



Executive Summary

From 2018 to 2020, the Racial Justice Audit of Episcopal Leadership surveyed and interviewed more than 1,300 members of the church's key leadership bodies about their experiences of racism, racial identity, and power in the life of the church. Conducted by The Mission Institute in partnership with the Episcopal Church's Racial Reconciliation and Justice Team, the audit and resulting report offer data, stories, major patterns and themes, recommendations, and reflection tools designed to help the church to truly become beloved community.

Background and Historical Context

In 2018 The Episcopal Church contracted with the Mission Institute to complete a racial justice audit of church leadership, in response to General Convention resolutions and to the first discipline of the Becoming Beloved Community framework: Telling the Truth about the Church and Race.¹

The audit is part of a long history of Episcopal racial justice work. Since the church's founding, Episcopalians of Color have in one way or another struggled to have the institution and its leaders recognize their dignity, power, and gifts. Especially since the 1950s, General Convention has passed resolutions specifically addressing racism in and beyond The Episcopal Church, accompanied by numerous pastoral letters, trainings, and programs by church leaders and groups.

Historically, the church has focused on education, representation, and eradication, with comparatively less emphasis on comprehensive efforts that address institutional structure and power.² It is essential for future work to incorporate a systematic, non-linear approach addressing culture, policy, decision-making, finance, education, liturgy, etc. The Beloved Community labyrinth and long-term vision are important steps, as is the commitment to ongoing audit and truth-telling.

Process

This project has not aimed to determine whether or not systemic racism is present in the church, but rather to explore how it operates. Two questions have been central to this research:

1. Who comprises the leadership of The Episcopal Church?
2. What is their experience of race and racism in their leadership roles?

With those questions in mind, research has focused on the church's major leadership bodies: the House of Bishops, the House of Deputies, the Executive Council, the Episcopal Church Center/churchwide staff; and diocesan leaders (staff, Diocesan Council, Standing Committee, Commission on Ministry, Trustees, or equivalent bodies) from a representative sample of 28 dioceses from nine provinces.

¹ episcopalchurch.org/files/becoming_beloved_community_vision_english_0.pdf; episcopalchurch.org/beloved-community

² An exception: the General Convention Special Program, a major healing, justice, and financial reparations effort from 1967 to 1970s.

Members of these major leadership bodies were sent a survey focused on demographic and experiential data related to racism. A self-selected sampling of respondents participated in in-depth interviews about their experiences. We collected survey data from 1,326 church leaders and interviewed 64 of them.

Theological Reflection

We are not alone in this work. We have ancestors, traditions, stories, rituals, sacraments, and an enfleshed God made known in Jesus. And we have our collective hope. As theologian Emilie Townes writes, “Hope is forged out of the biblical call to dig deep into our innards to tell the truth of what we see, feel, hear, and experience. And it reminds us that we must always show up in the face of relentless evil, particularly in such times when it appears so normal and natural in our midst.”¹

Hope is complicated. Especially in white dominant spaces, hope is often used to soothe weary souls, to escape painful realities, and to pacify truth tellers and prophets. Yet, hope is also essential to our transformation and resilience and our trust in God’s faithfulness. This paradoxical hope grounds our continued commitment toward becoming Beloved Community.

Who Are We?

A few key demographic findings. The overall response rate to the survey was 45%.

- Of overall Episcopal leadership surveyed ...
 - ◆ 77% identify as white
 - ◆ 22% identify as People of Color (vast racial diversity within leaders of Color)
 - ◆ 51% identify as laypeople (higher proportion People of Color)
 - ◆ 49% identify as clergy (lower proportion People of Color)

Theory and Framework

We used the following theoretical frameworks to analyze the collected data:

- **Racism is a complex adaptive system.** To engage it, we took a cyclical approach, returning to the questions “What?”, “So what?” and “Now what?”
- We are embodied creatures, and **the trauma of racism lives in the human body.**
- **White dominating culture** or **white supremacy culture** are the dominant, unquestioned standards of behavior embodied and enacted by the majority of institutions in the United States and European-identified cultures, including The Episcopal Church.
- **Racism is sin**, because it distorts our relationship with God and all of Creation. According to the Baptismal Covenant, when we sin, we must repent and turn back to God’s ways.

¹ Townes, E. M. “Lament and Hope: Defying this Hot Mess.” Yale Reflections Magazine (1970, January 01). Retrieved November 23, 2020, from <https://reflections.yale.edu/article/resistance-and-blessing-women-ministry-and-yds/lament-and-hope-defying-hot-mess>.

