

Boston Avenue United Methodist Church JUSTICE AND RECONCILIATION INITIATIVE

In Dr. Walter Brueggemann's devotion, entitled *On the Road Again*, he writes that as followers of Jesus Christ we "...must also travel beyond safe places to the gifted end that God intends, hopefully to be blessed and a blessing on the way. And if we ponder our destination, perhaps it is to be to the neighborhood of shalom, the neighborhood of shared resources, of inclusive politics, of random acts of hospitality and intentional acts of justice, of fearless neighborliness...". Brueggemann concludes by writing, "Self-giving God, call us to walk the road of newness – a new self, a new society, a new world, one neighbor at a time."

"I lift up my eyes to the hills. From whence does my help come? My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth." Psalm 121:1-2

CHARGE: Boston Avenue Church defines itself based on seven core values, one of which "affirms (that) everyone is a beloved child of God," another saying the church "nurtures our congregation to be ambassadors for reconciliation" and a third that reminds us that "spiritual growth [is] a lifelong journey."

With these three core values in mind, it is proposed that the Administrative Board establish a "Justice and Reconciliation Initiative". The Initiative aims to promote continuous growth toward becoming a more inclusive congregation by way of actionable objectives (see below) that evolve us, individually and collectively, toward discernment of what is meant by ambassadors for reconciliation in this body of Christ and, then, to practices which help us live out our core values.

In this year of the 100th anniversary of the Tulsa Race Massacre, the Administrative Board is asked to first charge the Initiative to focus on the historic and present day racial and ethnic inequities which may exist within and outside of the church. The Initiative is called on to recommend and facilitate actions which foster racial reconciliation and bring forth justice and repair for any harm done by the church based on past or present deeds. At a future date, the Initiative can turn its focus on additional marginalized groups of God's children who also suffer discrimination based on characteristics such as sexual orientation, economic status, age or physical or mental disabilities and particularly as these distinctions intersect with race or each other.

STRUCTURE: It is proposed that the Initiative exist as the loom within the church which weaves together the fabric of work done by committees and other groups in a shared purpose of affirming everyone is a beloved child of God. The Initiative would be led by a team of individuals who represent not only these groups but also others who bring expertise and resources to the interest. It is suggested that the Vice Chair of the Administrative Board serve as the Board's proxy on the team, and function as the convener of the Initiative's leadership team. It is expected that actions relating to the Initiative will largely be carried out by the existing committees and work areas within the church as they are defined by *The United Methodist Book of Discipline*. From time to time, the Initiative's team may also undertake

activities which are outside of the scope of an existing church group or involves coordination of multiple groups in the church's organization.

ACTIONS: It is anticipated that actions facilitated by the Initiative will fall into several major categories.

- **Acts of Discovery** (*"How can you say to your neighbor, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' while the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor's eye."* Matthew 7:4-5): Sincere and profound recognition of the role played by oneself and the church in creating or contributing to unwarranted bias toward another human being or population of God's children, and the injustices done based on racism and bigotry; recognition of the works done by oneself and the church which embraces equality and repairs injustices and harm done to others based on perceived inequalities.
- **Acts of Reconciliation** (*"But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, 'And who is my neighbor?'"* Luke 10:29): Rectifying and realigning with God's will as discerned through the teaching of Jesus Christ by educational programs, actions, and practices which strengthen human relations with those who are different from ourselves and represent populations which have been the targets of racism and bigotry.
- **Acts of Justice** (*"He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?"* Micah 6:8) Actively seeking and contributing toward righteousness and equity; creating actions, engaging with other groups outside of the church in practices that uphold justice and repair harm done not only by us but by our community as a whole.
- **Acts of Ascension** (*Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own...this one thing I do...I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus."* Philippians 4:12-14) Commitment to and assessment of systemic changes within the church and personal growth that fosters evolution toward a truly inclusive congregation that works for justice for all God's people, all the time, in the name of Christ.

PROPOSAL WORKGROUP: Amanda Chastang; Belynda Clanton; Ramona Curtis; Moises Echeverria; Paula Gradney-Garner; Sara Pugh-Montgomery; Anne Walker; Richard Wansley; David Wiggs

Justice & Reconciliation Initiative

Task Force:

Richard Wansley – Vice-Chair Administrative Board/Lay Delegate

David Wiggs- Senior Pastor

Sara Pugh-Montgomery - Associate Pastor

Paula Gradney Garner – Director of Weekday School & Young Children

Ramona Curtis – Administrative Board Class of 2022/Church & Society

Amanda Chastang – Ex-Officio Voting Member/Young Adult Council

Anne Walker – Work Area on Church & Society

Moises Echeverria – Administrative Board Member Class of 2023/Communications Committee

Belynda Clanton – Director of Welcoming/Assistant to Sr. Pastor

Church Leadership Review Committee:

Beverly Smith – Board Chair/Trustees

Scott Morgan – Lay Leader

Shari Goodwin – Staff Parish Relations/Lay Delegate/Chief Historian

Ron Turner – UMM President

Sheila Baker – UMW President

Laura Williams – Co-Chair Work Area on Missions

Becky Collins – Ex-Officio Voting Member/Metrics Review Board

Jennifer Kay – Co-Chair Church & Society

Matt Christian – Co-Chair Church & Society

Judy Rowell- Sunday School Superintendent/Church & Society/Interfaith Concerns

Meredith Wansley – Ex-Officio Voting Member/TMM Representative

Acts of Discovery

BCG Lecture series 2018/2020

Multiple Holy Conversation series on Race; including one for parents to learn how better to discuss racism with their children

Many studies/book clubs related to race

Movies Worth Talking About series

100 Days Toward Racial Reconciliation and Justice, 2021

Searching of BA archives for info from 1921

Personal work on family history in regard to race

Personal devotional reflections on race

UMW special programs, e.g., human trafficking; school to prison pipeline)

Library display and book lists/resources for all ages

Acts of Reconciliation

MLK, Jr Holiday participation

Partner Conversations/Worship/Choirs with Vernon AME

BCG follow up study on *White Too Long*

Interfaith *Open Tables* dinners/programs

Partnership with Oklahoma Center for Community & Justice, e.g., Interfaith Triologue Series

Partnership with Tulsa Metropolitan Ministry

Partnership with other churches for Project Transformation (summer reading program, most recently with Metropolitan Baptist Church)

Remember & Rise Events

John Hope Franklin Annual Symposium

Solidarity and participation in events with Black, Indigenous & people of color

Lament worship experiences at BA & Vernon AME

Celebrate Black History Month

Acts of Justice

Smiles of Faith Dental Clinic plans (in partnership with majority black churches)

BA gift to Vernon AME for their Building Campaign

Serving in Vernon's "God Provides" food ministry

Anytime we are serving the underserved in society, e.g., Sistema Tulsa afterschool program, Compassion Dinner and Worship, Family Promise, Burroughs Elementary partnership

Hiring outstanding ethnic minorities at BA

Expanding partnerships with Black, Indigenous, People of Color, especially initiatives from the Oklahoma UM Conference and UMC's doing this work

Acts of Ascension

Devotions on growing in these areas

Justice and Reconciliation Initiative

Current & Future Mission trips

Working toward a more effective welcome of ethnic minorities in our church/worship/SS and on our staff/clergy appointments

Scholarships for ethnic minority students

Future repair and healing ministries

Trip to the Southern U.S. focused on race relations