

Some questions and answers concerning this special Parish Post and message to the parishioners of Holy Trinity:

SIMPLY PUT, WHAT IS THIS?

With this Parish Post your Vestry is announcing a new attitude and a new commitment to achieving racial healing and justice, in and as an inseparable part of a transformed and authentic Christian life.

WHY NOW?

As Senior Warden Bill Drake notes in introductory remarks, the year 2020 has brought many challenges to our church, state, and nation, including turbulent politics and a terrible pandemic. Amidst these challenges, social unrest to a degree unseen since the 1960s has risen up across the land. We are at a pivotal time in our history: the pandemic has made everyone more conscious of our shared problems; in particular, as we have witnessed instance after instance of naked racial injustice, we have been moved to a reckoning with its root causes. This convergence of historical forces has led the 2020 Vestry of Holy Trinity Episcopal Church to answer the call to speak out and act to end the embedded racism that underlies this violence.

The resulting document, entitled A STATEMENT OF ACKNOWLEDGMENT, APOLOGY, AND COMMITMENT BY THE VESTRY OF HOLY TRINITY EPISCOPAL CHURCH, has been sent to all parishioners in a special Parish Post, together with relevant messages from clergy and laity.

The statement is the distillation of many meetings spent hashing out language, purposes, the proper channeling of remorse, and the desire for forgiveness and healing. It is a call to action to find a way to curb the racism that exists within us individually and corporately. To effect positive change, we must fully understand ourselves and our current behavior, especially noting our collective history. Jesus set the example for how we are to love one another. But how do we translate this Christianity that Jesus demonstrated so clearly? How do we transcend and leave behind racism, how do we avoid the inadequacy of non-racism: how do we become an antiracist Church?

IN 2006 The Episcopal Church of which Holy Trinity is a constituent parish adopted at national convention a formal apology for the great sin of the enslavement of black people and for the receipt of benefits, direct and indirect, which the Church and its members received from slavery. In the last few years your North Carolina diocese, along with diocesan leadership across the country, has undertaken programs to understand and to heal the damages to our African American brothers and sisters that slavery and post-slavery discrimination has caused. Holy Trinity has of course been a part of this, as a constituent Parish, but has not directly participated in these initiatives.

Black Americans and many white Americans have long decried the violence directed at African Americans by authority. The uptick of such violence in the last several years, in what was proclaimed a decade ago as a “post-racial America,” and culminating in the brutal killings this year of George Floyd and others, have shown that we as a country and we as a Christian Parish in that country have a long way yet to go in healing this terrible legacy. With this in mind, your Vestry unanimously joined in both condemning past and continued effects of sinful discrimination, based on a division of God’s children into different groups of unequal empowerment, in what is supposed to be a country of equal rights and a Christian fellowship of persons equal before God.

WHY “ANTIRACISM”?

In addition to acknowledging and apologizing for the sin of past discrimination, your Vestry understands and in this statement acts – as we are commanded to act – to repent, by as Saint Paul says not conforming to the world but transforming ourselves by the renewing of our minds and hearts, and to look to a different future. “Antiracism” is the course that the national Church and your diocese have adopted, and which in this statement the Vestry adopts for Holy Trinity.

“Antiracism” is the adoption of attitudes and structures that move a people and a Parish permanently out of racism – namely, any and all such attitudes and structures that group people invidiously on the basis of color or ethnicity (“race”). Some have questioned this negative sounding term and suggested that “non-racism” is sufficient. The Vestry’s statement is based on the thought that “non-racism” is no more sufficient than “non-evil.” The Christian life is premised on peace and goodwill. It cannot countenance evil. Therefore, the only truly Christian approach to the evil of racism is antiracism.

WHAT’S NEXT?

The Vestry’s statement anticipates and commends to parishioners a period of discernment, so that we together as a Parish can decide what Holy Trinity is called to do in order to achieve the status and the reality of an antiracist Church. Insightful statements from laity and clergy, including the announcement of an initial book reading as part of discernment, are presented with the Statement. More messages, and meetings of minds and souls, will follow. As an essential part of our discernment together – what Holy Trinity has done or not done to fight racism, and what Holy Trinity can do to achieve antiracism -- the Vestry asks at this time for your thoughts and your prayers for the Parish, and in the coming days for your prayerful commitment to this transformation.