

Beloved Community: Commission for Dismantling Racism
Report to 109th Annual Council of the Diocese of Atlanta
Submitted by: Chairperson Catherine Meeks, Ph.D.

I am pleased to report that our Commission has worked diligently thus far this year and we are pleased with the way in which the year has progressed.

We began the year with multiple dismantling racism training sessions in January and the request for the training to be brought to individual parishes continued to increase reducing the need to schedule as many sessions at the Cathedral. Thus far we have conducted ten training sessions and that brings the total number of people who have been trained to over two hundred. This is great considering the difficulty that we have experienced in the past in getting people to take the training, but we still have too many parishes that have not done the training which is required for all who are leaders in the Episcopal Church.

The Commission revised the mission statement this year in a manner that makes it possible for us to take a more public role in addressing racial issues both inside and outside of the Diocese. For example, a written response was made immediately following the Mother Emanuel Massacre which was placed on our diocesan website. We are continuing to explore other ways in which the role of the Commission needs to expand.

The Commission envisions that the work of dismantling racism has to reach far beyond simply providing training for parish leaders in the Diocese. This understanding led us to host a Conversation on Race at St. Bede's Church in April which was attended by more than one hundred persons. Along with the wonderful response that we received from throughout the Diocese, it was encouraging to have local panelists as well as national panelists including our Episcopal Missioner for Racial Reconciliation, Heidi Kim, and the Missioner for Social Justice Advocacy, Chuck Wynder, participate.

The next day we presented a one day conference on Howard Thurman at St. Paul's Church with about two hundred persons attending from across the Southeast. The day was amazingly successful and we had many requests from participants to remain on our mailing lists for all such events in the future.

This year's Jonathan Daniel's and Other Alabama Martyrs Pilgrimage was quite uplifting. We took four buses, several vans and cars filled with pilgrims this year with a total of more than three hundred. We had two Commission members travel to Hayneville to establish a Hospitality Table and to distribute water and Commission Bookmarks. A small group of the pilgrims were hosted by Holy Innocents for dinner and reflections on the Pilgrimage and to explore next steps that might have been encouraged by their participation in the day.

Across the Diocese the work of dismantling racism is becoming more organic with many parishes hosting events, organizing talking circles and other events to work toward creating

more awareness in their individual communities. Several parishes invited members of the Commission to join them in their efforts thus some of us traveled extensively across the Diocese as far north as Cumming and then southwest to Columbus.

The Commission has fifteen members at the present time and will seek to add at least five more members representing some of the convocations that are not represented at the present time. This is important to help foster the effort to spread the dismantling racism work throughout the Diocese and to continue in encouraging independent parish efforts.

We are planning to host our inaugural memorial pilgrimage in October 2016 which will take us to sites where people were martyred by lynching and we will place historical markers at those sites. These pilgrimages will have a three year cycle and will be supported by book studies, films, lectures and art exhibits. We intend to make video recordings of portions of these events in order to create a DVD that can be used by others as a source of information and encouragement to explore the ways in which their work might mirror this effort.

Requests for information and conversations about our work have been made by folks engaged in dismantling racism work from the Dioceses of Georgia, Rhode Island, Texas, Louisiana, Kentucky and Tennessee. Our work in this Diocese is rapidly being noticed as an example of the ways in which the work can be moved beyond simply providing dismantling racism training. Also, in early 2016, we have been invited to participate in a national conversation regarding the dismantling racism work that is being done around the country which is being convened by the Episcopal House of Deputies.

The Commission continues to be grateful for the ways in which so many folks are helping to make this work successful and for all of the support of Bishop Robert Wright and his staff in helping to get many aspects of the work done.

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