

Final Report of the Task Force on the Legacy of Slavery to the 176th Convention of the Diocese of Chicago

A Call to Faithfulness; an Invitation to a Committed Journey

Final Report of the Task Force on the Legacy of Slavery

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Report to the 176th Annual Convention

Diocese of Chicago

November 22-23, 2013

Members of the Task Force:

Patricia Abrams
Lascelles Anderson
Alice Brown
The Rev. Shelley Forrester
John Larsen(deceased)
Gerri Outlaw
The Rev. Primitivo Racimo
Newland Smith
Jewel Tomlinson (deceased)

Introduction

Almost twenty years ago the House of Bishops issued a pastoral letter- The Sin of Racism- addressed to “all the baptized of the Episcopal Church.” In that letter, the bishops asserted that “the essence of racism is prejudice coupled with power,” and noted that “ the sin of racism is experienced daily in our society, in our church and its institutions, in the House of Bishops.” This pastoral letter also addressed the issue of white privilege, and concluded in the following language: “the rooting out of racism requires intentional and deliberate decisions, prompted and sustained by the grace of God.” In March 2006, the House of Bishops issued another pastoral letter, this time titled “The Sin of Racism: a Call to Covenant,” in which the bishops renewed their commitment to the 1994 pastoral letter and continued their commitment with the following words: “...with God's help (we) advocate for continued response to the sinful legacy of slavery...” Four months later, the 75th General Convention adopted A123: Slavery and Racial Reconciliation. This resolution called for every diocese to “collect and document during the next triennium detailed information in its community on: (a) the complicity of the Episcopal Church in the institution of slavery and in the subsequent history of segregation and discrimination; and (b) the economic benefits The Episcopal Church derived from the institution of slavery. The letter also called for a culminating Service of Repentance. The 2009 General Convention acted to extend this resolution through the triennium ending in 2015. In July 2010, as a follow-on to the 2009 Diocesan Convention Resolution F-172, Bishop Jeffrey D. Lee of Chicago invited the above identified individuals to accept membership on the Task Force for the Legacy of Slavery (TFLS) of the Diocese of Chicago. The TFLS convened for the first time on July 27, 2010, and has met monthly since that time.

Research Results

The major piece of new data gathering undertaken by the TFLS was the archival research of material pertaining to its charge. This research was conducted by Prof. Johari Jabir, Assistant Professor in African American Studies at the University of Illinois at Chicago. Jabir began his work on Jan. 1, 2012 and concluded his investigations on Jan.1, 2013.

The TFLS and its research consultant agreed on a convenient division of time-frames for organizing our archival study. They are as follows: (a) 1835-1870; (b) 1870-1960; (c)1960- 1980; (d) 1980 to the present. Key conclusions from investigating those periods are as follows:

(a) The period from 1835-1870 is characterized by a very visible pattern of silence on the part of the church with respect to the institution of slavery despite loud voices which were attempting to call attention to the horrors of the practice of both trading in black bodies and the inhumane and brutal conditions under which slaves had to live and work. What was invisible was the moral substantiality of the black body, made so by law and custom in a tragically racialized civic culture. Our own diocese was established in 1877, but the Diocese of Illinois, which was the precursor to our own, was established in 1835. Although a general understanding of slavery in the United States is that slavery was a peculiarly southern institution, the available evidence clearly shows that the North was deeply complicit in its support of the rapidly developing agricultural and industrial activities in the nation as a whole. Much of the banking support for southern agriculture and for the slaving activity associated with agricultural and industrial activity in the South was located in the North. Our conclusion is that a northern location could not have walled-off the church from the horrors occurring in the new nation, particularly given the very active opposition to slavery coming from slaves themselves in the form of major revolts and uprisings up to and including the time of the establishment of the Diocese of Illinois and that of our own Chicago Episcopal diocese.

