Report from the Leadership Gathering Addressing the ECCT Resolution on Racial Reconciliation

Resolved, the Episcopal Church in Connecticut reaffirms the priority of the work of Racial Reconciliation as laid out by the General Convention of The Episcopal Church in 2015 (see resolutions 2015-A182 and 2015-C019 specifically); and be it further

Resolved, that the Annual Convention of the Episcopal Church in Connecticut charges the Leadership Gathering (Mission Council, Donations and Bequests, Commission on Ministry and Standing Committee) to spend at least two of its gatherings in 2018 devoted to the study and witness to the impact of the sin of racism on our common life; and be it further

Resolved, that the Leadership Gathering provide the Episcopal Church in Connecticut with what it learned and establish benchmarks (objectives/milestones) for the ongoing work of dismantling racism across Connecticut.

Overview

In response to the above resolution on racial reconciliation passed at ECCT’s 2017 Annual Convention, the Leadership Gathering created the Affirming Racial Reconciliation Working Group representing each of its bodies: Commission on Ministry, Donations and Bequests, Mission Council, and Standing Committee. The Working Group (June Aziz, Suzy Burke, Dana Campbell, Carolyn Clement, Sandra Cosman, Molly James, Rowena Kemp, Jim Myslik, Sharon Pearson, Marissa Rohrbach, Linda Spiers, Valarie Stanley, and Lisa Yarbor) began meeting in January 2018 and subsequently met in person or via video conference six times through September 2018. They spent their time sharing personal stories where racism has influenced or impacted their lives and wrestling with the challenge of how ECCT can make realistic and real progress toward true racial reconciliation. They also vetted resources (print, web, locations) and designed events for the Leadership Gathering at its March and June meetings at The Commons.

In addition, Lisa Yarbor, Valarie Stanley and Karin Hamilton attended a conference at the Absalom Jones Episcopal Center for Racial Healing in Atlanta, GA representing ECCT, and they brought back stories and additional resources to share.
Leadership Gathering – March 2018 (45 minutes)

In preparation for the March Leadership Gathering, we asked people to read *Waking Up White: Finding Myself in the Story of Race* by Debbie Irving (Elephant Room Press, 2014) and/or listen to her TedX talk “Finding Myself in the Story of Race” ([https://youtu.be/oD5Ox5XNEpg](https://youtu.be/oD5Ox5XNEpg)), and/or read *Letter from the Birmingham Jail* by the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and/or “How Michelle Obama Subverted Respectability Politics with a Ponytail” by Brittney Cooper in the *Christian Century* (February 29, 2018).

We had allocated 45 minutes on the agenda to engage these materials, and members were invited to either (1) talk in small groups about what their reactions and learnings were; (2) view Eric Law’s *Photo Language Cards* as a prompt for responding to the readings; or (3) use art materials to express their thoughts. The conversation flowed easily, and people were eager to share their stories about their experiences with racism as well as their thoughts and feelings about it.

Through this process, we learned how important it is for people to share stories and experiences with people who are different from themselves so they can better understand the impact that the sin of racism has on their personal lives as well as our common life. We also saw how eager people are to engage in the conversation when invited to do so, and there is never enough time to discuss what is on the hearts and minds of individuals. Because we believe that any gathering in which racism is discussed needs to be a safe space so people can offer their personal witness and be vulnerable to hearing what others are saying, we had invited chaplains to attend the meeting to tend to any needs that might arise during the discussion.

Leadership Gathering - June 2018 (3 hours)

At the June Leadership Gathering, with chaplains again present, we dedicated three hours to continuing the conversation about *Affirming Racial Reconciliation* through prayer (an opening litany as well as Dwelling in the Word using a passage from *Waking Up White*). Having finished reading *Waking Up White*, the members of the Leadership Gathering discussed the book in small groups using the following questions: What surprised you? What challenged you? and Where did you connect with *Waking Up White*?
Building on what we learned about the importance of sharing our stories at the March Leadership Gathering, once again in the same small groups, individuals shared their stories of racism from both their childhoods and their churches following a “testimony” from four members of the Working Group to the whole. We concluded the morning with a review and discussion of the results of a survey members completed in May, with emphasis on what the data call the Leadership Gathering and ECCT to do in response to our current reality.

