

Roundtable Report Outs from the Northeast Regional UBE Conference

May 4, 2019 Niagara Falls, NY

Becoming Beloved Community: Black Church, White Church, One Church

*Presiding Bishop Michael Curry's strategic vision of **Becoming Beloved Community** focused the May 2019, Northeast Regional UBE Conference in Niagara Falls. Under the theme "Black Church, White Church, One Church", attendees participated in roundtable discussions structured around the four quadrants of the Becoming Beloved Community labyrinth: 1) Telling the Truth; 2) Proclaiming the Dream; 3) Practicing the Way of Love; 4) Repairing the Breach. The Conference encouraged participants to share reflections on church and race and to develop action ideas for racial reconciliation, healing and justice within the Episcopal Church. The notes below summarize major themes that emerged from the roundtable conversations. These notes represent the best thinking of participants at the conference and from the facilitator training that preceded it. We share them not as official recommendations but rather to advance on-going conversation within the Episcopal Church.*



Respectfully Submitted:

The Bishop James Theodore Holly Chapter, UBE and The Commission on Dismantling Racism and Discrimination, The Episcopal Diocese of WNY

7/2019

SUMMARY OF ROUNDTABLE CONVERSATIONS

QUESTION 1: TELLING THE TRUTH ABOUT CHURCH AND RACE

*Roundtable participants began by talking about church experiences where they had felt unwelcome, out of place or excluded as if their voice, ideas and presence were not valued? **We asked: So, what does this tell us about church and race? How are we broken?***

Themes from Roundtable Report Outs —

We are broken because we remain, in large part, a reflection of societal ills. We are not learning how to love as Christians. Our churches are not teaching us. Too often we do not see beyond the surface. We look inward, instead of outward. We don't do enough to make our churches welcoming and open.

QUESTION 2 — PROCLAIMING THE DREAM OF RACIAL HEALING AND RECONCILIATION

*Roundtable participants considered how it felt to hear each other's stories and what this told them about racial healing and reconciliation. **We asked: So, when we imagine the Beloved Community, how will people relate to one another?***

Themes from Roundtable Report Outs —

Fostering racial healing, reconciliation and justice begins by seeing and treating one another as a gift from God, with love, care and respect, by striving to live the Gospel. We should practice meeting people where they are, listening without judgement, creating safe places for hard conversations, allowing people to remove their masks and tell their stories. We proclaim the dream by calling out injustice in our communities and looking inward as well to identify issues within our church and ourselves.

QUESTION 3 — PRACTICING THE WAY OF LOVE

*Despite The Episcopal Church's official embrace of inclusion, we acknowledged that Episcopalians seem reluctant to talk about church and race. **We asked: So, why do we fall short of racial healing and reconciliation?***

Themes from Roundtable Report Outs —

Episcopalians, in general, fall short of racial healing and reconciliation because the message of Jesus is misinterpreted, and our diversity is misunderstood. Many fail to recognize that not all racism is blatant. Others suffer denial and shame and are embarrassed as Episcopalians to need an official policy that states racism is a sin. We mistrust talking about race. We are unsure about how to talk about race, are uncomfortable and fearful of saying the wrong thing. White guilt inhibits conversation and creates resistance. We live in segregated communities and worship in separate churches. Too often, discussions of racism and white exceptionalism are dismissed as political. We fail to call out racism in ourselves and fear change.

QUESTION 4 — REPAIRING THE BREACH

*Recognizing that Sunday morning remains the most segregated hour in America, roundtable participants considered what could be done to overcome mistrust and move forward toward Becoming Beloved Community, realizing the loving, liberating, lifegiving way of Christ? **We asked: So, what can we do to strengthen trust? What has to happen?***

Themes from Roundtable Report Outs —

Trust was considered in three parts: 1) confidence in intentions to do no harm, 2) confidence in knowledge and competency to understand racism; and 3) confidence that actions will follow words.

- 1) **To strengthen Trust in Intentions of Love** (do no harm), Episcopalians need to acknowledge our brokenness, express remorse and work to repair the breach. We begin by building relationships, visiting each other's churches, working together on initiatives in our churches and in our communities, collaborating on projects to advance racial healing and racial justice. To do this, we need to name our fear and risk trusting to become invested in one another across differences.
- 2) **To strengthen Trust in Knowledge and Understanding for Racial Healing** (competency), roundtable participants recognized as Episcopalians, we need to expand understanding of the history and systemic institutionalization of racism in America as well as the dynamics of racial oppression. We need to promote personal skills for self-awareness and respectful interactions, strengthen our ability to counter implicit bias, and empower ourselves to speak up when we hear offensive speech or see offensive action.
- 3) **To strengthen Trust in the Integrity of Our Commitment to Racial Justice** (action will follow words), Episcopalians need to live the Gospel, becoming a visible faith voice in our communities, acknowledging interpersonal and systemic racism and taking action for change. It's important to move beyond charity to become involved in changing conditions that create the need for charity. We need to shift the paradigm for church and politics to support greater church advocacy against injustice. We also need to look inward to recognize and address issues of racial and cultural inequity within the church.