(b) The period from 1870-1960 saw the development of a new language with which to characterize emerging black populations in the social landscape of developing Chicago. St. Thomas, a south-side congregation was identified in official documents as a “colored” congregation, and St. Ambrose was located on the west side of the city, beginning and underscoring the geographical locationing of the black population in the city. This condition and pattern have persisted even up to, and including, the present time, along with a language which has abetted and sustained this social distancing which has proven to be so divisive in an institution—the church—which should have been evidencing a wholly different set of social norms and behaviors. It appears that in the latter years of this period, the church began to address conditions developing in black communities through the establishment of charitable agencies such as boys homes and the like, but these were clearly marked for specific populations, and therefore, at core, were meant to stand for the church's work with “outside” populations, populations on the “margins” of social life in Chicago.

(c) The period from 1960 –1980 was a watershed moment for the nation as a whole, and it became so also for the Episcopal church, both nationally and locally. It was the period of the Civil Rights movement. To the credit of the local church, there was a strong push toward support for the burgeoning civil rights struggle although at the national level this was not clearly the case. There is a sense that that local positive attitude toward the movement changed drastically when the movement was taken over by a more radical, impatient, and younger population who, to their minds, saw very little being accomplished by the struggle for integration identified with Martin Luther King Jr. and his emphasis on integration and individual equality. At the same time, white flight was denuding local populations of more economically stable demographic groups, and suburban domicile for these new arrivals along with economic development and job creation were increasingly out of reach of the black populations who were still walled-off in their ghettoized locations, replete with few jobs, poor housing and even poorer schools.

(d) The 1980-onward period simply sedimented the social and ecclesial divisions in the life of the church which had begun to take place in earlier periods. Suburban populations, substantially removed from the diversity of urban life, and typically more conservative politically, could carry on their lives totally outside the space inhabited by a more diverse church population. No challenges to their life-styles could develop, and no dialogue could challenge their impoverished understandings of the world outside those protected enclaves. We continue to see, even more importantly, experience, the effects of this essential bifurcation of the church.

(e) This bifurcation, deeply felt and openly recognized, has forced the church hierarchy to recognize, over the years, and over and over again, this exceedingly undesirable state of affairs, and has forced it to take very vocal positions of the issue of racism and discrimination. But conversation has been difficult to accomplish, and remedying the underachievement of church unity among the people of God in the Chicago Episcopal Diocese has been an elusive goal. It is to the answer of another call to sever the very real, but so far quite unreachable barriers to a life-giving church unity, that the TFLS was called into service, on behalf of a church, experiencing the deep spiritual incompleteness of two churches parading as one, yet very hopeful that this time we may begin afresh, with the requisite intensity, in search of a united and profoundly intentional Christian community.

Other themes that shaped our discussions:

(a) There is little documentation in the archives of the Diocese of Illinois and the Diocese of Chicago regarding African American resistance to the legacy of slavery inside the church. Objections to the marginalized status of African Americans within the Episcopal Church show up clearly in the history of the Conference of Church Workers Among Colored People beginning in 1883. This could be another example of the distancing of then concerns of black Episcopalians noted earlier. Harold T. Lewis' *Yet with a Steady Beat* gives a detailed accounting of black resistance in the Episcopal Church.

(b) Although the Episcopal Church in the United States did not succeed in accomplishing the kind of sharp racial separation in church life that characterized church-life in the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa until the closing years of the twentieth century when the Belhar Confession (1986) disavowing that heresy was adopted, a serious attempt was made in 1883 by a group of southern churchmen, meeting at the University of the South to accomplish formal division in the Episcopal Church in the USA. That effort did not succeed, but dioceses in the South began a very systematic separation of the races. We found nothing in the records of our own church that spoke in any way to that issue. Was it ignorance of the circumstance (hardly possible) or denial? We could not pursue that question.

(c) Black resistance to their “othering” by a white national church over the years has been deep and sustained. Since in our own church we live almost separate congregational lives, for all practical purposes, we have not been able to use this important history to facilitate deep face-to-face encounters on the issues of race. Attempts to start discussions which could bring that history to life and give it contemporary relevance is often met with statements like the following: “There is no race here.” Creative means have to be found to break through this hostility to “conversation for learning.”

