

As you know by now, our Black Lives Matter banner was brutally vandalized last month. Undeterred, we have already replaced and re-dedicated the banner and reaffirmed our support for Black Lives Matter. Those steps constitute a good and appropriate first response. And now, this Sunday, October 25, we are going to take another important step in learning how to be Anti-Racists. We are going to reflect collectively on this act of violence that targeted our Black members and friends.

After the worship service, in place of our usual Coffee Hour, we will break into racial affinity groups to discuss the import of this attack on our banner and our feelings about it. There will be separate groups based on your self-identification as BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and/or People of Color) or White. Then we will reconvene all together.

Why would we separate into racial affinity groups? It may seem counterintuitive to intentionally segregate ourselves when we're trying to become more inclusive, but this is a best practice in anti-racism efforts. BIPOC and white people will likely have experienced this attack in profoundly different ways because Black people were the clear target of the vandals' attack. Unfortunately, BIPOC recognize the threat only too well; however, this may be the closest first-hand experience our white members have had with racial violence and they may be struggling to understand how such a thing could even happen. BIPOC and white people will be processing different emotions, and we will be at different places on the learning continuum. Let's recognize that white naivete can unintentionally inflict pain on BIPOC, who have already been hurt time and again. We want to ensure that BIPOC are safe to deal with the anger and the pain of repeated racial trauma AND that white people are able to wrestle openly, vulnerably, and perhaps awkwardly with new insights into the pervasiveness of racism.

The goal of these separate racial affinity groups is to allow all of us to do our initial processing -- when we may be raw or confused -- with others who have a similar background so that we can be more grounded, clear, and thoughtful when we come back together.

In addition to being a new step in our Anti-Racism learning, this Sunday's discussion will be a new Zoom endeavor, too. We'll each be entering a second Zoom meeting after the service rather than being automatically placed into a breakout room. We'll explain the procedure as clearly as possible when the time comes, but if you are concerned that you might need some extra tech support to navigate this new online activity, feel free to reach out to Ingrid O'Brien Avery (ingridoavery@gmail.com). for some help prior to Sunday.

Be well. May you stay safe and strong.

Terri King and Michelle Wallace
on behalf of ARO (Mission Peak's Anti-Racism and Anti-Oppression Task Force)