Toward Becoming a Racial Justice Church

Do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with your God.

Micah 6:8

Abbreviated Recap of Phase I: LEARNERS in a community of mutual accountability studying the historic and continuing impact of white privilege and slavery on racism:

- Last Summer we prepared for the launch of our Racial Justice Journey by reading Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye* and Ta-Nehisi Coates’s *Between the World and Me*.
- Throughout the fall we viewed of Dr. Henry L. Gates 6-part film series, *The African Americans: Many Rivers to Cross* and engaged in small group discussions of the 400-year history.
- With the guidance of Racial Justice Steering Committee (RJSC) member, Donna Reade, we provided the NHCUCC bibliography for racial justice and added our own recommendations weekly.
- In November we sponsored Reverend Reneé Rouse who spoke on *NH African American History*. This program was open to the greater community, a practice that continued throughout our winter and spring programs.
- Five members of our RJSC shared their own racial justice insights during the Sunday Service.
- Many other opportunities for integrating social and/or racial justice were provided by the liturgy, music, and Christian Education.
- Additionally, with the support of Eunice Jadlocki the church website has a Racial Justice tab that takes the viewer to our extensive resources, newsletter RJ column and resources sponsored by the NHCUCC.
Abbreviated Recap Phase II INTERRUPTERS of the continued cycle of racism with a focus on current events.

Based on a survey sent to all church members and our collective assessment of Phase I, the RJSC identified three different timely topics that would take us deeper into our racial justice awareness and understanding:

In January: Perspectives & Reflections on Prison Ministry & Racial Justice in our Systems of Incarceration with two interactive presentations

- Cheryl Dean, Chaplain of the New London Hospital and Alice Roberts, Chaplain of The New Hampshire State Prison for Women
- Reverend Russ Gates, Chaplain at the maximum-security men's prison, State Correctional Institution Graterford/Phoenix in PA., and Termaine Joseph Hicks, recently found innocent of his accused crime and released from prison.
  Recommended viewing and reading: Thirteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution  Ten Years After “The New Jim Crow”

In February: Immigration: Public Policy to Local Advocacy

- Dr. Stephanie Diehlmann, Founder, The Well Health Center, Cactus, Tx
- Eva Castillo, Director of New Hampshire Alliance of Immigrants and Refugees

Extensive viewing and reading resources were provided on our website each month.

In March: Education: Systemic Perspectives & Spotlight on Youth

- Student Stories and Perspectives on Racial Justice in Education: Alex Marquez and Rebecca Fletcher
- Education: Courageous Conversation with a Native Educator: John Around Him

Engaging Church Committees: The NHCUCC Racial Justice process recommends that each church consider completing within teams, Welcoming Diversity: An Inventory for Congregations. The RJSC responded to this inventory and Reverend Marean facilitated its completion as part of the formation of each new church committee for 2021 as well as with other church leaders and members.

February was Black History Month and extensive educational resources were available through many sources. Those posted on the NHCUCC and many others were shared on the racial justice web site.

The NHCUCC Racial Justice Mission Group sponsored a three-hour workshop on 2/20, White Nationalism, Contemporary Racism, and the Christian Church. Our members were encouraged to attend: Youtube

Lenten Readings and Bible Study complement our racial justice journey.
Phase III Becoming ALLIES with People of Color in challenging race-based injustice in the areas of criminal justice, environmental degradation, economic deprivation, and exclusion from full participation.

Faith-based Focus
Based on informal feedback from participants of Phase I & II and the RJSC’s assessment of our journey, it was clear that it was time to slow down and provide time for the processing of this extensive experience of listening, learning, and experiencing. It is also a time to be mindful of how we together move forward in sync with becoming a racial justice church. So, we approached Phase III, Becoming Allies, with a plan that allowed us to look homeward and inward, to look to the implications of our work for the church, for our faith. And, to take time to reflect on what we have learned and the implications for our own individual journey.

Shared Leadership Focus
It is also a time to be mindful of how we together move forward in sync with becoming a racial justice church. It is time to be deliberate about bringing this work to the center of our church organization by aligning it with our current church mission and practices. The role of the RJSC will shift to one of facilitating this process of integration; helping us find synergies with the structures we already have and what we already do. Increased conversations with church leadership and members will help us also figure out what we may want to do differently or anew; always keeping in mind that as a small and vital church we want to be supportive and reasonable with our expectations. To this end, we will be setting up individual and small group discussions with our members and various committees throughout the spring and into the fall.

Goals for this transition to Becoming Allies:

- Emphasis on Becoming.
- Focus on spiritual foundation - Keep God in the equation
- Explore complex self-identity - who we are is changing over time throughout the journey.
- Increase comfort levels with our learning; deepen level of learning.
- Create a more inclusive lens - as individuals and as congregation, increase awareness and develop critical lens regarding issues of racial justice.
- Awaken - increase our consciousness as racial justice revolution moves forward.
- Integrate and infuse our learning with our church’s practices; keep us awake, help us each own the work.