What We Learned
From Our Conversations as a Leadership Gathering

- Most Episcopalians in Connecticut only know about racism and systemic oppression in the abstract. One of the challenges we face as a predominantly white community is that people don’t see racism as a problem. Many believe racism was “solved” in the 1960’s and that no further action is required, and if this is not the case, we don’t know what needs to be done to address it.
- When we get to know people who are different than we are, we learn that we all breathe the same air, and share the same dreams and hopes and fears. It’s very difficult to discriminate “up close”.
- Sharing our stories and listening to other people’s stories are both incredibly powerful experiences.
- Those who have white privilege need to become more aware of it, and we need to raise the level of awareness about the impact of white privilege in our faith communities.
- When we allow ourselves to be vulnerable and broken open, love can find space to flourish.
- Internal (personal) work needs to precede corporate action.
- White people are in a position to speak up and can no longer ask people of color to be the sole voices talking about the sin of racism (in other words, those who are historically entitled need to do their own work).
From the Survey of Leadership Gathering Members

In May, the Affirming Racial Reconciliation team administered a brief survey to members of the Leadership Gathering. Fifty-seven people responded (80% response rate). Key findings are listed below, and the survey results are attached.

**Themes from Responses to the Open-Ended Question:** What are the obstacles to having conversations about race in your parish?

- Lack of awareness/“racism doesn’t exist anymore” (n = 10)
- Conversations about racism may make people uncomfortable (n=10)
- The subject is too “political”/taboo (n=7)
- Competing priorities – buildings; clergy transition (n=6)
- White apathy/white guilt (n=6)
- Don’t know of any (n=6)
- Lack of trained leaders (n=4)
- It’s a complex issue (n=3)
- Other factors (n = 7)

**Data from the Survey**

- The vast majority of Leadership Gathering members and ECCT parishioners are white, not black, Hispanic or Latino/Latina
  - 85% of the members of the Leadership Gathering are white, as are our congregations
  - 96% are not Hispanic or Latino/Latina as are 90% of their congregations
- Two thirds of the members of the Leadership Gathering report that their parishes reflect “to a great extent” the racial and ethnic composition of the *neighborhoods* in which they are located, and more than half reflect the racial and ethnic composition of the *town/city* in which they are located. 16% of the respondents report their parishes do not reflect the racial or ethnic composition of the *town/city* in which they are located.
• Our parishes are very stable in terms of their racial and ethnic composition
  o Of those parishes that are changing, they are predominantly white and slowly becoming more diverse.
  o Only three parishes are becoming less diverse.
• Most of our close friends look like we do.
  o Only 1/3 of the members of the Leadership Gathering report that they have at least six close friends of a different race/ethnicity than they are, and 30% have 0 – 2 friends who meet that criterion.
• If ECCT wants congregations to focus more on the systemic injustices in our midst, it will have to create a strong perceived need for change.
  o Members of the Leadership Gathering report they are personally devoting significant time and resources to the study and witness of the impact of the sin of racism on our common life while only 4% of their congregations are.
• There is some level of openness in ECCT to addressing the sin of racism in our midst. Two-thirds of our parishes are devoting “some” time and resource to this considerable challenge.

PROPOSED OBJECTIVES ON THE PATH TO DISMANTLING RACISM ACROSS CONNECTICUT

The following objectives and implementation dates were unanimously approved at the September 8, 2018 Leadership Gathering.

By September 4, 2018

The following question was submitted for discussion at the upcoming ECCT Convention with the aim of leading a workshop on Racial Healing, Justice and Reconciliation at Convention: How can we, in ECCT, make realistic and real progress toward true racial reconciliation?

On September 8, 2018
The Leadership Gathering committed to continue its focus on racial reconciliation. Members will read *Stand Your Ground* by Kelly Brown Douglas in preparation for the December 8th Leadership Gathering, and they are encouraged to read the book with partners or in small groups. Once again we will have chaplains available at the meeting.