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DETAILS FROM COMPILATION OF ROUNDTABLE REPORT-OUTS

QUESTION 1: TELLING THE TRUTH ABOUT CHURCH AND RACE

Describe a church experience where you felt unwelcome, out of place or excluded as if your voice, ideas and presence were not valued? So, what does this tell us about church and race? How are we broken?

WE ARE BROKEN BECAUSE ...

1. OUR CHURCH IS A REFLECTION OF SOCIETAL ILLS

- Racism and discrimination still exist in the Episcopal Church
- We remain separated by race.
- Acceptance is dependent upon status
- Money talks. Money is the driving force.

2. WE ARE NOT LEARNING HOW TO LOVE AS CHRISTIANS: THE CHURCH IS NOT TEACHING US

- We fail to bring the Gospel outside the church
- Injustices are often disregarded in our churches
- We lack evangelism

3. WE LOOK INWARD INSTEAD OF OUTWARD

- We are broken due to fear of others
- We fear change; we are not accepting of change
- We find it hard to step out of our comfort zone

4. WE DO NOT SEE BEYOND THE SURFACE

- Not knowing one another is a barrier
- By not seeking new experiences, we function with misinformation

5. PEOPLE DON'T NECESSARILY MAKE THE CHURCH WELCOMING AND OPEN

- Outsiders remain unwelcomed.
- We have not lost that mission identity which leads us to think of “others” as less than
- We serve the poor but do not touch the poor.
- We are not welcoming of the stranger

QUESTION 2 — PROCLAIMING THE DREAM OF RACIAL HEALING AND RECONCILIATION

How did it feel to hear each other's stories? What can we learn from this conversation about racial healing and reconciliation? So, when we imagine the Beloved Community, how will people relate to one another? What behaviors and commitments foster healing, reconciliation and justice?

BEHAVIORS AND COMMITMENTS THAT FOSTER RACIAL HEALING, RECONCILIATION AND JUSTICE INCLUDE ...

1. SEE AND TREAT EACH OTHER AS A GIFT FROM GOD

- Be open and accepting of all, as we are told Jesus did
- Recognize the contribution diversity brings to the Body of Christ – racial, cultural, social, economic, generational
- Stop acting as if we live in scarcity
- Forgive and seek forgiveness

2. RELATE TO ONE ANOTHER WITH LOVE, CARE AND RESPECT

- Greet people and be welcoming and accepting of each other
- Be present with each other
- Listen to each other without intent to answer
- Listen actively and share stories
- Be really, really, really careful about judging

3. MEET PEOPLE WHERE THEY ARE

- Be welcoming and accepting of each other
- Be aware of cultural differences in order to avoid offending or being offended
- Allow people to remove their masks
- Create a safe place to have tough conversations
- Recognize pain and hurt
- Listen first before jumping in to respond: Practice WAIT – ask yourself: “Why Am I Talking?”

4. CALL OUT INJUSTICE

- Use your voice and your vote to advocate for social justice
- Engage in the political process because to foster justice, we need to change laws
- Be involved in church governance
- Challenge hierarchy; change paradigms

5. IDENTIFY PROBLEMS IN THE CHURCH COMMUNITY

- Change behaviors of Bishops, Dioceses, Search Committees from doing the same old thing
- Establish different criteria for Parochial Reports
- Accept diversity within the leadership of the Episcopal Church
- Move uncomfortable topics into the open (some issues are disregarded within the church)
- Live out the Gospel

QUESTION 3 – PRACTICING THE WAY OF LOVE

The Episcopal Church has an official policy of embracing inclusion, but our actions often seem to fall short of racial healing and reconciliation. In general, why are Episcopalians reluctant to talk about church and race? So, we often fall short of racial healing and reconciliation because ...?

WE FALL SHORT OF RACIAL HEALING AND RECONCILIATION BECAUSE MANY EPISCOPALIANS ...

1. MISINTERPRET THE MESSAGE OF JESUS

- We do not recognize racism as a sin
- We don't understand each other's needs as Christians/Episcopalians; we lack moral imagination
- We take difference as negative; We don't know how to value difference
- Once we are aware, we are unsure about how we can move forward

2. FAIL TO RECOGNIZE NOT ALL RACISM IS BLATANT

- We are complacent with the status quo; certain people benefit from the status quo
- We are in denial about racism
- We do not recognize subtle expressions of racism; implicit bias
- Racism is against the image we have of ourselves as Americans
- We take difference as negative

3. SUFFER DENIAL AND SHAME

- We are embarrassed as Episcopalians to need an official policy that states racism is a sin
- We fail to understand that we have a problem which says we, Episcopalians, are not nice people
- We are unsure how to talk about race
- White guilt inhibits conversation; we don't want to face our own prejudice.
- We don't call out "racist" behavior in ourselves and others

4. MISTRUST TALKING ABOUT RACE

- We are uncomfortable talking about race and fear saying the wrong thing, offending someone
- We harbor notions that block conversation like: "It's not my problem." or "I didn't have anything to do with slavery or benefit from it."
- We live in segregated communities that prevent conversation within races
- Clergy presence is lacking in UBE meetings

