

On Thursday evening, August 25, Christ Church United Methodist's Anti-Racism Task Force held its first onsite gathering. Twenty people participated, including long-time Task Force members, others who were curious and interested, and representatives from collaborating organizations like Bread for the World and Racial Equity Council of the Greater Fort Lauderdale Chamber of Commerce. Even ahead of the official start of the meeting, the atmosphere was cordial and inviting as people greeted one another at various tables.

After welcoming the group and sharing opening remarks, Pastor Nathan led a fun ice-breaker activity. Then Pastor Nathan blessed the food and we enjoyed a time of fellowship, sharing in a delicious meal provided by Lenore Nolan-Ryan Catering, and amiable conversation.

After reviewing a covenant about respectful communication guidelines, Pastor Nathan posed several questions and focus topics. Each table discussed the topic for a specific length of time, sharing personal experiences and perspectives in the process. Once time was called, a representative from each table shared responses to the larger group. The first was the "WHY" behind the Task Force – why does it exist? The tables agreed that we are working to be anti-racist because of who God calls us to be and what God calls us to do as Christians, and we can best achieve this by working with people in our community, both within Christ Church and with others.

Additionally, we touched on how will we know we have accomplished our work – when people feel uncomfortable, when we are known as the church that works for social justice issues and stands up and takes action for relevant issues and causes, and when we look at the world through a new lens.

We also discovered topics around race where we want to learn more include sharing stories of people of color regarding challenges of daily living, sensitivity, microaggressions and their impact, learning about local history and different cultures in our area and what people value, as well as language and terms that may be perceived as derogatory or offensive to others.

Timely concerns tugging at our hearts include education, incarceration, violence, affordable housing, the racial wealth gap, voting, countering oppressive legislation, and transitioning to a multi-cultural worship experience.

We reviewed the three Pillars of the Anti-Racism Task Force (education, beloved community, and advocacy), what is on the horizon, and suggestions for future action.

Education – continuing book discussions. Two Zoom sessions are scheduled: One Man's Life and the Struggle for Racial Justice by Robert Samuels and Toluse Olorunnipa of the Washington Post on Thursday, September 22 at 7 pm, and Killers of the Flower Moon: The Osage Murders and the Birth of the FBI by David Grann on Wednesday, October 26 at 7 pm. Focusing on children to instill interest in learning about people who aren't like them. Banned books week. Tour of local black cemetery by historian to learn about notable pioneers.

Beloved Community – forming partnerships, building bridges across the racial divide, with other organizations, attending cultural activities and activities as a group, finding other faith-based anti-racism organizations to work together, building relationships with relevant secular groups.

Advocacy – with upcoming elections November 8, discussing which issues we should promote and stand behind, attending governmental meetings, and joining advisory committees.

The group agreed that they would like more onsite events, possibly including a monthly conversation time after Sunday worship.