



Generational Healing Retreat at Camp Washington, March 25-56, 2022

THE FRONTLINE

RACIAL RECONCILIATION AND GENERATIONAL HEALING: INTEGRATED CHRISTIAN HEALING PRACTICES IN THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH IN CONNECTICUT

BY THE REV. TARA SHEPLEY

"If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, pray, seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land." (2 Chronicles 7:14)

In 2020 the 236th ECCT Convention passed *Resolution #7 Acknowledging & Confronting Systemic Racism, White Supremacy, & Anti-Black Bias*. As a result of this resolution, the leaders of St. George's Church, Middlebury, and I, The Rev. Tara Shepley, an OSL Chaplain and Convener, began to take steps to discover our historic complicity in racism in our parish and community.

St. George's church is a young church by Connecticut standards, consecrated in 1958. As the church leaders reviewed the town and church history, nothing overt presented itself. Finally, I asked if there was anything in more recent years that anyone could recall. Two of the leaders' faces suddenly blanched with the registered look of recognition, and one of them offered, "Well, there is this one thing..."

One evening in January 1984 the original building that housed St. George's church burned to the ground. As the building burned, Suffragan Bishop Clarence Coleridge immediately responded to the news and attempted to drive to the church in its time of need. A member of the Middlebury Police department (now deceased) prevented the bishop from crossing the police barricade to carry out his duties due to the color of his skin and questioned the bishop's identity because he was black. Bishop Clarence Coleridge was the first black bishop in ECCT (Suffragan, 1981-1993 and Diocesan, 1993-1999). A member of our church (now deceased) had to come down and vouch for him at the police line and accompany him to our burnt church.

On Tuesday March 22, 2022, the current Middlebury Police Chief, with two church members (one is a former Middlebury Police Commissioner, now senior warden, and the other is active in the town of Middlebury), and I visited Bishop Coleridge to name and to recognize the racial injustice and prejudice that occurred that night and to offer an apology on behalf of the town of Middlebury, the Middlebury Police Department, and The Church. We also offered our recognition and thanks for the bishop's service in our time of need.

Our visit with Bishop Coleridge was an act of integrated healing practices including laying on of hands, holy unction, confession, repentance, communion, and blessing. We spent time together in warm conversation, and the bishop shared his care and concern about St. George's church and the wider church, as well. Bishop Coleridge blessed each one of us and he received the laying of hands, holy unction, and a blessing, too!

The act of discovery and sharing our wounded stories is holy and healing work. This integrated process of healing which leads to God's wholeness – shalom – total wellbeing – is not just for individuals, but for communities, churches, and systems. Our relationship with Jesus involves a lifetime of yielding to God's saving work on the cross and the power of Christ's resurrection. Russ Parker in his book, *Healing Wounded History: Reconciling Peoples and Healing Places* gives powerful evidence about how individual healing practices, the sharing and listening to one another's stories, combined with confession, repentance, and reconciliation, personally, if needed, and representationally, in the name of Jesus, connects God's healing power to our ancestors, our own stories, and the even the land. **How can we reframe racial reconciliation as part of an integrated healing approach in OSL?**

OSL AND DIOCESAN COLLABORATION FOR GENERATIONAL HEALING

On March 25-26, 2022, at Camp Washington, the ECCT ministry network Connecticut Healing Order of St. Luke (CHOOS), The Northwest Region, and St. Paul's Church, Brookfield co-sponsored the New England OSL Generational Healing retreat led by The Rev. Dr. Sharon Lewis. During the retreat, thirty-one participants brought themselves and their family histories to the cross to break patterns of trauma, disfunction, pain, and disease, in the name of Jesus. On the last day, we participated in a Generational Healing Eucharist that involved communion, confession, forgiveness, repentance, Spirit led prayer, and blessing.

Among the thirty-one participants, four members identified as Indigenous peoples. As we moved into a time of blessing, the Holy Spirit led Pastor Sharon, Father Joe Shepley, and I to repent on behalf of The Church and the nation to our Indigenous brothers and sisters, before we entered a time of blessing. **How is God leading OSL to further embrace generational healing as part of an integrated process of healing that accompanies laying on of hands, inner healing, and spiritual freedom for individuals, churches and communities?**

The week before both events, I began reading the book *Healing Wounded History: Reconciling Peoples and Healing*



Middlebury Police Chief Patrick Deely, Bill Stowell, Bishop Clarence Coleridge, The Rev. Tara Shepley, and Ken Heidkamp, March 22, 2022 in Bloomfield, CT.

Places by Russ Parker. Parker's work inspired me to add communion and blessing to our visit with Bishop Coleridge, to reframe racial reconciliation as an essential part of Christian healing, and to consider how reconciliation at the place of our wounded histories brings healing to churches, communities and even the land. I am convinced that there is still so much more for us to discover about how the Holy Spirit is leading us live into the reconciliation found in Christ Jesus!

*Apology offers a climate for dialogue, the beginning of all healings. Confession at a group level suggests that it is possible to work towards healing wounded groups stories and to change the destructive and often repeated cycle that such stories generate. I am quite convinced that the predominately emerging theme in the work of care both on a political and spiritual scale is going to be the relationship between reconciliation and the healing of relationships at a group and institutional level.*¹

OSL's commitment to Christian healing positions us to embrace and lead the way into the emerging practice of integrated healing in Jesus's name. How is God calling OSL to embrace and reframe racial reconciliation, generational healing, and creation care as essential aspects of the Christian healing ministry? The Spirit of the Living God is already at work, let's join Him!

¹Russ Parker, *Healing Wounded History: Reconciling Peoples and Healing Places*, (SPCK Publishing, 2012), 3.



The Rev. Tara Shepley is the Priest in Charge at St. George's Church in Middlebury, CT. Ordained in 2020, and she has been happily married to The Rev. Joe Shepley for almost thirty years. They have three grown children and a beloved dog named Sir Arthur. Tara is an active chaplain and convener in OSL Region 1 and in Connecticut. She is Co-Chaplain to the OSL North American Chaplains, and teaches the Discernment of Spirits practicum for The OSL Next Steps Course.