

Beginning the Conversation – Building a Racially Just Parish
Saturday, August 28, 2021 – 9:00 am PDT – Noon PDT
Location: Jubilee Hall, Our Lady of the Lake Parish or Zoom

Our Lady of the Lake (OLL) Parish, Seattle, WA, Pax Christi Northwest and the OLL Justice and Peace Committee sponsored an event on Saturday, August 28, 2021 – 9:00 am PDT – Noon PDT, titled “Beginning the Conversation – Building a Racially Just Parish.” Pax Christi USA National Council Chair, Mr. Isaac Chandler was the presenter.

The event was a combination of virtual via Zoom and in-person attendance at the Jubilee Hall at Our Lady of the Lake Parish. Forty-eight individuals participated via Zoom and over twenty were present in person. Individuals from parishes around Seattle participated in this event. Kendra Baker, Director of Faith Formation, Our Lady of the Lake Parish, managed the registration as well as live and virtual broadcast of this event.

Among the participants were representatives from Our Lady of the Lake, Seattle, WA, St Elizabeth Ann Seton in Bothell, WA, St Joseph, Holy Names Academy, St. Luke, St. Anne, Our Lady of Fatima, St. Matthew, St. Leo, St. Benedict, South Seattle - from CCS, St James Cathedral, Lady of Guadalupe Parish, Intercommunity Peace & Justice Center (IPJC), Our Lady of Assumption in Claremont, CA and St. Augustine Parish in Los Angeles, CA.

The session offered fellow parishioners and others an opportunity to learn about and discuss the evil of racism, as well as identify concrete ways we can build racial justice in our community life and the society around us. Presenting information on this topic was one of the recommendations made by parishioners who completed the “Open Wide Our Hearts” training earlier in 2021.

Father Tim Clark led the group in prayer and welcomed everyone. Deacon Denny Duffell, introduced Kendra Baker, Director, Faith Formation, Our Lady of the Lake who provided guidance to the in-person and virtual participants. Deacon Denny Duffell, Barbara McGrath, Janet Bester-Meredith, and Sister Iva Gregory read the five Pax Christi Northwest acknowledgements:

1. Commitment to follow the example of Jesus;
2. Acknowledge and honor Indigenous Peoples;
3. Acknowledge the legacy of slavery;
4. Acknowledge the role of the Catholic Church; and
5. Acknowledge and support Racial Justice.

Deacon Denny then introduced our guest speaker, Mr. Isaac Chandler, National Council Chair of Pax Christi, USA.

Mr. Chandler shared with us how he became active in the Catholic Church in the University of Florida Youth Group for People of Color. Through this group he participated in conferences that influenced his interest in Environmental issues, especially as they affect People of Color. Mr. Chandler has been involved with the Pax Christi Anti-Racism Team (PCART) since 2004. He explained the need for addressing institutional racism. Mr. Chandler’s involvement with Pax Christi Anti-Racism is how he practices his faith. He explained that racism, prejudice and bigotry, whether intentional or unintentional, are a misuse of power by individuals, systems and institutions. The reality of generational trauma continues to affect People of Color such that certain sports and career fields are viewed as unsafe. Local, state and national decisions of locations for toxic waste and air-polluting industries often result in

placement near communities of color. It is important to educate ourselves about the foundations and realities of systemic racism in order to actively address these issues.

The virtual and in-person participants were asked to meet in small groups to address these two questions:

1. What can we do to build a racially just parish?
2. What steps can we personally take to become Anti-racist?

After the ten groups (three in-person and seven virtual) met, several reported their suggestions and recommendations to everyone. The group comments from those who reported, and who did not have an opportunity to report due to time constraints, were compiled and totaled eighty items. These ideas were sorted into broad categories listed in alphabetical order below:

Education: 15
History: 4
Language: 2
Liturgy: 6
Listening: 2
Parish Actions: 33
Parish Newsletter: 2
Political Action: 3
Positive Behaviors: 11
Terminology: 2

The most frequently mentioned comments were in the category of Parish actions. Some of the ideas included to team up with a more diverse sister parish (or any congregation) to ask for help in becoming anti-racist (mentioned by four groups); Homilies that address racism (two groups); Book club, e.g., St. Joseph's and Holy Names Academy focused on themes of racism, history (two groups). The need for Parish and Archdiocese leadership support was a key focus area. Suggestions for Anti-racist team formation, Open Wide Our Hearts sessions, Jesuit's Zoom retreat on racism in SJ history along with displaying Black Lives Matter sign in front of the church were made. There was an interest in finding out what is being taught and what is not being taught in Faith Formation and Parish Schools regarding this topic.

The second area of great interest was in the category of Education, of ourselves, our Parish and school staff and our children to educate the next generation and keep the conversation going. The availability of many on-line education resources on this topic was noted.

The Positive behaviors category generated many ideas. Some of the comments included connecting, collaborating, and showing solidarity with parishes with more diversity (mentioned by three groups), supporting businesses owned by people of color, especially restaurants in north end, engaging in conversations with people of color, and working to change our mindset, move away from we/they to all of us. Less talk of "they" distinguished from "we" to build community.

In the area of Liturgy suggestions were made, such as, to hold a Liturgy of Atonement, holding a "walk with the other" event during Lent, a racially focused Mass, and an introductory statement before every liturgy to recognize the event takes place on the traditional lands of the

Duwamish people and in an area of Seattle from which Black, Indigenous and other people of color were excluded for over a century.

In the area of History, ideas generated included keeping recognition of the past before us to broaden our awareness, fostering a desire to clearly see the links of the past and present, looking into neighborhood covenants that traditionally excluded people of color to see if they still exist, and exposing and acknowledging our past complicity as racists so as not to make missteps as we welcome the “other.”

In the categories of Language, Listening and Terminology, comments included being aware of the impact of Liturgical language on people of color, e.g., servant, master, the importance of listening to those affected by racism first, listening to People of Color in our parish community regarding what we should do and what their needs are, and the need to define Terms during meetings, study and reflect on terminology so we are all on the same page.

Political action suggestions included becoming politically active to dismantle racist systems, paying attention to local issues – such as zoning, and advocating for Duwamish Tribal recognition.

In the category of Parish Newsletter, participants advised including information regarding racism once a month in weekly parish newsletter and asking parishioners who are people of color to share their experiences with racism – to write their stories.

Our Lady of the Lake, Seattle, WA, is scheduling monthly Anti-Racism meetings via Zoom beginning in September 2021 to keep the conversation going and to facilitate parishioner actions to move toward a more racially just parish.

The Recording of Mr. Isaac Chandler’s presentation and of the group reports from this session can be viewed at Our Lady of the Lake, Seattle, WA website, Get Involved, Justice and Peace Resources:

https://www.ollparishseattle.org/apps/pages/index.jsp?uREC_ID=1500231&type=d&pREC_ID=1965795