



Taskforce on Racial Justice



**From one ancestor He made all nations to
inhabit the whole earth. Acts 17:26**

**FINAL REPORT TO THE 139th DIOCESAN SYNOD
of the Anglican Diocese of Fredericton**

October 24th, 2024

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DATE: October 24th, 2024
FROM: The Task Force on Racial Justice
SUBJECT: Report of the 139th Diocesan Synod Concerning the Work of the Task Force on Racial Justice

Dear Friends:

I am pleased to submit this Report to Diocesan Synod concerning the work of the Task Force on Racial Justice.

The Task Force was first established through a resolution of Diocesan Council in June 2022 and fully constituted in December 2022 based on the following Motion of Synod 138 in November 2021:

Synod Motion – Task Force on Racial Justice
MOTION 138-14

THAT the Diocesan Council establish a Task Force on Racial Justice made up of at least one representative from each Archdeaconry to:

- *examine the implications for the Diocese of Fredericton of the [Charter for Racial Justice in the Anglican Church of Canada](#);*
- *educate congregations about issues of racial justice, racism, xenophobia, prejudice and discrimination in the Christian context; and*
- *make recommendations concerning implementation of the Charter for Racial Justice across the Diocese.*
- *Report at the 139th session of Synod (Thomas Nisbett / David Page)*

MOTION: 138-14 Carried

The Task Force believes that we have fulfilled our mandate as outlined in the Synod Motion, but there is, without a doubt, much more work to be done if we are to adequately live out our call as people of Faith in the Anglican Church in New Brunswick.

Yours faithfully in Christ Jesus,



Thomas W.L. Nisbett (Rev.)
Chair – Task Force on Racial Justice

Establishing the Task Force on Racial Justice:

Establishing a full compliment of the Task Force from each of the Archdeaonries in the Diocese proved to be much more difficult than first thought, with numerous people wishing to offer an opinion concerning the subject matter of the Task Force, but few wishing to put their names forward to give concrete leadership in that regard.

Also, efforts to get help from the Synod Office and the Archdeacons of the Diocese in identifying disparate voices with which to fill out the membership of the Task Force as suggested by the establishing resolutions, proved equally as difficult.

We are, therefore, eternally grateful to those who put their name forward to listen, learn and give input to the work of the Task Force over these many months as follows:

- The Rev Terence Chandra
- The Rev. Lidvald Haugen-Strand
- The Rev. Bob LeBlanc
- The Rev Julian Pillay
- Mrs. Dorothy Wilson
- Mr. Bill Wilson
- The Rev. Thomas Nisbett (Chair)

While we were unable to find a person from our membership to represent the views of the First Nations Community of New Brunswick, we have benefitted from input and wisdom offered by both Archbishop Chris Harper and Chief Roger Augustine.

Understanding the Issue of Racism

The online Cambridge Dictionary defines Racism in two main ways:

- policies, behaviours, rules, etc. that result in a continued unfair advantage to some people and unfair or harmful treatment of others based on race; and,
- harmful or unfair things that people say, do, or think based on the belief that their own race makes them more intelligent, good, moral, etc. than people of other races.

Racism is understood as different from issues of xenophobia, prejudice, discrimination and ignorance, in that they can be influenced and changed by information about or exposure to people who are different, unusual, or hold differing views and opinions. Racism is not unique to one particular race or ethnic group.

Institutional Racism is defined by Cambridge as:

- policies, rules, practices, etc. that are a usual part of the way an organization works, and that result in and support a continued unfair advantage to some people and unfair or harmful treatment of others based on race;

The Anti-racism Working Group of the Anglican Church of Canada has defined Racism as:

- the belief, reinforced by power and privilege, that one race is innately superior to other races. Systemic racism occurs when the power and privilege of one racial group results in the exclusion, oppression or exploitation of other groups of different racial origin. Racism also manifests itself in individuals in the form of racial harassment when a person or persons belonging to a privileged group behaves in ways that intimidate, demean, or undermine the dignity of others on the basis of their race. A consequence for victims is that racism becomes internalized as deeply engrained feelings of self-hatred and low self-esteem.

The National Church's Statement on Racism was received by the Council of General Synod in March 2004, and has been used as a foundation document for further dialogue and discussion since that time. It holds that through baptism we enter into "a new life in Christ through which we affirm that divisions of race have been put aside and that all come before God as equals."

The General Synod also undertook to start a number of initiatives flowing from that Statement which would assist the organization in fulfilling its stated goal of eliminating racist structures and behaviours. both within its immediate sphere of influence and in the wider society.

