

**For Holy Trinity Members Only**  
**July 13, 2020**

### **Institutional Racism Consultation: Short Summary**

A journey began 11 months ago to assess institutional racism at Holy Trinity with the help of a consultant, Alicia Sojourner. This was covered financially through a Synod Imagine Grant. Our congregation has a long history of addressing social inequities and encouraging members to speak up in the public square, but little effort or work has gone into evaluating institutional or organizational racism. Institutional racism involves an ethos in which practices, policies and procedures privileges one set of people over another based on race. Examples include how resources are used, how power and authority are distributed and how members communicate in ways that perpetuate exclusions or disparities.

Alicia has gathered data around how we function as an organization reviewing formal congregational documents, talking with our pastors and staff, meeting with the Council, talking to members individually and in focus groups, talking to community members and administering a congregation-wide survey. She also made a concerted effort to connect with Holy Trinity members who are persons of color.

Preliminary findings of her work were initially shared with the Racial Justice Group, our pastors, the Council and other leaders. It was a “snapshot” and not a comprehensive assessment of every aspect of congregational life, but it has a wealth of information. We now share these findings with the larger congregation with both a short summary and a detailed version of her findings. Of course, it would be far better to learn about the results of the consultation where we could talk face-to-face. The limitations of the pandemic make this impossible so this is the medium we can use for now. Eventually, we hope for more dialogue.

Here are a few highlights from the consultation findings.

To start with, Alicia assures us that organizations fall on a continuum between being racially equitable and inclusive and being inequitable and exclusive. Organizations are not good or bad, but all have areas of strength and areas with potential for improvement. It’s a long journey to shed white supremacy and become a multicultural organization and she outlines many of our organizational aspects that could use attention. While we believe that Holy Trinity has many practices that reflect our strong commitment to racial equity and inclusion, the highlights below focus more on where we can improve.

- Alicia encourages us to develop a clearer vision of what we want to look like as a racially just organization. Equity and inclusion are clearly not embedded in all aspects of congregational life and we need that vision and goals to guide us.
- While we pride ourselves in being a “welcoming” congregation we also send signals to others to “fit in” with norms of our mostly Northern European heritage and white culture.
- As a congregation we have huge passion and knowledge about racism, but we are less skilled with action and “walking the talk.”

- When we see racial biases and conflicts we have difficulty speaking out. There is a “don’t rock the boat” cultural norm.
- As an organization, we tend to “check the box” with our gains in diversity and our work to dismantle racism rather than make substantial changes in areas with disparities.
- Youth are disconnected with racial justice work at HT, but are closely watching adults and how they act.
- We need a clear strategy to address gaps in organizational equity and inclusion and have ways to measure our success in addressing them.

What comes next? We can share with you that Church Council members reviewed Alicia’s preliminary findings and discussed them with her at their April 27th meeting. They agreed that: 1. There are levels of institutional racism within HT practices, policies and culture and 2. That changes should be made within HT to dismantle practices, policies and culture that support racism. Their response is a good start! Action plans to address gaps in equity and inclusion are just starting to develop.

This is a small portion of Alicia’s findings and details are in her full report that is posted on the Holy Trinity website for members only. Your feedback and responses are welcome. You can contact any members of the Racial Justice Group listed below.

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