

## Commission on Dismantling Racism

The Right Reverend Deon K. Johnson, Eleventh Bishop of the Diocese of Missouri

Submitted to the 185th Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of Missouri

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**Vision:** As people living out our Baptismal covenant, we see our diocese reconciled to God by challenging racism in ourselves and society.

**Mission:** To dismantle racism through relationship building, dialogue, education and action.

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### **Restructuring**

We began this year with an important transition in our leadership team. Kurt Greenbaum, after many years of dedicated service to the Dismantling Racism Commission, decided to step down from his role as co-convenor. Kurt grounded many of our programmatic and administrative duties. The leadership team decided to continue with three co-convenors rather than replace Kurt Greenbaum. The leadership of the three co-convenors (The Rev. Aaron Rogers, The Very Rev. Shug Goodlow, and Harrison Hagan Heil) was duly established and presented by Bishop Deon at the Absalom Jones Celebration in February.

The Dismantling Racism Commission also restructured its membership model. For years, the commission struggled to determine who made up the constitutive body of the commission. Restructuring the model allows the commission to have a more defined membership structure, clear defined roles for representatives, and a clear division of labor for the work of the commission.

In the new structure, the Commission on Dismantling Racism will be an 1- member commission of individuals appointed by the Bishop to serve either a 1 year term or two year term. Individuals are appointed to particular roles with three at-large members included in the delegation. The Commission will meet once every month every month as a commission to handle the business of the commission and will host one at-large meeting quarterly for any one to attend to fellowship and gain resources for their parish.

In addition to changing the membership structure, we changed the structure of our general meetings. Instead of every month, our general meetings became quarterly

events called Beloved Community Gatherings. These events were open all and focused on fellowship and equipping congregations.

### **Programmatic Year**

In January, despite, weather challenges, we were able to complete a 14-hour training for both clergy and lay. Weather conditions forced us to adjust our original schedule



and provide follow-up sessions both in person and online. The training included 4 new trainers for our curriculum and were able to complete the training for 14 individuals.

In February, we pulled off another wonderful Absalom Jones Celebration. St. Timothy's in Creve Coeur was the host congregation. This year the speaker was Bishop Eugene Sutton who provided not only a dazzling sermon, but an insightful discussion after the service. We improved our attendance from last year, hosting over 120 guests and continued our support of local, black-owned bookstore EyeSEEMe. We also provided an opportunity for individuals to support local ballot initiatives through MCU (Metropolitan Congregation's United).

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In March, the DRC hosted its first Beloved Community Gathering where our conversation focused on reparations. We brought in a speaker serving on St. Louis city's reparations commission. We then supported the Diocesan's Healing in the Heartland event through attendance and by tabling to advertise DRC's upcoming events and highlighting some of the work in our parishes.

In April, in concert with local partners, we brought popular speaker and author Cole Arthur Riley to town to speak at Christ Church Cathedral and to sign copies of her books *This here Flesh* and *Black Liturgies*. The author talked about her growing spirituality and the spirituality of young people of color. This event was in partnership with the office of Young Adult Ministry and had a phenomenal turn out.



Additionally, we hosted our yearly excursion this month which was a visit to the National Civil rights Museum in Memphis. We had 37 attendees, which included both adults and youth.



In August, the DRC helped the diocese commemorate the 10-year anniversary of the Ferguson Uprisings and the murder of Michael Brown. In partnership with Faith for Justice, we held a Public Vigil and Art Showcase at Stephen's and the Vine in Ferguson throughout the week and held an Evensong of Remembrance during Wednesday evening. The Public Vigil and Art

Showcase was covered by local and national media.

In September, we helped celebrate with the Emery Washington Convocation the Emery Washington Annual Celebration. Emery Washington was a critical partner in the founding of the Dismantling Racism Commission. The celebration both honored Emery Washington's legacy and provided us an opportunity to support convocation leadership while introducing the new structure of the commission.

In October and in partnership with Christ Church Cathedral, St. Timothy's Episcopal Church and the Office of the Bishop, the Dismantling Racism Commission will help bring The Rev. Peter Jarrett-Schell to the Episcopal Diocese of Missouri to discuss how churches can actively implement strategies to support, champion, and implement strategies around reparations.

In December, we will have our annual celebration. This year we will honor Kurt Greenbaum and his service as a co-convener of the Dismantling Racism Commission as well as Charlie and Katie Claigget for their work in co-chairing the dismantling racism committee at St. Peter's-Ladue.

### **Looking Forward**

Next year, we look forward to restarting the Episcopal Diocese of Missouri's Union of Black Episcopalian's Chapter, traveling to Montgomery, Alabama to see the Equal Justice Initiative's lynching memorial. Moving several of our training resources online and utilizing the ChurchNext platform to aid in delivery of timely and consequential training related to anti-racism, and continuing our support of the St. Louis Racial Equity Summit.

You can contact members of the co-convener team for the Commission on Dismantling Racism here:

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Respectfully submitted by,

The Rev. Aaron Rogers

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