It is the unanimous opinion of the members of the Task Force that the National Church's Statement on Racial Justice could, with a bit of editing, could be easily adopted by any significant secular organization. That, in an effort to try to create a document that would be acceptable to as wide an audience as possible, it has not truly captured the essence of what a Church, grounded in the faith of Jesus Christ, should say or be.

To that end...:

the Task Force does not recommend that the Anglican Diocese of Fredericton adopt the Charter for Racial Justice in the Anglican Church of Canada as reflecting its aspirations for how the Diocese must move into the future.

In its stead, it is recommended that the Diocese undertake a series of initiatives to assist parishes and individuals to both grapple with the Biblical implications of racism and intolerance, and understand the spiritual freedom which comes from heeding the call of Christ to "***love one another***" inherent in Christ's Commission to His people.

It is also important to note that when racism is allowed to occur within families, it creates a power dynamic that eats away at some of the most important relationships we have. History has also shown us that the influences of racism, prejudice and discrimination in our families (and our communities) are often felt over multiple generations

Racism must be seen as something that affects the whole Church, not just those who are directly and personally impacted by it.

Often well-meaning people, not understanding how insidious racism truly is, will do things that on the surface seem very innocent, only to later discover that they were done in that way as a result of biases which have been indoctrinated in them since childhood.

One has only to look at the makeup of the leadership groups within our Church to understand that we are not as “inclusive” as we might think we are, and that there is a lot more work to be done in that regard.

Repentance and reconciliation take work, and it is Jesus Christ that offers us a pattern for that effort.

Understanding Our Mission As Disciples Of Jesus Christ

The Mission of the Anglican Diocese of Fredericton has long been:

“To proclaim the Gospel of Jesus for the making of disciples.”

Such a Mission requires that we look to Jesus the Christ, His teachings and example, as the blueprint for our lives – Jesus is to be the primary influence in who and what we are, and all that we do. Matthew 28:19-20 is clear about what Jesus has called us to do and to be:

19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age. [Matthew 28:19-20 NRSVA]

As Disciple-Makers, rather than wait for people to wander into our orbits, we must actively seek them out: creating opportunities to invite diverse groups and peoples into our midst so that they might experience the love and grace, compassion and truth, joy and forgiveness of God which we enjoy in Jesus Christ.

Being disciples of Christ means that we struggle continuously to be obedient to His teachings and His example – constantly challenging our own biases, prejudices and fears as part and parcel of who we aspire to be as people of faith in Christ Jesus.

It also means that we are to actively invite others into a dynamic and growing relationship with Christ so that they too might hear and believe God’s commands, and thus be better equipped to conquer those same struggles.

A Church that is obedient to the Gospel Message offered through Jesus the Christ must have a vision of including people, tribes and nations from beyond its traditional walls, barriers or boundaries.

Acknowledging Our Past In Order To Envision Our Future

Although the perfect mending of all ethnic divisions will not take place until Christ's inauguration of the Kingdom of God on earth, the Church has been called to serve as a foretaste of this coming unity - showing the people of this fallen world what true racial harmony looks like. Indeed, to be a Christ-follower is to be part of a global body of believers made up of people from every nation, tribe, people and language, united in love by our allegiance to the Crucified Messiah.

Given this calling, it comes as no surprise that many historical movements against racial injustice— from the abolition of the slave trade throughout the British Empire, to the defeat of apartheid in South Africa— found their impetus in the teachings of Jesus Christ. It is equally unsurprising that many of the leaders of such movements (William Wilberforce, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.) counted themselves as disciples of the Lord Jesus.

While there are shining examples of Christians who have, in the name of Christ, sought to bring about true justice and racial reconciliation, it is clear that the opposite is also true. Indeed, at various points in her two-thousand-year history, the Church has allowed herself to become complicit with racial injustice and ethnic division.

In the modern era, Christians of various stripes participated in the oppression of colonized people— exploiting their labour and stealing their lands. They owned slaves and when that was no longer allowed, Church and community leaders found other creative ways to put fellow humans into servitude, providing what they believed were sound, Biblical justifications for doing so.

Closer to home, the English Church in Atlantic Canada (including Newfoundland) and across Canada, clearly played a leading role in the foundation and operation of both residential and day-schools designed specifically to destroy First Nations families, lands, language, peoples and cultures. Our Church and its people engaged in such oppression, not because they were following the commandments of their God, but because they were giving themselves over to the lust and greed of a few powerful men. They were rebelling against God and God's teachings, and inciting others to participate with them, betraying the very principles that lay at the heart of the Christian faith.