(d) We note, with deep concern, that a church that took its creedal statements with utter seriousness could not have been so utterly silent on the major social issue which, on the one hand, book-ended its formation, while on the other, decisively shaped the macro climate within which it has operated these many years. We would have liked to have investigated: (1) the use of black clergy and lay persons in the day-to-day ordinary business of the Diocese of Chicago in recent times; (2) the very likely economic connections the church could have had with the institution of slavery, and the way or ways in which it either just went along with developing patterns of discrimination that were the progeny of racialized slavery, or itself acted as an agent of that continued “othering” of a people of God; (3) possible disjunctions, if any, between how black and white Episcopalians worship that would account for the kind of sharp dichotomy we currently observe in the worship experiences between these two groups. Time and resources did not permit venturing into these, and other areas, and we regard this as work yet to be done.

We found it necessary however to reflect theologically on the task at hand, and to add this piece both here and in the body of our Final Report to the Diocese of Chicago.

(e) The Final Report of the TFLS lists some key pieces of research it regards as absolutely necessary. Specific recommendations are:

That each congregation in light of the findings of this Final Report, including its appendices, spend the following year in a series of conversations on the impact of the legacy of slavery, segregation and discrimination in its local context and toward the end of this period for each Deanery to meet for a day to receive and discuss reports from member congregations.

That each congregation in the Diocese conduct oral history projects. Interviews with members of congregations will shed light on the historical dynamics of a given congregation in terms of race and class. This would prove to be critical for churches whose racial demographics have changed in concert with social phenomenon such as “urban renewal.”

That the Diocese conduct oral history projects with persons who participated in the various social organizations within the Diocese. As these organizations have responded to the social dynamics of the society, it will help to explain how the Diocese engages social issues, and more importantly, how to sustain them.

That the Diocese conduct oral history projects on Latino/Hispanic and Asian American congregations/members of the Diocese who have been mentioned but not fully documented in official diocesan records. A fuller investigation into these congregations is important to the conversation on race. Interviews and ethnographies might help to move these persons from the margins of ministry to the center of the Diocese.

That the Diocese produce maps of the Diocese of Chicago and of its predecessor Diocese of Illinois in ten-year periods locating the congregations and the demographics by ethnicity of the areas covered by these dioceses.

That at the conclusion of this congregational based research and conversation, the Diocese as a whole embark on a period of truth telling.

What does our faith require?: An excerpt from the final report

As we search for the theological foregrounding of our work of reconciliation in a church that is struggling with the residues of slavery and the baggage of racism, we can do no better than recall the Trinitarian foundation of our faith, that faith to which we attest each time we come together to worship, especially so when we approach the table that is set for our communal sharing in the Eucharistic feast, that mystery that stands at one and the same time, in this world, at that moment, but also represents that unique, inexplicable coming together of the divine and the human. This is the profoundest exemplification of the nature of the sacrament, binding as it does, all God's children in one act of sharing one body and one blood. A Trinitarian God stands at the center of our life of faith together.

The concept of the Trinity was not always available to the church. It is important for us to remember that it was consciously forged against sundry heretical doctrines that sought to separate Jesus' humanity from his divinity, in a struggle that stretched over a long period in the life of the early church. At its core is a doctrine concerning the oneness of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, an understanding that does not speak of three persons, separated in any bodily or extrinsic way, but of one true God, who is at one and the same time: God, the Father - creator; God, the Son - redeemer; and God, the Holy Spirit - comforter, bound together in a seamless, love-infused relationality, whose evident quality is that of unity, what theologians call perichoresis. For us at this time, it is our most urgent task to recover and exemplify that unity in the life of the church, a unity which has been eroded not so much by ecclesial decision, but by the absence of a deeply self-conscious adherence to the abiding principles of that Trinitarian faith and its ethical implications as the processes of nation-building unfolded in all the major institutions of a developing America.

It is important for us to remember that this concept of the Trinitarian Godhead stands at the center of our liturgical life, as the basis on which we come together in our baptismal covenant- in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 5: 18-20).

A church that took seriously this perichoretic relationality could not have stood silently by as the brutalities that have been perpetrated by one group against another were unfolding in the broad daylight of the American experience of racial slavery and its progeny. That our church did not vigorously challenge these evils unfolding in its midst, and even now struggles with the disunity within itself that is the direct and indirect result of that sordid history, is the primary and inescapable reason for this present urgent call for truth-telling and change.

