



Religious Leaders Caucus
October 20, 2021

MINUTES

ATTENDING: Rev. Dr. William Wilkinson, Rabbi Peter Stein, Rev Todd Pullano, Rev Johanna Raybaum, Rev Andrew Gookin, Rev. Debbie Grohman, Rev. John Loncle, Rev. Shari Halliday-Quan, Rev Marilyn Cunningham, Deacon Jim Fien, Deacon Duncan Harris, Deacon David Palma, Dr. Gayle Harrison, Kathi Stolte, Beth Laidlaw, Laurie Mahoney, Jonathan Nwagbaroacha, Nancy Brown, Jon Horne, Princess Fame, Anne Thomas, Ayala Emmitt, Susan Helman, Josh Hertz, John Kaposta and Dr. Deni Mack.

INTRODUCTIONS: We each gave our name, congregation and **shared our deepest desire for building up the Beloved Community, i.e. passing Elder Parole Bill.** Equity and justice for all; More willingness to be vulnerable & share in suffering & recognize we have not got it all together; A sense of joy in our justice work; Support ever evolving American democracy; Building relationships; Realize deeply the beauty and strength in diversity; To not look upon people as other but see brothers and sisters; Greater sense of community locally; Urban & suburban congregations coming together in advocacy for anti-racism curriculum in schools; Join RocACTS advocacy-- if every congregation joined, our collective power would effect change--insuring all children have equal opportunities for bright future and cut through pockets of resistance.

ANTI RACISM EFFORTS BUILDING UP THE BELOVED COMMUNITY:

St Rita's Church in Webster: Princess Fame, Anne Thomas, Faith Formation Coordinator and Deacon Jim Fein met with 12 parishioners weekly throughout the pandemic to develop mission & vision statement & use Facebook Live discussing the US conference of Catholic bishops' anti-racism paper. Their anti-racism committee continues to develop a sustainable anti-racism program with black and white parishioners, building relationships, offering sharing sessions and St Peter Claver prayer services via zoom and in church, presenting sessions through which people listen with their hearts to parishioners tell of racist experiences; Black Saints; regularly scheduled devotionals with racial justice theme and participating in BLM vigils with Elders and Allies all towards making anti-racism the focus for all we do.

During Black Catholic History Month this Nov. they'll preach more regularly on anti-racism and examine the Catholic Church's racism history as well as times of solidarity to honor. These Pope Francis' *Fratelli Tutti* study sessions will follow the Saturday afternoon mass and include a meal. They're examining they're not yet taking action against racism & appreciate anti-racist preaching, listening, creating safe space, getting people involved, education & honesty.

Downtown United Presbyterian Church: Jonathan Nwagbaroacha and Nancy Brown said the first thing DUPC did after Daniel Prude's death was hang a BLM flag. DUPC's efforts include reflection on our behavior, collaboration & public witness. They're working with Free the People ROC, Elders and Allies and Spiritus Christi's anti-racism community showing up for racial justice by publicly **supporting Daniel's Law** and staffing tables at the public market for signing letters of support.

DUPC uses SURGE (Showing Up for Racial Justice) tool kit and has developed the practice of being ready on site to provide coffee and oatmeal with the mantra of hospitality not conflict! They now start every meeting with a healing moment. Their joint meetings with Spiritus Christi anti-racism team begins with separate black caucus/white caucus wherein they ask one another questions. Rev. Myra asked Jonathan "what does healing look like?" that really made him think as a black man growing up in a white supremacist society. Jonathan chairs the Presbytery's Racial Justice Working group. Both @ DUPC and on the many churches level they ask and assess processes continuing police behavior which we all do. They are revisiting study programs they held last spring to see what they've learned. To include the aging congregants they encourage letter writing. The anti-racism team shares immigration letters and letters to Pittsford's school superintendent and school board re recent racist actions by students and the way they were mishandled.

Temple B'rith Kodesh: Alaya Emmitt, Susan Helman and Josh Hirst shared yard signs their anti-racism team created, "You shall not stand idle upon the blood of your fellow." (*Leviticus 19:16 in Hebrew and in English*). Another sign is BLM: "Justice! Justice you shall pursue." (*Deuteronomy 16:20*). Alaya explained, Justice is both a religious and civic responsibility: American history of slavery and Jim Crow laws and in our own time – the killings need our support of Daniel's Law. They work with DUPC with Family Promise (formerly called RAIHN) and help refugee families from Afghanistan and volunteer with Mt Olivet and Third Pres. on the Interfaith Thanksgiving service. Josh spoke of the temple's history confronting racism. They helped fund Baden St. Settlement and will work with Baden celebrating 120 years on Dec 4. See Baden's website for details.

Third Presbyterian Church: Beth Laidlaw and Laurie Mahoney said PCUSA affirms BLM. Beth and Laurie spoke of Third Pres. holding a year of listening and holding **three small group anti-racism series over 40 weeks with 60 church leaders (trustees, elders, deacons and staff)**. They're finding commitment to this cause by the **entire** community, many whom want more action now and they are **implementing the Matthew 25 curriculum developing commitment to eradicate systemic poverty and dismantle racism**. They listen and learn through weekly emails including podcasts and articles for people to do as individuals + things groups might do.

They've sought advice from their black parishioners. They've held a congregational survey as to the effectiveness of their anti-racism advocacy and have a book exchange. They're contributing about \$2000 per month that they used to donate to people in need now to Family Promise as FP will follow through supporting families. **Third Pres. begins all meetings with an equity 5 to 10 minutes time of reflecting on questions such as "when was the first time you became aware of your race?"** The RASE recommendations are being addressed through their Black Agenda Group. 3rd Pres. was a "safe house" years ago. Their's

was the first Presbyterian congregation to allow women to be ordained. Trustees passed Best Practices. Third Pres. puts black and brown voices first. Their most powerful collaboration is with RocACTS. Congregants serve on all RocACTS task forces. **A black congregant told them, “you are a congregation of consequence; you must act.”** They listen to voices of elders and advocate for just laws and policies. They sometimes feel as though they are awakening from a stupor knowing they can do this work so much better than they’ve been doing previously. **They’ve hired a parishioner of color for direction and consultation and facilitation. Some are frustrated they are not advocating for laws and policies.**

GENERAL DISCUSSION: build relationships, build trust. Institutional push – money, outreach, investments, procedural changes, struggle with system through stages within racism. At each level, we work toward action that leads to system change. We build momentum. **Racism is a national health crisis.** The President of RocACTS, Dr. Gayle Harrison said, “When people begin to sense they have bias or, upon realizing racism, might even say, “I am bad person,” that is a teachable moment.” Others said, “That is the Holy Spirit transforming us.”

ACTION STEPS:

Support:

- Daniels Law,
- the Elder Parole Bill & Children’s Agenda Mental Health for RCSD students. Sign petitions.
- Participate in Black Lives Matter silent vigil @ corner of Clifford Ave/Culver Rd/Empire Blvd October Saturdays @ noon & Nov. Saturdays @ noon @ the corner of Routes 441 & 5 mile line rd Penfield.
- Marvin Mich, one of RocACTS founders is being memorialized with a free Lecture. Come 7pm Nov 4 St Jn Fisher College to hear Rev Myra Brown.
- RocACTS Religious Leader’s Caucus meets 11:30 to 1 pm Wednesday, Nov. 17 via zoom
- Baden St Settlement House 120th anniversary Celebration Dec 4
- Please email deni.mack412@gmail.com with topics, issues, speakers, actions for religious leaders

CLOSING PRAYER: Rev. Dr. William Wilkinson