The Doctrine of Discovery, enacted initially by the institutional Church in the 15th-century, was used to both displace and enslave Native people in all parts of the world where European leaders wished to claim land. It was clearly understood as antithetical to the Gospel message (and repealed) very soon after it was enacted, but the Church hierarchy failed to enforce their own edicts, bowing to political and economic expediency of their time.

England continued to adhere to the concept of *terra nullius* which deemed that any territory without a recognized European sovereign would be considered uninhabited, without any identifiable human occupation. The basic assumption in doing so was that European civilization (and its people) were superior to all others.

Having acknowledged this complicated past, we wish to affirm that racial reconciliation is indeed possible and that the Church continues to be called by her Lord and Saviour, Jesus the Christ, to play a leading role in its actualization.

True reconciliation, however, cannot be achieved through any human philosophy or social policy, no matter how well articulated or devised, but *only through the work of the crucified and risen Messiah*. Jesus is the one who suffered and died in solidarity with the victims of racial oppression. He is also the one who suffered and died for the atonement of the perpetrators. In the words of Saint Paul:

“¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. ¹⁴ For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us.” [Ephesians 2:13-14 NRSVA].

Having said this, Christ’s victory over all sin, including the sin of race-based hatred, does not mean that the disciple of Jesus is permitted to stand passively by, unresisting in the face of unrighteousness. In the power of the Holy Spirit, we are to fight against evil in all its forms, including racism as it exists in the broader culture, in our local churches, and in our individual hearts. When we fail to act against it, we too become complicit in the sin we claim to abhor.

There are a number of ways in which we could go about this task:

1. We Must Learn from our Past

In the Old Testament, the Psalmist enjoins the people of Israel to recall their nation’s past— retelling the history of their people to the next generation. This retelling was not to be a glossed over version of Israel’s history, recounting only the good. Rather, it was to involve an honest examination of the nation’s past failings. The hope was that, through such a truthful retelling, the next generation would:

“not be like their ancestors, a stubborn and rebellious generation, a generation whose hearts were not steadfast, whose spirit was not faithful to God” (Ps. 78:7-8).

If it was wise for the people of Israel to recall their past in such a manner, so too would it be wise for us— the people of the church— to do the same. For this reason, this Task Force recommends that historical resources be provided to parishes of this Diocese— resources that would help us better understand our complicated history as Anglicans. Some topics to explore might be the history of residential and day schools in our region or the history of black Anglicans in our diocese and neighbouring diocese. Such resources can take the form, not only of written materials, but video presentations and guest speakers.

2. We Must Talk about Racism in our Present Context

Using the teachings and example of Jesus as our starting point and framework, we need to encourage honest conversations about racism throughout our Diocese. In these conversations, the following questions could be explored: Are there visible minorities in our parishes? If the answer is no, why might that be the case? If there are visible minorities in our Church communities, have they experienced racism either inside or outside of a Church context? What can the broader Church do to protect them from further hatred or discrimination? What can the broader Church do to facilitate their full participation in the leadership, mission and ministry of the church? As followers of Jesus Christ, how might our approach to rectifying racial injustice differ from the broader cultures or community at large? Etc.

3. We Must look to the Future

Recent demographic data indicates that the population of New Brunswick is slowly on the rise, thanks, in part, to the arrival of newcomers from many different parts of the globe. Indeed, our own churches seem to reflect this trend, with many priests reporting the sudden presence of parishioners who just arrived in this country within recent years. (Many of these new worshippers come from countries where the Church is growing and thriving- despite persecution!) Given the fact that this trend is likely to continue, this task force suggests that this Diocese devise strategies to better integrate our newcomer brothers and sisters into the leadership, ministry and social life of our parishes.

Racial Justice vs Biblical Justice

Racial Justice, by definition, is a legislative function (one of crime and punishment) which seeks to ensure that the advantages offered by a particular state or jurisdiction are available to every inhabitant or member of that state or jurisdiction. It seeks to provide a legal framework which includes guarantees that one group will not have access to the advantages and resources of a society while others are deprived or shut out from them.

The Gospel of Matthew offers the following instruction:

³⁵ One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: ³⁶ “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” ³⁷ Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ ³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹ And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ ⁴⁰ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” [Matthew 22:35-40 NIV]

As people of faith in the teachings and example of Jesus Christ, however, we are to be about establishing Biblical Justice for all peoples, nations and tribes. This is distinctly different than Racial Justice or Social Justice in that it begins and ends with a call to love God above all else, and in so doing, influence everything we might do: in thought, word or deed – so that grounded in faith, we might love others as we would wish to be loved.

