

Ministry for Racial Justice and Healing – Report to the 227th Annual Convention of Diocese of Virginia

Vision: The Ministry, in conjunction with our Bishop and Ecclesiastical Authority, has developed a vision of a Diocese filled with *Christians boldly speaking truth to power and working for a world free from the evils of white supremacy, racism, and colonialism.*

Mission: *To actively engage the Diocese of Virginia in creating sustainable programs to dismantle racism, white supremacy, and the legacy of colonialism through education and advocacy with social, governmental, and ecclesiastical systems.*

This report is submitted by Carolyn Lanier of St. Philip's Church in Richmond, Chair of the Ministry for Racial Justice & Healing for the Diocese of Virginia. Together with the Rev. Justin McIntosh of St. Paul's, Ivy, vice-chair, as well as eight other members, we have diligently worked to live into our Diocese's strategic vision for the Ministry of Racial Justice & Healing.

Last year, we presented a strategic plan that detailed some of the work of racial justice and healing for our diocese. That work included educational opportunities, historical research, as well as the exploration of planting more diverse churches. Most importantly, that strategic plan included the hiring of a full-time staff person to serve as Missioner for Racial Justice & Healing, an inaugural position for the Diocese of Virginia.

Throughout the year 2021, the Ministry offered several opportunities to learn about the work of anti-racism, racial justice, and inclusion, and more. We hosted webinars on topics such as Implicit Bias, the Doctrine of Discovery, and Healing from Internalized Oppression. We also offered a 9-week zoom book study on *The Four Vision Quests of Jesus* by the Rt. Rev. Steven Charleston.

In June of 2021, the Diocese of Virginia electronically distributed a survey on Racial Justice and Healing to 159 churches and campus ministries. Forty-six useable responses were received, representing 29% of the original invitees. Given this response rate, results are not representative of the diocese as a whole and it is likely that churches that are engaging in racial justice work were more likely to respond than those that are not. Every region of the Diocese was represented by at least two faith communities.

The vast majority (91%) reported engaging in conversations about race and diversity. Thirty-three (72%) reported having a committee or other group actively engaged in addressing race and diversity issues. Fifteen (33%) reported having a strategic plan or other forms of measurable goals regarding these issues. Forty (87%) were aware of the racial justice resources the Diocese of Virginia provides. Eighteen (39%) have engaged in a process to study their racial history and twelve (26%) have not yet done so but would like to. Twenty-nine (63%) reported experiencing some sort of antiracism curriculum; of these, fourteen (48%) reported Sacred Ground as their primary curriculum.

Across all questions, there were some themes, some of which included:

- Learning about church racial history was reported by several communities, and they are, or want to be, studying how colonialism, slavery, and racism are associated with their church histories. Responders were also interested in the racial history of the Diocese and The Episcopal Church.

- Communities are eagerly engaging in ongoing education through book studies, bible studies, and a variety of prepared and self-designed curricula. Sacred Ground was the most frequently mentioned racial justice programming.
- Partnering with Black churches or “more diverse churches” was reported as important to some churches (it should be noted that none of the churches that identified as serving primarily People of Color mentioned this as being important).
- Many churches see great importance in connecting their internal racial justice work to their local communities.
- Communities are engaged in a wide variety of racial justice and social justice advocacy work including affordable housing, public health, education, policing, gun violence, care of creation, mental health, voter rights, criminal and civil justice system, and more.
- Communities would like to see more resources and offerings from the diocese about racial justice and healing.
- Two churches serving primarily people of color reported being constantly engaged in racial justice and healing work because of the make-up of their community.
- The reason some communities did not use diocesan resources related to them not being in Spanish, not feeling connected to the diocese, having specific local interests, or not covering the range of people and issues relative to racism (need more on Latino, Asian, Indigenous people).

A couple of responses acknowledged having congregations that were relatively unaware of racial issues or having a broad range of folks in their community from deeply committed to racial justice to believing that it is a political issue that doesn't belong in church.

There is more work ahead, but thanks be to God, we continue to see evidence of a righteous hunger among God's people in this diocese for racial justice and healing, and we know that God is not calling us to small, symbolic efforts, but to true Christian discipleship, which entails nothing less than a deep and sustained focus on embodying the vision of *Galatians 3:28*: “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.”

We are grateful for the hiring of the Rev. Dr. Lee Hill, who, together with the Ministry for Racial Justice and Healing, will guide the Diocese through this next chapter in our effort to live to our Baptismal Vows to “*strive for justice and peace among all people and respect the dignity of every human being.*”