**On October 26 – 27, 2018 – ECCT Convention**

- Facilitate a workshop on Racial Healing, Justice and Reconciliation
- Host a table staffed by members of the Racial Healing, Justice and Reconciliation Working Group and other volunteers to showcase resources, share ideas, and have conversation to create awareness
- Display Rhode Island’s *History of Racism* panels

**On November 1, 2018**

*Launch a “Season of a Racial Healing, Justice and Reconciliation” (to last a minimum of two years)* with the initial goal of introducing foundational concepts, language, and tools to help encourage and enable congregations to begin to open hearts and minds of the people to recognize the reality of white supremacy and anti-black/brown, as well as to awaken our people to the need for concerted action to address the ongoing injustice of the racial divide. Promotion of these activities and resources will go through all channels of ECCT communications.

- Kick off ECCT’s *Season of Racial Healing, Justice and Reconciliation* with a letter from the bishops to all clergy and parishioners outlining the why, what, when . . .
- Declare Sunday, February 10th as a *Day of Racial Healing, Justice and Reconciliation*. All parishes will be asked to begin a conversation with their congregations about the sin of racism in ECCT by hosting a forum on racial reconciliation. The Racial Healing, Justice and Reconciliation Working Group strongly recommends using the video and discussion questions from the joint session on racial reconciliation held at the 2018 General Convention in Austin.
- Parishes, other groups and individuals will have access the following additional materials to support their work:
Materials from the Leadership Gathering’s June 9th half-day workshop such as *A Process for Engaging in Racial Healing, Justice and Reconciliation Conversations* that includes a leader guide, workshop materials and a discussion starters.

- An annotated resource list of print, web and film resources available through ECCT’s website
- A diocesan-wide book discussion during a designated time that will be supported by a discussion guide, ECCT communications, and other materials
- A Racial Healing, Justice and Reconciliation page/content area on ECCT’s website
- A Coffee Hour @ The Commons podcast dedicated to racial reconciliation
- A monthly feature story for ECCT’s eNews

- Create a simple form to be submitted by each parish with their annual Parochial Reports that details how they have engaged in conversations, study and action about the sin of racism, and racial healing, justice and reconciliation. This report will be shared with the Mission Council.

- In support of the canonical requirement that all clergy must participate in an anti-racism educational program once every three years, collaborate with Faith and Order to support ongoing continuing education for all ECCT clergy and lay leaders.

- Support the Commission on Ministry in fulfilling their charge to incorporate and reconciliation work (reading, conversation, experiences) in the ordination process.

- Ensure that as part of the transition ministry process, search committees, interim rectors, and others in leadership parish positions are trained in understanding white privilege and the importance of including diverse candidates in every search. The number of diverse candidates included in every search will be reported in the new report that will accompany the parochial report.

- Ensure all searches for ECCT staff positions include at least one person of color among the final candidates to be interviewed. Provide Mission Council with an update quarterly or as often as a search is being conducted.
November 14, 2018

Host a performance of *The Queens of the Golden Mask*, the world premiere of a play about the women of the KKK, at the Ivoryton Playhouse in Essex, CT for ECCT folk. The play will be followed by a talk back (with the author) and a reception. We will invite chaplains to attend the performance and provide pastoral care to anyone in need.

January 2019

Formalize and expand the current Working Group of the Leadership Gathering to include collaboration with the Racial Justice and Racial Reconciliation Ministry Network. Create a clear charter with specific accountabilities and deliverables.

April 6, 2019 (Christ Church Cathedral, Hartford)

Host a one-day workshop with Kelly Brown Douglas on the history of racism open to all in ECCT.

April 27, 2019

Host a workshop on Racial Healing, Justice and Reconciliation at Spring Training.

June 2019

Offer training for missionaries and other facilitators in each Region so they are equipped to lead truth-telling conversations accompanied by active listening.
Other Actions (Implementation Dates TBD)

- Members of the Racial Healing, Justice and Reconciliation Working Group will also offer/coordinate field trips to significant places including:
  - St. Luke’s, New Haven
  - The Center for Reconciliation in Providence, RI
  - The National Memorial for Peace and Justice, informally known as the National Lynching Memorial

- Develop a strategy for raising new, diverse leaders in ECCT’s Leadership Gathering and increase the diversity on our committees, commissions, etc.