As St. John the Evangelist so clearly states:

19 We love because he first loved us. 20 Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. 21 And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister. [1 John 4:19-21]

Jesus calls us to a sense of ***“love in action”***, not just through adherence to an appropriate set of words, rules, practices or principals. It is with God in our hearts that we are to reflect God’s love to those within our orbit, no matter who they are, where they may be found, or where they may come from.

It is in how we earnestly and boldly welcome those around us into our midst in love (and without fear) that we will defeat the natural tendency toward the sins of tribalism and racism inherent in all of us – even and especially when we disagree.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

Suggested for Synod

- ***The Task Force does not recommend that the Anglican Diocese of Fredericton adopt the Charter for Racial Justice in the Anglican Church of Canada as reflecting its aspirations for how the Diocese must move into the future.***

Suggested Initiatives for Parishes

- A set of self-assessment questions that parishes (and other ancillary organizations) can use to understand how open and welcoming they truly are, with a view to developing activities which welcome “others” into their midst;
- Cultural festivals and events which celebrate the diversity and contributions of the disparate communities in which they serve;
- Special Worship Services at Pentecost highlighting the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the believers such that they could offer the Gospel message to people from every corner of the earth;
- Welcoming/Integration Groups established as a way of helping new clergy (especial clergy from abroad) to adapt and integrate into their new communities and parishes;
- Bible studies with a view to helping parishioners understand the call of Christ inherent in the diversity found in our communities;
- Holding special services, events and commemorations at the Cathedral (and at other locations) to mark “seminal” moments in history that are important to the various cultural, ethnic and racial groups in the Province – e.g.: Emancipation Day; National Day for Truth & Reconciliation; Chinese New Year; Orthodox Christmas & New Year;

National Indigenous Day of Prayer; Watch Night Services at New Year's Eve; and the like... Such events and activities should be done, where possible, in cooperation with the various cultural societies and organizations active in the towns, cities or neighbourhoods where congregations are active;

- With the assistance of the Director of Mission & Ministry of the Diocese, congregations should consider undertaking an “environmental scan” in order to understand who the people are that are living within their Parish boundaries.

Suggested Initiatives for the Bishop

- Annual visits to parishes with a view celebrating the contribution of diverse groups and communities – e.g. St. Peter's, Fredericton; pre-Loyalist Black Burial Ground at the back of the Christ Church Anglican Cemetery, Bloomfield;
- New church plants or targeted growth strategies in areas and communities where diverse groups are established or resident;
- Encourage the use of new liturgies and worship styles, including Indigenous liturgies from Asia, Africa, the South Pacific, etc..., highlighting the diversity of our communities and the Anglican diaspora;
- Take steps, in consultation with the Dean and Archdeacons, to designate the First Nations Version of the New Testament as one of the bible translations “authorized and permitted for public reading” in the Diocese of Fredericton;
- Training of archdeacons and other key leaders in accessing “new communities” and the sensitivities inherent in such strategies;
- Establish hiring practices which, over time, help Diocesan staff and clergy to become more reflective of the diversity and makeup of the communities in which they serve;
- Work with the Anglican Council of Indigenous Peoples to develop affiliations between parishes in the Diocese of Fredericton and majority Aboriginal parishes primarily in the Canadian North;

Suggested Initiatives for the Diocesan Council

- Examine the Recommendations 58 to 61 of the National Truth and Reconciliation Commission relevant to the Churches and develop a plan to build a relationship between the Diocese and our Aboriginal sisters and brothers in New Brunswick and elsewhere;
- Offer diversity, inclusion and cultural awareness training for all clergy, staff and key volunteers in the Diocese, including leaders at the parish level;
- Examine the rules, statutes, procedures, practices and regulations operative within the Diocese with a view to identifying elements that discourage the full participation and contribution of key groups within the Church;

- Hold a “Viewing and Discussion” day-retreat for lay and clergy Church leaders centred around the 2022 documentary, “*You Can Call Me Roger*”, about the life and work of Chief Roger Augustine;

It is the hope of each of the members of the Task Force on Racial Justice that our collective Ministry will be built on the understanding that God’s Word is the foundation for all instruction, guidance, rebuke, comfort, challenge and encouragement – as complicated as that might be sometimes..

As disciples and disciple-makers of Jesus Christ, we are required to be ordered in thought, word and deed, and to cultivate “*habits of holiness*” such that the fruit of the Spirit is evident in all that we do and all that we are:

²² By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things. [Galatians 5:22-23 NRSVA]

Respectfully submitted as a Final Report of the Task Force on Racial Justice.

Thomas

"At Play in the Fields of the Lord..."

Thomas W.L. Nisbett (Rev.)

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