dining experience is not something one typically encounters in regular life. Most dietary choices can be honored by the kitchen; however, socially, meal hours can produce anxiety. Walking into a large dining hall and not knowing where and with whom to sit can make someone feel excluded, especially when seat-saving is taking place. Conference leadership should discourage this practice. Instead, waving over fellow conferees who seem waylaid is a compassionate, thoughtful way to fill a table. Your conference may also consider creating a seating challenge whereby all conferees are challenged to sit at a table that doesn't include any close friends or family members for one meal a day. Of course this is optional and no one will be keeping track, but it is a fun thing to announce at the first night orientation and normalizes the practice of mixing up seating habits in the dining hall.

If anyone would like to offer a blessing before a meal, of any tradition, he/she/they must be made aware that it is acceptable, and that the table will participate respectfully. Perhaps someone at each table, without any sort of formal assigning, asks if anyone would like to offer any words of blessing at each meal (logistically, this does not work well at breakfast).

### **Chapel**

All people of all theistic and atheistic ascriptions are welcomed and encouraged to attend all services. In pre-conference communication and literature, this fact cannot be overstated.



A consideration may be to send out copies of frequently-used music in advance. This can likewise be done with the wake-up singer music.

### **Bonfire**

There are inherent safety and accessibility issues in having a bonfire on Star Island. Make sure that you make clear to all conferees the realities and safety issues that are part of the bonfire experience. This way, people with mobility concerns can make wise decisions about their participation. Moreover, parents can make informed decisions ahead of time about what is best for their children.

With regards to musical selections, those facilitating the event should be encouraged to include songs from a variety of traditions and genres.

### **Lobster night**

The Star Island kitchen does a wonderful job of making those who do not partake in Lobster Night feel included. Although everyone is eating in the same hall, there are plenty of options for non-lobster eaters that are vegetarian, gluten free and vegan. Non-lobster eaters also get an extra 15 minutes of Social Hour.

### **Polar Bears**

Conferees should be made aware of this tradition before a conference begins. For those who do not want to swim in the North Atlantic first thing in the morning, or those who have physical restrictions, cheerleaders can form a group



and assemble on the dock. This further builds community and allows everyone to share in the experience.

### **Banquet**

For those conferences that hold a banquet dinner, traditions should be communicated thoroughly and in advance, via pre-conference correspondence. You should make sure to explain the “clap-out” and Grand March traditions. Participation in either is not mandatory, but new Shoalers should nevertheless know the rituals in advance, including the names of the Pel crews (and a basic understanding of what each crew does). It is also a good idea to be upfront about the physical demands of the Grand March. Announce that participants should be older than 5 and wearing good shoes. You may also mention that the lawn is uneven and that anyone who has knee or hip problems (or wants not to get knee or hip problems!) might decide to watch from the porch. You can offer bubble wands to porch observers to blow out over the Grand March as a way of more actively including them.

Many conferees or groups of conferees are recognized during banquet night. As on the first night of the conference, it may be embarrassing to single out new Shoalers for their new Shoaler status. Make sure that any new Shoaler who will be thanked on banquet night is made aware in advance that they will be asked to stand and receive applause. Many conferences also include a moment to recognize new Shoalers just for being new. This must be done tactfully. Having them stand while everyone claps can feel alienating. We suggest instead to ask the conference to clap not for the fact that they are new, but for what they have added to the existing conference experience.

Many conferences also take this opportunity to recognize old Shoalers who have been coming for longer amounts of time. This is not just a practice in celebrating seniority for seniority's sake, but finding a way of commending those who make up the foundation of each conference community and honoring their commitment and service over the years.

Focusing on the celebration of seniority extends beyond banquet. Consider how this can reinforce an idea that Star belongs to some people more than others.

## “Free Range” Kid protocol

For many returning conferees, Star Island begins at the dock, and while this is often an exciting time for returning Shoalers it can be overwhelming, confusing and stressful for new people especially families who don't know many other people.

Inviting volunteers to be part of a buddy system can help ease this feeling. Buddies can help by showing people where to put their bags and sit as well as explaining that families often let their kids walk around and explore the boat.