But the healing of itself is not the only reason for undertaking this effort. More importantly, if the church is true to its calling to be prophetic in a world riddled with injustices of one kind or another, it must in addition speak with conviction to the community outside its walls, and speak and act forcefully, with coherence, and with wisdom against all circumstances which undermine the sanctity of God's creation, especially those that support any essential, or induced, overlordship of one group or person over another.

The objective of our work is nothing short of a full-bodied push for the achievement of reconciliation and the embodiment of a spirit of forgiveness across the various domains of the life of the church, with a vow never again to let the lingering effects of the racialization of humanity contribute to any distancing between blacks and whites in the affairs of our church community. This implies also that as new groups become part of the church, we receive them joyfully and incorporate them without reserve as examples of the diverse richness of God's creative act. It is the under-achievement of unity in the presence of God, and enacted in His church, which for too long has been represented by a state of uneasy accommodation of two peoples in a condition riddled with suspicion, hurt, lack of trust, coupled with the inability to open-up to each other in robust conversation on the divisive issue of race which has given us a picture of an unreconciled relationship parading as family. We should be about the recovery of unity that comes from being children of a Trinitarian God, where differences are not elevated as some specific markers of substance, but alternatively seen as markers of a divinely ordered diversity that evidences the abundance of life as a gift from a Trinitarian God, freely, beautifully and bountifully given.

Conclusion

The primary impact of the legacy of slavery, segregation and discrimination in the Diocese of Chicago and its predecessor Diocese of Illinois as the result of white privilege has been the construction of an invisible wall of separation between the white members of the diocese and African Americans who sought "refuge in the Master's House." The House of Bishops in its 1994 Pastoral Letter, "The Sin of Racism," asks, "How can the church offer all people the 'supreme advantage of knowing Christ,' when too often it is itself a bastion of separation? How can the Episcopal Church, which reflects the dominant culture, be a factor in changing destructive racial attitudes and behaviors? Are we ready to find new common ground on which all may stand together? Will we trust the grace of God to enable us to bridge our many unhappy divisions." These "unhappy divisions" have been documented not only in the research conducted by Dr. Johari Jabir but also by the African American Clergy Focus Group and further work conducted by Task Force members. Dr. Jabir captured this wall of separation in the following four categorical timelines: 1) Silence and Invisibility: 1835-1870; 2) Acts of Agency, Seeking Refuge in the Master's House: 1870-1960; 3) An Active Social Theology in Conflict: A Church's Engagement with the Civil Rights Movement – Maintaining Institutional Segregation: 1960-1980; and 4) Race and the Change

in Congregational Profiles: 1980 – Present. Two of the themes that emerged during the African American Clergy Focus Group were the lack of power, influence and agency by African American clergy in the Diocese and racial division – White privilege. This invisible wall of separation is further documented in the Task Force’s Final Report in each of its sections from the theological to Church and Race in Historical Perspective: the Chicago Episcopal Diocese Experience, White privilege, silence and invisibility, Black Episcopalian responses to the expressions of silence and invisibility and the economics of the legacy of slavery.

**RESOLUTION F-172 (WITH AMENDMENTS) FROM THE 172ND ANNUAL CONVENTION
OF THE DIOCESE OF CHICAGO, NOVEMBER 20-21, 2009**

Subject: The Legacy of Slavery since 1835 in the Episcopal Church in Illinois

Sponsor: Derrick Dawson, on behalf of the Anti-Racism Commission
The Diocese of Chicago's Deputies to General Convention
The Peace and Justice Committee

RESOLUTION F-172

Resolved, that the 172nd Convention of the Diocese of Chicago affirm the action of the 75th General Convention of the Episcopal Church (2006) in Resolution A123, which declared that the institution of slavery in the United States was a sin and which called upon The Episcopal Church to acknowledge its history of participation in this sin, its legacy and the lasting injury which it has inflicted on our society and on the Church; and be it

Further Resolved, that this 172nd Convention mandate the creation of a task force on the complicity of the Diocese of Chicago and its predecessor, the Diocese of Illinois, in the institution of slavery and in the subsequent history of segregation and discrimination and the current practices of segregation and discrimination; and be it

