

Beloved Community: Commission for Dismantling Racism Report to Council November 2016

Submitted by Catherine Meeks, Ph.D, Chair

The Commission has much to celebrate as we come to the close of our 2016 work. The year began with the diocesan wide study of **Just Mercy** by Bryan Stevenson which was supported by a study guide. The kickoff for the book study was enhanced by Mr. Stevenson's acceptance of our invitation to be our keynote speaker for the Memorial Pilgrimage cycle to remember the lynched. Thankfully many of our parishes took up the book study and I was invited to lead a discussion on it at the Cathedral along with Rev. Cathy Zappo. There were almost a hundred people present.

The Commission and the Diocese were able to host a delegation from the Diocese of Chicago which included Bishop Jeff Lee. They came to learn more about the way in which we are implementing the work of dismantling racism in this Diocese. The event was quite successful and our Commission was very pleased with the response that came from our parishes. There were twenty-seven parishes involved in the event. St. Luke's hosted an elegant dinner for us which included the delegation, commission members, Bridge Builders from St. Luke's and Bishop Wright. They made quite an impression upon the delegation with their amazing hospitality. It was very uplifting to all of us to hear the stories of our twenty-seven parishes about their individual parish level dismantling racism work. Following this visit, six of the members of the racial reconciliation commission from the Diocese of Chicago returned to join us for a Dismantling Racism Training Day. There is a conversation continuing with them as they re-imagine their work.

We have continued to communicate with the Diocese of New Orleans as they move toward instituting dismantling racism training for the first time as a requirement for ordained persons. Thus far we have been invited to the Dioceses of Pennsylvania, Eastern North Carolina, Lexington and Tennessee to offer consultation to their commissions. Along with these have been numerous inquiries from other dioceses around the country regarding our work. The Commission is gratified about becoming an example of Best Practice in the dismantling racism arena.

Bishop Curry invited me to attend a gathering that he convened in the beginning of the year to share our work as an example of a Best Practice. Our Diocese was one of two that were invited. It was quite helpful to have the opportunity to share our current work and our intention as we move forward.

This year we hosted 20 dismantling racism training sessions with an average of 28 participants in each of them. The demand increased following the passing of the Resolution at last year's Annual Council reaffirming our diocesan commitment to this work. Along with that was the request for individual parishes to make reports by October of this year regarding the work that they have done during the year. The response has not been as good as we would have hoped. As of this date we have received 16 reports. They came from the following parishes: All Saints, St. Julian's, St. Thomas in Columbus, St. Aidan's, St. Edward's, St. Matthews, All Angels in Eatonton, Church of the Transfiguration in Rome, Holy Spirit, St. Luke's, St. David's, Christ

Church in Norcross, St. Patrick's in Dunwoody, Christ Church in Macon, St. Stephens in Milledgeville, Holy Innocents and Epiphany. There was a wide variety of activities done by all of these parishes and the Commission is delighted to have heard from each of them. It is our hope that others will get their reports in before the end of the year and we can add them.

The Commission is encouraged by the generosity of the many parishes who have hosted training days and its meetings. The parishes who host provide morning refreshments and lunch for the training day and either breakfast or lunch for the Commission meetings. This has resulted in more than \$3000.00 savings for our small budget, but additionally it has created new opportunities for community building and fellowship which helps to foster our stated mission to create space where the beloved community can be born.

Special Events:

Attorney Bryan Stevenson was hosted by the Commission and the event was held at St Luke's Church with close to a thousand persons attending and who gave so generously to the offering that we raised \$10,000.00 for the work of the Commission. The Cathedral Bookstore took care of the book sales which were numerous and they donated 10% of the sales to the Commission. This was a very special event and served to galvanize our work in important new ways. We hosted a follow-up breakfast the morning after the lecture and worked on action steps to take going forward. One of those steps is another forum in early November which will be highlighted later in this report.

The honorarium for Mr. Stevenson was provided by grants from The Greater Atlanta Community Foundation and the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

Inaugural Memorial Pilgrimage to Macon followed approximately a month after the Stevenson talk. There were 175-200 participants involved in that event. Though we did not put forth any effort to make it an ecumenical event, it became one. At least a third of the audience was not Episcopalian. There were guests who had been invited to come to bear witness to what we were doing by traveling to Macon and placing a marker with the names of the men who were lynched in Macon and Middle Georgia. The witnesses came from the Dioceses of Western Massachusetts, Massachusetts, Tennessee, Gulf Coast, Alabama and California. Several of them have committed to be involved next year as we continue this effort of remembering and to begin to explore their own communities in terms of what needs to be done along these lines.

The marker, the Eucharist and the partial exhibit of **Without Sanctuary** were important in creating the sacred day that we needed to have. Following the Pilgrimage the Episcopal News Service accepted a very well written article which was done by a journalist who was contracted to travel with us and tell the story of the day and the entire day was videotaped. We wanted to make sure to have an historical record of the day. The footage will be used in multiple ways to enhance our work.

Black Lives Matter Forums were organized and hosted by Holy Innocents and St. Paul. A panel who served for both events addressed questions around how the Black Lives Matter Movement intersects with us as Episcopalians. Those events were well attended with total attendance for both events being around 180 people.

The November 13th workshop is a follow-up to the previous ones on the Black Lives Matter Movement. The intention is to have representatives from several organizations who are

involved in liberation work to join with Episcopalians in discussing what we can do next together or separately. This will be an inter generational event.

Commission Expansion has led us to add new members and we are especially delighted to have two of the Road Fellows serving as members and one former Road Fellow who is serving as a Youth Minister at Epiphany. Along with this we are beginning to work very closely with the Diocesan Youth Missioner to bring the voices of high school students into the conversation. One of the Road Fellow members is serving as the liaison between the Commission and the Dismantling Racism Committee of the Youth Team.

Six new trainers will be beginning next year to do dismantling racism training. I wrote a training manual for them and offered a one day train the trainer session for them. This was followed by each of them working as apprentices in the current training sessions to help them to become ready to handle the training on their own.

Chair's Activity: I edited a book which involved seven other writers including Bishop Rob Wright which will be out in a few days. Along with the editing I wrote two and one half chapters. I have continued to write a bi-weekly column which enhances our work. I have been asked to speak in many parishes this year as they work to imagine their way forward in this work. Along with this I spend many hours a week speaking with folks from other parts of the country, writing about our work and sharing our story, teaching at Emory and conducting workshops. I am working on developing a methodology for advanced training which will be offered as a follow-up to those who have completed the preliminary training that is being offered at the present time.

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