Whether you have a buddy system start on the boat or the island, ask volunteers to have a parent-to-parent conversation about parenting styles and boundaries. Communication and transparency among parents should be emphasized during orientation or early during the conference so that everyone has some common ground from the start of the week. For teens, we suggest parents come to an understanding about shared expectations around free time.

Additionally, use landmarks or create maps for conferees to reference rather than exclusively referring to names of buildings that new Shoalers may not already know.

The idea behind the “free range” kid culture is another example of something that can seem intimidating and unfamiliar to new families. Letting kids be free range is a great and unique aspect of Star that many of us love, but we understand that it should be accessible to all. We need deliberative care to make it more equitable and available especially to new parents, and not just something that is available to people who know more conferees.

State explicitly during your orientation kid-related rules and how youth programming works. Also, while it is always the parents' responsibility to watch out for the safety and welfare of their child(ren), explain that the culture of the island is to let kids be free, and many adults invite keeping a watchful eye.

One easy way to help new families into this unique piece of Star culture is to have a few volunteers watch kids on the playground during Fire & Water - This sets the tone for free range kid culture and makes F&W more welcoming to families.



## Land Acknowledgement & Star Island Song

As a summer gathering spot for families and individuals, people are able to enjoy the natural wonder of Star Island and the Isles of Shoals. Star Island, and those islands around it, hold a special meaning for many people. Part of spending time on Star Island is acknowledging the history of the land.

*Star Island is within the waters of N'dakinna, the traditional lands and waterways of the Abenaki, Pennacook and other related Wabanaki Peoples past and present. We acknowledge and honor with gratitude the land itself and the people who have stewarded it throughout the generations.*

Star Island Corporation will permanently acknowledge the history of the land it inhabits today. Here are other ways to make the land acknowledgement part of your conference:

- Begin theme talks or daily gatherings with the land acknowledgement statement created by the Star Island Corporation
- Read the land acknowledgement during breakfast announcements before folks go on their way
- Include an intentional moment during conference program to visit the land acknowledgement plaque on island
- Inquire with the Island Historian about history of indigenous people at the Isles of Shoals within the context of the land acknowledgement
- Devote part of your conference schedule to a discussion about land acknowledgements and how they are a starting point for addressing settler colonial history and dominant culture narratives.
- Invite youth leaders to incorporate the land acknowledgement into their program in age appropriate ways:
- A visit to the land acknowledgement plaque with youth drafting their own statement
- A visit with the Island Historian to understand history of indigenous people at the Isles of Shoals

- A discussion about land acknowledgement statements and how they are a starting point for addressing settler colonial history and dominant culture narratives

### **Star Island Is My Spirit's Home**

Many people have fond memories of singing "Star Island is My Spirit's Home" on Star Island, a tradition that we believe began in the 1960s. However, the tune and most of the lyrics are taken from the song "Marching to Pretoria" which originated during the Boer Wars in South Africa. As such, the song comes with a troubling history rooted in colonialism, violence, racism, and oppression.

While this has been acknowledged in the past, including by Edith Pierson (Star Island employee from the mid-1970's through 1990's) who would provide a disclaimer before the singing of the song, we are exploring opportunities to create a new song that Shoalers can embrace authentically as our own anthem. With this new song, we will create a new tradition that seeks to cajole us from our seats and sing from our hearts for the island we love.

Some conferees might be curious as to why "Star Island is My Spirit's Home" is being reconsidered, especially since the history of the song has been acknowledged before. Rather than rationalizing the continued use of a song we know to have problematic undercurrents that don't align with our values, we seek to create a new tradition that invites current Shoalers into making history.

### **Examining "insider culture" – Keeping Tradition Alive**

Sometimes, when new people come to Star, it can feel like all the traditions and exciting and fun aspects of Star culture have already been decided. There can be a pervasive "insider culture" that may make new people feel hurt or like they are in the wrong place. As a new person, it can feel like your job to adhere to rigid practices. Tactically, conference leaders can mitigate some of these feelings by preparing new Shoalers through sending them helpful excerpts from the "New Shoaler Guide" on page 24

Still, while you can try to "prepare" new Shoalers and they may find the prospect of adopting some Star Island traditions fun and meaningful, it could

be more meaningful if there is some flexibility around the way conferences embrace tradition.