Nine Dominant Patterns of Systemic Racism in The Episcopal Church



Understanding the 9 Dominant Patterns

Transformation vs. Transaction

Some anti-racism work seeks genuine transformation of the dominant culture over time (*systemic change*). White dominant culture and leaders tend to address racism with disconnected transactions (*episodic change*), assuming that “If I do (or read or watch) *this*, I will get (or be) *that*.” The transactional approach relies on one-off book studies, workshops, service projects, protests, and the like. These become transactional if they are disconnected from a comprehensive effort and if they don’t lead to examining and transforming white dominating culture. Transactional anti-racism often forces People of Color to placate and pacify white dominant systems and to survive and keep a job or seat at the table.

Leverages of Power

People of Color report varying degrees of ease and difficulty navigating Episcopal power structures. Their ability to navigate this system is a point of survival, and many rely on other People of Color for guidance and support. In general, the church often uses money to either harm or help anti-racist efforts, by withholding funding for certain work, paying People of Color less for comparable work, or measuring clergy of Color by how much money they bring in, not if their ministries are thriving.

Hypervisibility vs. Invisibility

People of Color report being simultaneously hyper-visible and invisible. They are often tokenized or pigeonholed into work that revolves around diversity, anti-racism, or global mission, while they are often overlooked for certain positions or assumed to be “new” Episcopalians unfamiliar with the church’s culture and systems. White people often see People of Color as a monolith and lack curiosity about various People of Color’s cultures. White people tend to see racism if it is hypervisible or named by People of Color. In addition, white people often do not recognize racism or race in predominantly white spaces.

Faith & Spirituality

People use the language of faith as they reflect on anti-racism and explain why the church should engage in becoming Beloved Community. People lift up theology, liturgy, and spiritual practices as leaven for this ministry. At the same time, they note how these elements of our faith are often used to actively maintain white supremacy culture and racism.

Political Polarization

Because racism has become so politicized and polarized, especially among white people, there is both urgency around anti-racism and anxiety about how to navigate it. Likewise, leaders of Color interviewed after the murder of George Floyd mention an uptick of instances of blatant racism within The Episcopal Church. While they knew this kind of racism was present, it is moving from the shadows and into the light.

Anti-Racist Leadership

Leaders of Color have great self-confidence combined with a deep commitment to their church and to addressing racism. They confidently bring their perspectives and experiences to leadership. They also name the stress of being the first or the only Person of Color in mostly white contexts. White culture often places leaders of Color on a pedestal and holds them to unreasonable expectations. It also holds them primarily responsible for naming, calling out, and confronting racism.

Intersectionality

Leaders of Color note the complexity of internalized racism among People of Color and racial tensions among and between other groups of People of Color. Such issues can be taboo and tough to explore openly, but there is also deep wisdom about the intersection of power (or powerlessness) and privilege (or disadvantage) across racial groups or within them. People also speak of the limitations of the Black/white paradigm for challenging racism in the United States and in the church, which extends beyond the U.S.

Historical Context

The key to unlocking current racial dynamics is often found in a location’s racialized history. There is a deep longing and commitment to telling the whole historical truth of how The Episcopal Church financially benefited from, participated in, and perpetuated white supremacy and racist practices and beliefs, and how it continues to benefit from, participate in, and perpetuate racism to this day.

Intentionality & Ongoing Commitment

There are no single, accidental, or quick solutions to racism. Many people recognize that anti-racism, racial justice and healing requires long-term commitment, lifelong learning, deep intentionality, accountability, financial redistribution (reparations, to name one example), and powerful and courageous leadership.

Recommendations for The Episcopal Church

- Prioritize racial justice and healing within, between, and for People of Color, including resources, gatherings, and funding
- Continue to educate all-white or predominantly white congregations about racialization and about the story/history of whiteness in their lives and communities
- Systematize internal racial audits for leadership bodies. Conduct racial audits every 5 years on a churchwide level. Provide resources and tools to conduct racial audits for dioceses and congregations.
- Explore and discern a system of accountability to ensure deep systemic change (culture, policy, decision-making, education, finance, liturgy, etc.)
- Institute reparations on the churchwide level for communities directly affected by the exploitation of or profiting from the labor and resources of Black and Indigenous people
- Expand the current audit report into a living, interactive, theological resource for the church
- Use theological resources to deepen commitment for the long-haul of transformation, anti-racism, and Beloved Community
- Design effective interventions for communities at different points along the Becoming Beloved Community labyrinth or along the continuum from exclusive club to anti-racist organization

For more information, including the full audit report, go to <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/racial-justice-audit>.

Learn about The Mission Institute at www.missioninstitute.org.

Learn about the Becoming Beloved Community framework and efforts at www.episcopalchurch.org/beloved-community.