Our programming throughout the spring was designed to help us work toward these goals of increased spiritual identity and consciousness raising about our own personal identities.

In April, we sponsored two programs:
• And Interactive Presentation & Discussion with Renee Rouse and Bonita Betters-Reed, “Becoming Allies: Shifting our Lens.”
• A Collective viewing of Mark Charles TedTalk, *We the People: the three most misunderstood words in US History.*

**In May** we also sponsored two programs:
• A virtual author presentation with Drs. Marlene Fine and Fern Johnson on their new book *Let’s Talk Race: A Guide for White People* co-sponsored with Morgan Hill Bookstore
• A workshop co-sponsored with the Wilmot Public Library, *But I Don’t Feel White.*

Additionally, Rev. Marean specifically addressed the celebration of Juneteenth in the church newsletter before the 19th and during the service Nancy helped the entire congregation better understand the importance of Juneteenth through the Children’s Moment; Will coordinated special music as well.

While Rev. Sara Marean was on sabbatical this past summer, we were blessed to have Reverend Dr. Dawn Berry join the RJSC and guide our community through summer services informed by her racial justice expertise and insight. Rev. Berry also joined us throughout the summer book discussions of *His Truth Is Marching On: John Lewis & the Power of Hope* by J. Meacham which were held three alternating Sundays after church beginning July 18.

In August we reconvened with Rev. Marean and met with the Parish Committee to share our fall calendar and to reiterate our collaborative goals.

**Sept. 10** we held a second workshop with the Wilmot Public Library, based on the book, *Let’s Talk Race,* “Understanding Unconscious Bias.” 30 members of both our wider and church communities attended!

**Plan for Fall 2021 – Creating our Racial Justice Covenant**

Having laid a firm foundation in our spring and summer work, we are now ready to formally consider becoming a Racial Justice Church. Our planned activities are:

**October:**

10th The first of two workshops will be held after church, *Our Calling as a Church.* This workshop will provide a summary of our RJ journey and then provide time for us to discuss our key takeaways, reflect on our lessons learned, and begin to shape our racial justice covenant.

Christian Education acknowledges Indigenous People’s Day, *Learning from Our Mistakes;*
17th Christian Education program will complement our RJ journey, What *Does Racial Justice Mean to Me?*  
We will sponsor a private guided tour of the Black Heritage Trail in Portsmouth. Complete information is in the newsletter – space is limited for the tour.

**November**

7th Our second workshop will be held after church, *Toward Covenanting.* Those who attend will have the opportunity to further help shape our racial justice covenant.

16th The Racial Justice Committee will present a draft of our covenant to the Parish Committee for continued input and discussion.

**December**

5th Communion Sunday - We will also incorporate time to share our proposed Racial Justice Covenant.  
The children’s input gathered throughout the fall, will be an explicit part of this proposal and our discussion will be intergenerational.

Adoption of our covenant will be a consensus process.

**Next Steps after covenant**

Throughout the fall and into the winter of 2022, we will continue to explore other racial justice opportunities and programs such as a guided bible study, connection to a Black Church, guest preacher, and African drumming program. We welcome your thoughts and participation. And again, offer the following questions for your continued reflection:

- How might we incorporate racial justice into our lives?
- Where did this journey take us?
- Do we see, feel, and hear differently now?
- Have we brought change to our hearts?
- How do we bring issues to front and center and re-write the narratives moving forward?
- What future processes best help us own this work and move forward?
Racial Justice Outreach and Donations - Feeling that we wanted to thank our program presenters in a meaningful way, we decided that we would donate to an organization that is doing good work related to their topic:

- $150 donation to: Christian Aftercare Ministries in Manchester, NH in honor of Cheryl Dean and Alice Richards who participated in a Racial Justice program on incarceration.
- $150 donation to the Innocence Project of NYC in honor of exonerated inmate Termaine Hicks and Chaplain Russ Gates who participated in a Racial Justice conversation on incarceration.
- Cookies baked by Sunday School and mailed to Dismas Home in Manchester, NH for formerly incarcerated women, and to men in two halfway houses in Ohio.
- Shower of Love” collection. Sunday School students packed six large diaper bags overflowing with useful items donated for new moms and babies in their Zoom session on Sunday morning.
- In honor of Eva Castillo sharing her time and expertise with us, a $250 donation was made to the NH Conference UCC Bond and Support Fund was made.
- Alex Marquez designated Mikva Challenge for a $100 donation in his honor. Mikva Challenge reaches out to under-resourced communities and schools to create a stronger, more inclusive democracy.
- Rebecca Fletcher’s $100 donation was sent to Black Girls Smile a nonprofit that aims to eliminate racial disparities by empowering young Black girls through mental health literacy programs, therapy scholarship funds and more.
- John Around Him’s $150 donation was designated for Thunder Valley CDC on the Pine Ridge Reservation in SD. This is a grassroots development organization that seeks to increase the community’s ability to flourish through housing, education and youth leadership, social enterprise and workforce development.