Indeed, the reason why tradition is so powerful – and why it draws people to return to Star Island year after year – is that it is not established by one person, it is the product of collective impulses to celebrate and be in the moment. When we recognize those traditions, they become meaningful because we are a part of them and they are a part of us. Many people say when they come to Star, “things never change on Star Island!” Actually, that is not true. Many traditions have evolved. A whole section of the back of the island has been converted to solar panels. If you were a Pel, you probably know well the experience of learning that beloved walls of graffiti from decades ago have been torn down to accommodate fire code projects.

And yet, even while change is all around, we still feel when we return to the island that somehow time stands still. Star Island has a way of accessing a familiarity within ourselves rather than providing an experience that is the same year after year. A place steeped in tradition like Star Island has a greater capacity for change than many people think. We can honor the personal history inherent in those traditions and also allow for those traditions to evolve to reflect the current people on island. This is what we mean by keeping traditions “alive.”

By allowing room to create new traditions, we also make opportunities to instill pride in new parts of the conference population. There is nothing more powerful than feeling like you are present in the moment when traditions begin, that you took part in their formation. This is what builds community, strengthens connection between humans and physical spaces. This is an investment in your conference's future and a visible act of practicing being deliberately inclusive and respecting diversity.

We encourage conference leaders to be mindful of the role tradition plays in your culture and to challenge your conference to open cracks in those traditions to allow new light to shine in. There is no one way to do this, so you may choose to have your own conversations about how to practice alive traditions in your conference.

## Conferee/Staff relations – how to love your Pels

It is important that Pels are part of our Beloved Community and can sometimes face unique challenges related to race. Just as we want to create an inclusive environment for conferees, we also must work within a safe community for Pels.

Just as you will remember meaningful interactions with our beloved Pels when you depart the island at the end of your conference, the Pelicans will remember you and your conference even after the season has ended.

Ensuring a positive working relationship between the Pelican community and conferee community will help both groups feel welcome to each other. Many Pelicans apply for the job because of their experience as conferees, many decide to spend their summer on Star because it offers them housing and economic stability, and some will set foot on Star Island for the first time on the day their contract begins. Regardless of prior Star Island experience, if a Pelican is treated as though they are a member of a larger beloved community, they will feel welcomed to come back.

Pelicans see the same people every day for the whole summer, which is why it is a refreshing gift to welcome a new conference every week. As Pelicans watch the different conferences throughout the summer, they get to see and engage with a variety of traditions. A common conversation between Pelicans is regarding which conference they would like to join when they continue on in their Star Island experience as a conferee. As conference leaders, you can be a model for how your conference will treat the staff on Star Island. Using inclusive language in conference communication, such as referring to Pelicans as being part of the "Star Island family," will help to bridge the gap between the staff community and the conference community. Consider opening conference events to staff and actively inviting Pelicans to participate in programming and activities.

The Pelican community differs from any conference because of the unique arrangement that comes out of living and working in the same spaces. The Pelicans, especially in recent years, have put a lot of effort into fostering an intentional community that reduces interpersonal harm. The community prides itself on being open, accepting and affirming of all individuals' identities. For some, this may be the first community to openly support their identity.

# Creating Pathways for Better Communication

## On-Island Conflict Resolution

Conflict is a natural part of life. We are not the same, and that is fine -- until those differences cause us to question things about ourselves or each other, which is when things can get difficult. Our awareness of the depth of a conflict that may arise grows with our discomfort. Our pain also grows when we don't know how to engage with those differences we encounter in a healthy way, or we don't see a way to move through it -- and instead, we walk away.

The pain we experience in conflict comes when we don't understand that relationships and processes can be built to help us navigate them. In practical terms what does that mean? Before we offer some suggestions, we want to distinguish the difference between conflict and inappropriate, even actionable, conduct. If conference members, visitors, or staff encounter what feels like threatening behavior, or behavior that makes one feel unsafe, the appropriate response is to approach a conference leader. For adults, this might be a member of the conference steering committee or other designated leader with a portfolio of "healthy relationships" -- and share the concerns they hold.

