



2021 SOCIAL JUSTICE VESTRY MOTION: Committing Ourselves to Anti-Racism

The Social Justice Vestry Motion for 2021 is offered by the Bishop's Committee on Intercultural Ministry with the full support of the Social Justice & Advocacy Committee. The motion is as follows:

The parish of St. Olave's, Swansea acknowledges that Anti-Black racism exists in our society and in our national Church, and that it and all forms of racism against Black, Indigenous and other racialized people are a sin against God and against our neighbour. We commit ourselves to the recognition, dismantling, and elimination of Anti-Black and other forms of racism in our secular institutions, in our Church, and in ourselves, and to work for the full inclusion, participation and belongingness of Black, Indigenous and other racialized people in all sectors of our common life.

In light of this acknowledgment, and in keeping with this commitment, our parish undertakes to invite someone from a racialized community to speak on anti-racism, or to give an anti-racism workshop. 

St. Olave's Youth Group will present a video based on the background information provided by the Diocese of Toronto.

The vision of God's Kingdom is one where all races, tribes and nations are welcomed and made one in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:28), where barriers are broken down and all are full citizens of the household of God (Ephesians 2:17-21) and where all are invited to contribute the gifts and glory of their heritage (Revelation 21:26). Yet, as racialized members of our communities can attest, and as has been made painfully visible in the events of this past year, our society and even our Church fall far short of this goal.

Canadians, particularly those of European decent, may be tempted to look at racial tensions in the U.S. and congratulate ourselves that we live in a comparably diverse and tolerant society, but the experiences of racialized people in Canada do not bear out this assumption. A recent study by the Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC) has found that, although Black people make up less than 9% of the

population of Toronto, they are “grossly overrepresented” in cases of discretionary arrests for low-level offences, as well as in police use of force, including fatal shootings. Another report from the OHRC found that between 2013 and 2017, a Black person was nearly 20 times more likely than a white person to be fatally shot by police in Toronto.¹ Indigenous people make up only 5% of Canada’s population, but more than 30% of incarcerated individuals in Canada.² Several school boards in the GTA have faced inquiries into their systemic inequitable treatment of racialized students. These are all present realities within the most racially-diverse region of Canada.

Nor can we claim that our Church is free of racist attitudes and the systems that entrench and perpetuate them. Black clergy in our Diocese can attest not only to being racially profiled in shops but to encountering surprise and discomfort when people realize they are the senior cleric in charge. Nor does our leadership fully represent the ethnic and racial diversity of our Church. The first bishop of African descent in the Anglican Church of Canada, Bishop Peter Fenty, was only elected in 2013 – less than a decade ago. Nearly 30 years have elapsed since the Rev. Dr. Romney Moseley’s report “No Longer Strangers” was presented to General Synod, and many of its recommendations have yet to be implemented. We have a long way to go before we fulfil God’s vision of a people “from every language, tribe and nation” (Revelation 7:9) where all are fully welcome.

However, there are signs of positive change. In our Diocese, ethnic and linguistic-based congregations are centres of growth and vitality. Our recent ordinands and postulants represent a wider range of ethnic and racial backgrounds. Indigenous Anglicans in Canada are taking steady steps toward self-determination, while this past year has seen the formation of the group Black Anglicans of Canada, whose mission is to improve the participation, representation, empowerment and inclusion of Black people in lay and ordained leadership roles within the Anglican Church of Canada.

Our Diocese will be implementing anti-racism and anti-bias training for Diocesan staff and clergy starting in early 2021. An Anti-Racism/Anti-Bias Pod will be created to carry this work forward among volunteers and lay leaders and over the long term.

In his letter to the Diocese of July 17, 2020, Bishop Andrew wrote: “It is time to challenge and to question how structures shape our attitudes, beliefs, assumptions and bias. We must understand and confront white privilege, institutional and systemic racism that so many of us have been blind to for too long. And we must not be afraid to become agents of transformation. To dismantle racism in all of its forms takes commitment, community and faith in order to realize progress and change. It means becoming comfortable with being uncomfortable. It means taking a very long look in the mirror and understanding the part that we each play.”

Some of this work has already begun. Just as many Anglicans in our Diocese and beyond have committed themselves to education and action as part of the process of reconciliation with Indigenous peoples, Anglicans in our Diocese have started to examine their own attitudes, beliefs, assumptions, and bias. Virtual study groups have sprung up around books such as Robin diAngelo’s *White Fragility*, Desmond Cole’s *The Skin We’re In*, or the late Rev. Dr. James Cone’s *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*. Many signed up for the Black Anglicans of Canada’s summer roundtable series (still available on YouTube) and workshops on anti-racism at the Diocesan Outreach Conference.

In the September 2020 issue of *The Anglican*, the Rev. Canon Dr. Stephen Fields wrote: “The compassionate Church cannot be an observer on the sidelines, reluctant to judge the values by which racism is allowed to take root. It must be disposed to listening, open to being transformed by reality, and accountable for being contributory to the situation, where that is the case.” In the second part of his column, published in October 2020, Canon Fields discussed the parts we must all play – from the institutional to the individual level – to grapple with systemic racism and make our Church and our society a place of mutual healing. Let each member of our Church take up this work with intention and goodwill.

¹ <https://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2020/08/10/black-people-more-likely-to-be-arrested-charged-shot-and-killed-by-toronto-police-ontario-human-rights-commission-report-finds.html>¹_{SEP}

² <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-safety-canada/news/2020/01/indigenous-people-in-federal-custody-surpasses-30-correctional-investigator-issues-statement-and-challenge.html>