Further Resolved, that at the end of the Task Force's research phase, the Diocese of Chicago use the information gathered by the Task Force "as the foundation for truth telling", and when necessary, "confession, apology, forgiveness, repentance and reconciliation" and the restoration of true communion between the members of the church, and that of the church of God. (General Convention 2009 Res. A143: Reconciliation: Extension of General Convention 2006 Res. A123 to General Convention 2012); and be it

Further Resolved, that the Task Force submit reports on its work to the 2010, 2011, and 2012 Diocesan Conventions and that the Diocese of Chicago report its results of this work to the 77th General Convention (2012); and be it

Further Resolved, that the Diocese of Chicago use these reports to further its work in becoming an anti-racist institution.

Further Resolved, Any expenditures under this resolution must receive prior approval of Diocesan Council.

EXPLANATION

The 2006 General Convention resolution, A123, "Slavery and Racial Reconciliation," called for every diocese "to collect and document during the next triennium detailed information in its community on (a) the complicity of The Episcopal Church in the institution of slavery and in the subsequent history of segregation and discrimination and (b) the economic benefits The Episcopal Church derived from the institution of slavery," and "to hold a Service of Repentance." The 2009 General Convention acted to extend this resolution through the triennium ending in 2015. On the evening of July 9 at this year's General Convention, at a forum entitled, "A123 and A127: Facing Our Past to Shape Our Future," Deputies, Bishops and guests heard progress reports from the

following four dioceses that had begun to implement A123 -- Maryland, Mississippi, New York and North Carolina. Bonnie Anderson, the President of the House of Deputies, in her remarks said the Church still participates in “voluntary amnesia to pain and oppression.” The work called for in A123 is, she said, “both an academic exercise and an exercise of the heart.” Dan Perry, one of the descendants of the James DeWolf family, and his wife, Constance, who were resources for the legislative committee that considered the resolutions on anti-racism, talked about their work in presenting screenings of the DVD, “Traces of the Trade,” at diocesan conventions as a means of assisting dioceses in implementing A123. They stressed the need for dioceses, especially in the North, to document the complicity of The Episcopal Church not only in the institution of slavery but also in the subsequent history of segregation and discrimination. The staff of the Archives of The Episcopal Church, as part of its online exhibit, “The Church Awakens: African Americans and the Struggle for Justice,” have included the resource, “Consulting the Past Through the Archival Record: A Guide for Episcopal Church Research into the Impact of Slavery on Church Life and African Americans.” The final section, “The Legacies of Segregation and Discrimination,” poses five questions “to allow researchers to reflect on the legacy of segregation and discrimination in their own diocese and parish.” One of these questions reads as follows, “Were African American parishes treated differently from other parishes within your diocese? Were these congregations maintained as missions longer than was typical for your diocese?”

Ed Rodman in his “Open Letter to Various Leaders in The Episcopal Church on the Evolving Implementation of the 2006 General Convention Resolution A123,” chastised the Church for the litany which was used at the Service of Repentance at the African Episcopal Church of St. Thomas, Philadelphia, which was “neither historically correct nor appropriately structured to acknowledge that one group of people was apologizing to another group of people who for all of the history of slavery and most of the history of the Episcopal Church have been separate and unequal.” Ed Rodman then quotes Maya Angelou, “History with all of its wrenching pain cannot be un-lived, but if faced with courage need not be lived again.” As the Diocese of Chicago enters into this work of breaking through the clouds of historical amnesia, may one result of this work be that its history of segregation and discrimination “not be lived again.”

In order to implement this resolution the sponsors suggest that the Bishop appoint the task force as mandated by this Convention to consist of ten to twelve persons equally divided between persons of color and white persons, all of whom would serve initial three year terms. The Task Force would identify Chicago area scholars, historians and researchers who under the direction of the Task Force would conduct the needed research. The Task Force would use the documentation unearthed by the team of scholars, historians and researchers as the basis for its annual reports to the next three Diocesan Conventions. The Task Force would also be involved in working closely with the Diocese regarding truth telling activities and any other activities or processes deemed necessary.

Adoption of this resolution could require modest expenditures, such as for research assistance from graduate students. The precise amount of such expenditures cannot be ascertained at this time.