For children, this might be the leader of the children's program. Star Island requires that all staff working with children and youth have a CORI (Criminal Offense Record Inquiry) completed prior to serving in such roles on island. Children's leaders and those working with elder or youth populations are considered "Mandated Reporters" and are best equipped to receive concerns of this nature and escalate them if necessary. Leaders of the Star Island staff hold similar roles and can assist in helping conference leaders address these concerns in a proactive and sensitive way.

### **Navigating Conflict and Power in White Supremacist Culture**

The white-dominant culture in which we all live tends to make assumptions about shared and equitable power. This culture assumes that people are able to step into a relatively equal playing field. This is a myth. Some people have vulnerable identities and have been marginalized (people of color, those with

disabilities, LGBTQIA+), and it is not fair or appropriate to ask these people to step into a conflicted situation when they may need to be protected from parts of the dominant culture. Culture imbalances place pressure on the vulnerable, and in a majority-white society we tend to make assumptions that are based on that white culture. If power is imbalanced, harm can occur to others.

### **Harassment**

Harassment can be considered a threat to an individual's safety and is usually a sign of conflict. Individuals experiencing harassment will frequently note that there is a power imbalance present between the individual exercising such behavior and the individual on the receiving end. In such situations, we advocate for approaching conference leadership (if the behavior is coming from within the conference) or island leadership (if staff are involved or if other resolutions cannot be found) for support and assistance.

### **Intra-Conference Conflicts**

What about intra-conference conflict? Children do not always get along, and neither do adults. Although Star Island is an idyllic place for us - and there is a strong sense, within most of our conferences of the joy of an "intentional community" - we should not delude ourselves into believing that we are all friends and that we all think alike. We are independent and unique beings, and opinions and behaviors will vary. It is important to recognize that frequently disagreements come because there are assumptions being made rather than conversation being had.

So let's say that a conflict occurs. It could be about political opinions. It could be about an assumption an individual has made about another person without knowing the "whole story." It could also result from hearing gossip from someone else. We tend to make decisions based on the information that we have on-hand. From that pool of information, we select data that seems to relate. That information guides our assumptions as well as our conclusions and actions. That data may, or may not, be accurate. Without direct conversation, it is pretty difficult to be able to move to conclusions and informed beliefs and actions. It's hard to talk directly to a person about conflict.

Frequently, we try to advocate for our position by explaining why we think what we do or did - defending our position - rather than beginning with a sim-



pler approach: Let's talk about what you hold as a concern. A clergy colleague once articulated this opening statement as: "Please tell me what I just did." Showing up ready to listen (not defend) and ready to engage with a desire for mutually acceptable outcomes will ultimately help to create lasting resolution and understanding among those experiencing a conflict.

### **...And it might not work out**

One final note: At the end of such a process - of intentional listening, of civil conversation, of careful exploration of concerns on both sides - all may not be well. Reasonable people, as we know, may and will still disagree. But the hope - the intention - is for there to be conversation directly with those experiencing the conflict, with a goal of finding resolution that addresses some of the concerns articulated. May it be so for you and your leaders and beloved conferees.

## **How to circulate a meaningful and helpful conference feedback form**

Organizations tend to do again what they have done before, and Star Island conferences are no exception. Volunteer leaders rely on habit and routine, and conferees come hoping to relive past experiences and hand them on to younger generations. As a result, Star Island conferences sometimes behave in surprisingly conservative and change-resistant ways.





One key to refreshing conference life is to seek feedback about what is and is not working. In a consumer-centered culture, we're all familiar with the satisfaction survey. A thoughtfully designed survey can guide leaders as they decide which programs and activities to continue and—this is the hard part—which to stop or change. One example, the International Affairs Conference survey from 2019 appears at the end of this chapter.

