

## A Pilgrimage Into History

In keeping with its mission to discover and share truth about racism in America, and to advocate racial healing and equity, the Facing Racism ministry at Christ Church, Ponte Vedra Beach, sponsored a pilgrimage to the Equal Justice Initiative (EJI.org) sites in Montgomery, Alabama. As people of faith, Facing Racism strives to create safe spaces for honest dialogue, abundant grace and generous love. Over Presidents Day Weekend 29 pilgrims embarked on a journey with us that was educational but, most importantly, an opportunity to grapple with unsettling American history in the context of our faith.

The group visited EJI's three legacy sites -- The Legacy Museum, The Memorial to Peace & Justice and Freedom Monument Sculpture Park.

While there was much history offered, unlike many museums, EJI's Legacy Museum is an emotional experience. Located on a site where Black people were forced to labor, this narrative museum uses interactive media, sculpture, videography and exhibits to immerse visitors in the sights and sounds of the slave trade, racial terror, the Jim Crow South and the world's largest prison system.

EJI's Memorial to Peace & Justice is a sacred space for truth-telling and reflection about racial terror in America. It tells the story of 4400 documented African American men, women and children who were hanged, burned alive, shot, drowned and beaten to death by white mobs between 1877 and 1950. Victims of racial terror lynching who have been memorialized include victims from Duval, St. Johns and Apalachee Counties, to name a few.

The new Freedom Monument Sculpture Park sits on 17 acres above the Alabama River. It uses contemporary artworks, first person narratives and historic artifacts to articulate slavery's gravity of loss while paying homage to the millions of Black and Native American people who somehow maintained their capacity to love and hope for freedom.

This pilgrimage was about more than education: it was an opportunity to grapple with unsettling American history in the context of our faith. At intervals over the three days, we processed our thoughts and feelings in facilitated dialogue circles. We prayed together. We worshipped at St. John's in downtown Montgomery. We invited the Holy into our spaces from the time we departed until we arrived back home.

Pilgrims included members of Christ Church, Ponte Vedra Beach; St. Francis-in-the-Field, Ponte Vedra; St. Peter's, Fernandina Beach; Holy Trinity, Gainesville; St. Johns Cathedral, Jacksonville; and Shiloh AME Zion Church, North Carolina.

In the learning of facts, in the processing of emotions, in a deeper dive into our faith, this group of pilgrims developed bonds with one another as well as a deeper bond with God.

[Learn more about Facing Racism at Christ Church, Ponte Vedra Beach.](#)

