

Religious Leaders Caucus Meeting Wednesday, October 28, 2020

Summary of Rev. Myra Brown's update on local racial justice movement

Rev. Myra Brown gave a history of the concept of superior race. Myra spoke in front of a background photo of jars from all southern states containing soil from lynching sites. The history of enslavement continues in lived philosophy as black people are criminalized while driving, shopping, sleeping, and walking. Many whites limit ourselves to merely feeling bad about it.

Re-imagine our role from harm to healing. Dr. King said America has agreed to a kind of installment plan for racial equity. End agreement of gradualism. Have the will and moral courage to finish the work. Police are one of the last bastions of power backed by legal, state & local protection to not have to be accountable for eroding the humanity of black and brown peoples.

Myra led her congregation's antiracist education and congregational commitment to racial justice training once or twice a year since 2006 after training herself for a year in anti-racist history, micro aggressions, self-hatred, white denial, white fragility, strategies and a year of tools for undoing racism. Part of that tool box to end racism is finding our voice & refrain from having our voices muted.

She helps whites find voice and "end the experience of Uncle Jack at the dinner table shutting us down." Anxiety: some are so worried about saying the wrong thing. We can tweak it along the way. Anti-racist is sacred and holy work. God is always on the side of the oppressed. We're the ones God uses to end oppression. We're the tools God uses to end it. Make sure your skin is thick. We have to speak truth to power. If we don't, nothing will change.

Myra was called to the scene where photos, of Rev Myra talking with police that appeared in the 9/22/20 D&C, was taken. There is no moral equivalency between looting and lost life; **lives are looted** from communities and families. Police were aggressive and violent. Police wore riot gear and used chemical weapons. They could run them through all protestors framing their actions as equitable. There was no moral equivalency. Myra said she saw trauma being poked at long enough, police traumatizing long standing trauma for several days.

"Police converged at my church angrily." The protestors were angry to be pepper sprayed. That started with police boxing people in our street at our church. Myra does not know who broke the glass at City Hall; she thinks it may have been 5 or 6 people but police punished everyone with rubber bullets and pepper spray. The church is a sanctuary. Police were at gates of church and slammed the gate closed as if it were his gate.



The Rev. Myra Brown, Spiritus Christi Church, talks to Rochester Police, looking for a more peaceful resolution as the police clear Black Lives Matter protesters from their encampment surrounding City Hall Wednesday morning, Sept. 16, 2020.
Shawn Dowd/Rochester Democrat And Chronicle



The Rev. Myra Brown speaks with a Rochester police officer on Fitzhugh Street on Sept. 16, 2020.
Justin Murphy/Rochester Democrat And Chronicle



The Rev. Myra Brown of Spiritus Christi Church talks to Rochester Police, looking for a more peaceful resolution as the police clear Black Lives Matter protesters from their encampment surrounding City Hall Wednesday morning, Sept. 16, 2020.
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Myra received phone calls up to 2 am at home because "I'd gone home to write my homily for the next day." Myra called the mayor and said we need to talk about what happened at my church last night. In that conversation she reiterated that our policing system began in 1819 creating police departments designed after the blueprint of slave patrols when blacks were enslaved or indentured. They monitored blacks and protected white property and wealth in response to white anxiety. Police slave patrol blueprints in every city are having the same experience. We need to defund the blueprint and design new blueprints for public safety focused on investing in thriving communities. The new blueprint will need to redefine the roles of police officers. The current blueprint is not good for them, for relationships, or for public safety.

The system wanted protestors away and dehumanized; their voices for justice unheard due to a police version of what they call "order." Myra asked a movement leader, "What do you want?" Myra made a critical analysis and assessment. She saw the police offer no respect nor regard for people and people showing no respect nor regard for police. Myra told an officer, "I want to be arrested. Protestors are not leaving the street and neither will I."

That offer to be arrested changed things. Police were not willing to arrest Rev. Myra and called the chief who agreed to work with Myra. Policeman said "Let's work this out, people need to be able to get into City Hall and the city needs to clean the streets." Myra sensed her privilege and observed that protestors had already stopped blocking employees at City Hall from entering the

bldg. Myra in negotiation with the officer in charge helped him see that all three things were possible. City employees could go to work, the city could clean the space and the protestors could be allowed to protest on the public sidewalk outside City Hall without the threat of being further arrested or removed.

Optics did not look good to arrest Myra and she knew if they could do it for her, they could do it for protestors. We can demand; we can change the blueprint. Myra has worked on new blue print for policing with the Faith Leaders Roundtable which is a group of black pastors. She asked state politicians to support the work of creating a new blueprint that asks the right question of how to create public safety, not what to do with black or and brown people. People calling for justice are not the problem.

People created racism and can end it. This is our time to go big or go home. We cannot accept the rationale that's been driving the refusal to do this work from a bent over position. See it, name it; work collectively and collaboratively to end racism. Myra was a nurse for 28 yrs. She spoke up, made appointments to talk with the CEO to not support racism within the hospital system she worked in when it reared its head. "I will not participate in oppression. That would be inhumane, outside the call of faith and just wrong."

Q & A affirmed many of the points Myra made and asked *how to put funds into black and brown communities?* Some spoke of creating a Community Chest similar to United Way. Currently, we expect police to take care of everything from gang violence to drug dealers to housing deprived to domestic violence, mental illness episodes and more. These are social problems for social workers. We've dumped everything on the police.

Put funds into the Community Chest into public safety to people in those communities who are well equipped and pay them living wages. Quit criminalizing housing deprived people and those who are mentally ill! Create Community Chest in communities of color with mental health entrepreneurship, employment and living- wage jobs.

Privileged people are responsible to bring people up. Scarcity is a myth. Another spoke of the challenging stumbling block of segregated neighborhoods and schools and the racism that created white flight and our need for diversity. Without regular diversity we are out of touch. We need to dismantle structural racism.

(Added comment from Myra- If the city refused to create the Community Chest, Myra has created a place we can start without them as a faith community and that is putting funds in the Black Community Focus Fund which is a non-profit Myra has created to begin some of the work of creating a thriving community in 14605 for Black families there). Here is a link with more information about the Black Community Focus Fund. [Match My Five | Black Community Focus Fund](#). Here is an [article](#) about why we started the fund and what inspired us.