The limitations of a satisfaction survey should be evident, especially from the point of view of diversity—asking current conferees how they feel about the conference is more apt to reinforce the status quo than challenge it. Unsurprisingly, long-time Shoalers enjoy the traditions of their favorite conferences. Negative feedback is more apt to come when something has been changed than when too much was left alone.

But Star Island is a public charity, not a private club. Customer satisfaction is a necessary condition of Star Island's work, but its goal is to confer a public, not a private benefit. It is not enough to ask whether the current customers are satisfied. Conference leaders need to ask whether the life-changing gift that is Star Island should be shared more widely than it has been.

To get information about how to welcome new and different people, conferences need to amplify the voices of conferees who differ from the majority and seek information from outside the current cast of conferees. This kind of feedback is hard to obtain and hard to receive. It probes the boundaries of

"what has been" in order to imagine "what might be" and can challenge our idea of ourselves as welcoming, inclusive, un-racist people.

One way to amplify unheard voices is to offer programs that challenge the dominant culture. Over decades, Star Island conferences have offered workshops on women's liberation and gay rights and more recently programs on disability, whiteness, and anti-racism. Such programs have value in themselves and can be an important source of data and insight for conference leaders who make a point of attending and then bringing what they learn back to the conference-planning process.

A second mode of data gathering is to learn kindred organizations that have managed to cross cultural boundaries.

A third is to seek help from outside experts with experience helping organizations to engage in "adaptive" work that calls for questioning the contradictions between an organization's espoused principles and its behavior.

Organizations—even liberal ones—tend to behave conservatively. Seeking feedback from beyond the usual circle is one way to find the motivation to try something new.

### **Customer satisfaction survey**

The International Affairs Conference has a strong customer-feedback survey practice that may be useful to others. After the close of each year's IA, conferees receive a Google Survey by email that asks about their experience and invites them to volunteer to help with next year's IA. To maximize response rates, the survey is as short as possible. Here are the questions from 2019:

- 1. Did you enjoy your week at (Name of Conference) ? (score from 1 to 7)*
- 2. Check the activities that you found most informative, engaging and/or enjoyable. (24 options plus "Other")*
- 3. Did you attend the morning theme talks? (4 options, from "Yes, all of them" to "No.")*
- 4. How would you rate this year's theme? (score from 1 to 7)*
- 5. Check the theme talks you found most engaging and informative. (theme speak-*

*ers listed by name, plus a Friday panel discussion and a comment space)*

*6. Did you have any children in the youth program? (yes or no)*

*7. (Describe your child/children's experience in the youth program. (score from 1 to 7)*

*8. Do you have any suggestions for the youth program? (long answer)*

*9. What did you think of the number of conference activities? (4 options from "too many to "I just do my own thing")*

*10. How many years have you attended (Name of Conference)? (5 options)*

*11. Do you have any feedback about Social Hour? (long answer)*

*12. Please provide suggestions for future conferences in these areas (all long answer):*

*Potential themes of speakers*

*Potential ministers of the week*

*Potential (Name of Conference) Planning Committee members (including yourself)*

*What do you think worked particularly well at this year's conference?*

*What, if anything, do you think needs improvement?*

*13. Finally, please check any of the volunteer jobs you might be willing to help with in the future. This is not a commitment, just a gauge of interest. (32 options, plus "Other")*

*If you checked a volunteer job above, please provide your name so we can get in touch with you. (short answer)*

## **Star Island Corporation programming**

As work continues on the Beloved Community Project, we envision some sort of social justice and or anti-racism programming offered by the island to support the conferences, similar to offerings from the Marine Lab, Music Director and Environmental Services. This could potentially take the form of adult workshops, children's programming, and other activities. More information on these programs will be made available in the coming year.





## Star Island Ongoing Beloved Community Projects

In the coming months, the Beloved Community Task force plans to work on several other projects to support building inclusion on the island. These will likely include:

- Making educational resources available to conference programs such as picture books with diverse representation, curricula and suggested activities.
- Looking into resources for financial accessibility and economic barriers to participation
- Finding ways to support the accessibility of "free-range kid culture"
- Exploring how conferences can use the island/their conference to do anti-racism work



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## **A resource for Conference Leaders**

2021 Edition