5. DISMISS DISCUSSIONS OF RACISM AND WHITE SUPREMACY AS POLITICAL

- People look at this issue as highly political and don't want to alienate anyone from church
- Certain people in the dominant culture fear change and loss of control and advantage
- People feel that racial healing and reconciliation leads to financial settlement

QUESTION 4 – REPAIRING THE BREACH*

*Sunday morning has been called the most segregated hour in America. Roundtable participants considered what could be done through our churches to overcome mistrust and move forward toward Becoming Beloved Community, realizing the loving, liberating, lifegiving way of Christ? **We asked: So, what can we do to strengthen trust?***

TO STRENGTHEN TRUST IN INTENTIONS OF LOVE (i.e. to build confidence in intentions to do no harm)

What has to happen? - Strategy Suggestions

1. Acknowledge our brokenness, express remorse and work to repair the breach
2. Build relationships through racially and culturally diverse congregations working together on initiatives
3. Reach beyond our parishes to build relationships in the community
4. Name the fear and risk trusting to become invested in one another across differences
5. Truly value each of us and the gifts we bring

How can we make this happen? - Ideas for Practical Action Steps

- Tell our stories to one another; listen without judgement and learn
- Welcome, greet, respect, accept, love those who are diverse from ourselves
- Visit one another's churches
- Partner on dismantling racism initiatives with the Diocese, with other parishes, in the community
- Plan and participate in a racial healing pilgrimage
- Participate in study groups and racial healing circles

TO STRENGTHEN TRUST IN KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING FOR RACIAL HEALING

(i.e. to build confidence in competency and knowledge)

What has to happen? - Strategy Suggestions

1. Conduct church sponsored education on racism and racial healing, reconciliation and justice
2. Build the knowledgebase for understanding of the history and systemic institutionalization of racism in America as well as the dynamics of racial oppression
3. Build personal skills for self-awareness, respectful interactions, and countering implicit bias and prejudice
4. Empower ourselves to speak up when we hear offensive speech or see offensive action
5. Address problems and harms in a way that furthers learning and change, rather than resistance and denial
6. Address racism continuously from the pulpit and through ministries, rather than as a topic of the week

How can we make this happen? - Ideas for Practical Action Steps

- Create opportunities for storytelling and dialogues such as racial healing circles
- Conduct church sponsored dismantling racism training and implicit bias workshops
- Sponsor educational book study and movie discussions
- Hold a Racial Healing Labyrinth
- Sponsor a pilgrimage; visit a civil rights museum
- Invite community leaders to your church to speak on justice issues

- Have clergy spend a day discussing racial reconciliation with each other, exchanging experiences and observations
- Hire visibly diverse clergy and staff and engage diverse perspectives and experiences
- Encourage clergy sermons that challenge us on what to do in the world

TO STRENGTHEN TRUST IN INTEGRITY OF COMMITMENT TO RACIAL JUSTICE?

(i.e. to build confidence that actions will follow words)

What has to happen? - Strategy Suggestions

1. Live the Gospel
2. Acknowledged systemic racism and take action for change
3. Become a visible faith voice in our communities
4. Move beyond charity; become involved in changing what creates the need for charity
5. Shift the paradigm for church and politics to support greater church advocacy against injustice
6. Empower ourselves to speak up when we hear offensive speech or see offensive action
7. Empower ourselves to speak out on issues in our communities
8. Work in a collaborative manner to recognize and address racial and cultural inequity within the church

How can we make this happen? - Ideas for Practical Action Steps

- Include commitment to racial healing and reconciliation in church by-laws
- Create dismantling racism ministries in every parish; ask each parish to submit an action plan to its Diocese
- Add reporting on racial healing and reconciliation activities to parochial report
- Create and include in mandatory Safe Church Training a section on history of racism, dismantling racism and parish level action ideas for repairing the breach
- Provide resources and sponsor clergy events to support understanding of the Gospel as applied to racial reconciliation and ways to overcome obstacles for bringing this to primarily white and/or resistant congregations
- Encourage participation in racial and cultural healing activities for clergy, wardens and those holding positions within the Dioceses
- Review internal church policy, practice and ministry from a racial equity lens – on parish and Diocesan levels
- Provide spiritual leadership to speak out about community issues through prayer vigils, pilgrimages and public statements
- Actively engage in our communities to overcome systemic injustice in matters of fair housing, employment, education and criminal justice, etc.

*The structure of Question 4 is designed around validated scholarship by Meyer, Davis and Schoorman, adapted for our purposes, where trust is viewed as a “willingness to take risk” based on an assessment of three factors: 1) Do they intend to do no harm? – Intentions of Love; 2) Are they competent, able to understand? – i.e. Knowledge and Understanding for Racial Healing and 3) Will they do what they say – i.e. Integrity of Commitment to Racial Justice. See: Mayer, Davis & Schoorman, “An Integrative Model of Organizational Trust, *Academy of Management Review*, 1995