

## **From Acorns, Oaks; From Justice, Joy**

By Tammerie Day

From my vantage point as an Alliance board member, working with the Annual Gathering planning team, I can see many threads being drawn together, a tapestry whose pattern none of us will fully see. But if the commitment to learning and being antiracist is a thread of light, the tapestry of the Alliance is shot through with that light, like the rising sun in our Carolina pines.

I have been watching this light gather for some years now. My own desire to be part of a community with a racial justice commitment drew me to the Alliance and its Racial Justice/Multicultural Community, under the leadership of Michael-Ray Matthews, Marie Onwubuariri and Cody Sanders. Another connection came when the Alliance staff invited me into conversation with them about what deeper antiracist identities could look like. Next was service on the board and antiracism training with Crossroads in 2018. I remember feeling both excitement and grief after that training: excitement because my fellow board members were espousing their own antiracist commitments and grief as I recognized I had been in this hopeful space before in other communities, only to see that hope fade when commitment failed.

Now, though, I am remembering an old saying: You could count the number of acorns from an oak. But only God knows how many oaks there are in an acorn.

A scattering of acorns over the years in the Alliance are beginning to produce a crop of oaks, growing stronger every year. Our revised covenant reflects our commitment to racial justice and wider welcome. The Alliance Board established a racial justice task force, led by Malu Fairley-Collins and April Baker, in which we did difficult and courageous work to envision ways we can and will live into our antiracist commitments. Aspects of that vision were given to implementation planning groups, and through the long months of the pandemic these many groups have done their work to further elaborate how we can live into our commitments to racial justice: in our board, in our committees, in our partnerships, in our Annual Gatherings. Small groups are continuing this work, drafting the policies that will shape our life together, as we hold ourselves accountable for racial justice.

I can see our commitment continuing to unfold in the offerings of workshops for this year's online Annual Gathering. You'll see the light of antiracism slanting through these workshops, illuminating various ways we are living into our vision of racial justice. Our speakers will offer words that challenge us, surprise us, and inspire us with new ways to live together.

How does it feel to you, I wonder? How has this year of a viral pandemic and racial reckoning unfolded for you? I am sure no matter who you are, and where you are, that grief and fear and loss have been part of the story of this year. I honor that you are living through and with this grief and fear and loss. Doing theological education in a hospital setting, I have had my own griefs, fears, losses.

And yet... and yet. I have also had the terrible opportunity this year to try to do justice. Terrible, because this year's burgeoning attention to racial oppression has been so long overdue, and came at such a high price, a price still being paid by our kin who are black, indigenous, and people of color. Opportunity, because I've been learning and working at

antiracism for nearly 25 years now, and this year has brought new teachers and conversations and working partners in the journey toward justice, and for that I am grateful.

Some years ago, in conversation with Alliance staff, I remember offering a paradoxical promise in the middle of a Zoom call. We had been talking about social location, white supremacy, the southern roots of the Alliance of Baptists. The faces of the staff were heavy with pondering, and I was inspired to try to encourage them. "If you undertake this journey," I said, "I make you a promise: there will be joy." Their eyes met mine through our computer screens.

Paula laughed, her beautiful and yet rueful smile illuminating her face. "Joy? I'm going to hold you to that!"

And she has. Paula and Carole and the staff and the board and so many of you have held both the pain and the promise of this journey, into which we all are called, that our working for justice may bring joy, that we all might live in that justice and that joy.

This calling is for all of us: it is life itself that calls us, love that wants to live among us, joy that wants to grow through justice in us. Come, let us find our way together, to this life, this love, this justice, this joy.



*Tammerie Day is a member of the Alliance of Baptists Board of Directors and also serves on the ACPE Board of Directors and Anti-Bias Task Group. Tammerie is an ACPE Certified Educator at UNC Hospitals and lives in Hillsborough, N.C. with her spouse, Mary Hill, and their dog Roadie.*