

# Creation of the Anti-racism Transformational Team of the Pittsburgh Presbytery

## The Anti-racism Task Force of the Amos 5:24 Ministry Team

The Rev. Dr. Randall Bush, Ms. Jean Cox, Mrs. Lawrencecella Dukes, Ms. Darlene Durrwachter Rushing, The Rev. Patrice Fowler-Searcy, The Rev. Shanea Leonard, The Rev. Dr. Johnnie Monroe, Mr. Tony Norman, The Rev. Dr. Ronald Peters, Judge William Simmons, Ms. Aimee Spicuzza, The Rev. Jeff Tindall

The Anti-racism Task Force of the Amos 5:24 Ministry Team seeks to establish an Anti-racism Transformational Team to dismantle systemic racism within the Pittsburgh Presbytery, its congregations and the communities in which we live as followers of Christ Jesus.

The sin of racism has neither been consistently addressed nor actively countered by the Presbyterian Church nationally or locally. Yet, periodic denominational and confessional standards call us to anti-racism activism: “Racism persists as a cancerous reality in American life and our society as a whole has been irresponsible in dealing with it.” (1970 Statement – PCUS General Assembly)

The Anti-racism Transformational Team will respond to problems by proposing to Presbytery new ways of living together. The Transformational Team will be an organized, strategic and extensively trained team dedicated to identifying and working for the necessary changes to ensure that systemic racism is acknowledged and eradicated within the structures of the Pittsburgh Presbytery and member congregations. Just as the Civil Rights Movement’s success was predicated on the dedication, strategic training, and long-term commitment, the same process is necessary within the Pittsburgh Presbytery. The formation, appropriate training, implementation and long-term commitment of the Anti-racism Transformational Team will change the lives of people, followers of Christ and those who observe them, that all might live in unity and peace, regardless of race, ethnicity, or income and love one another as Christ loves us.

## Implementation

In 1999, the 211th General Assembly declared that we will “assume an anti-racist identity, provide adequate staffing and funding for implementation of the churchwide strategy for anti-racism...and urge governing bodies and congregations to assume an anti-racism identity, [making] available to the church training resources, which are essential for the implementation of the churchwide strategy.” (1999 Statement-PCUSA)

Since 2007, the Amos 5:24 Ministry Team has investigated a variety of resources and programs to respond to this General Assembly-mandated initiative and a 2007 Overture to the Pittsburgh Presbytery on Racism, Classism, and Justice. Upon reflection and based on direct experience, Amos 5:24 found that Crossroads Anti-racism Organizing and Training (Chicago, Illinois) has the organizational skills and quantifiable history of changed lives, and that they are best suited to transform Pittsburgh Presbytery and help us assume the new, anti-racist identity the church deserves.

In March 2012, representatives from Amos 5:24 (Rev. Karen Battle, Rev. Chad Collins and Ms. Jean Kennedy) attended three days of anti-racism training in Chicago with Crossroads. The team returned, enthusiastically supporting a deepening of our partnership. Amos 5:24 then partnered with Crossroads in April 2013 to present the workshop, “Understanding and Dismantling Racism,” to forty members of the Presbytery leadership. The strong and positive response to this workshop lead to the creation of the Anti-racism Task Force of the Amos 5:24 Ministry Team in 2014, and their charge to ascertain the strategy and means for dismantling systemic racism. Additionally, in the fall of 2013, the Executive Committee of the Pittsburgh Presbytery made the

commitment that 2014 will be a year of considering the cost of racism among us.

Established in 1986 by Joseph Barndt, author of “Understanding and Dismantling Racism: the Twenty-first Century Challenge to White America,” Crossroads Anti-racism Organizing and Training has worked for nearly 30 years with institutional clients (churches, non-profit organizations, school districts, universities, municipalities, and governmental organizations across the U.S.A.) to counter systemic racism and establish permanent institutional change.

Since 2012, Amos 5:24 has partnered with Crossroads staff ([www.crossroadsantiracism.org](http://www.crossroadsantiracism.org)) for training and consulting services. We fully anticipate that continued collaboration with Crossroads will allow us to translate the grassroots anti-racism work we have been doing for the past eight years into lasting structural change. The goal of the new Anti-racism Transformational Team will be to work within the Presbytery and with senior leadership to identify barriers and create anti-racist and anti-oppressive policies and procedures in order to change lives. The work of anti-racism calls for a reordering of life, a dismantling of unjust structures, and an invitation to consider our complicity in systemic forms of oppression.

### **Impact on the Community**

The city of Pittsburgh and Allegheny County are deeply in need of anti-racist action and improved intercultural communication, as evidenced by the pronounced racial segregation of our region’s neighborhoods, and the uneasy relationship between police and minority communities.

The need for anti-racism transformation is also evident in the Pittsburgh Presbytery and its member churches. There are few African American congregations and they lack resources more readily available to their European-dominant congregational colleagues. Churches are closed in neighborhoods with changing demographics instead of transforming into multicultural congregations. Has our reliance on a worldly business model, distorted by societal patterns of racism and metrics of membership numbers and wealth, kept us from being churches whose spiritual foundations are shaped by faith in what God has done for us through Jesus Christ?

The Anti-racism Transformational Team will be prepared to advocate for systemic structural change and dedicated to defeating institutional racism by ‘institutionalizing’ anti-racism. As expressed in Crossroads’ literature: “Because racism is a systemic problem structured into institutions, the antidote needs to be structured into institutions as well.” The purpose of the Transformational Team is to keep anti-racism work central in the Presbytery’s life and mission. The Anti-Racism Transformational Team will identify strategies and offer education, all with the goal of dismantling systems of racism. This work requires a significant level of training, initially provided by Crossroads, to the 20-24 members of the newly formed Anti-racism Transformational Team. Forty additional Pittsburgh Presbytery congregants will receive a two and a half day training to broaden support and awareness. The faithfulness, heightened awareness, and passion of these 60 people and others will create the momentum needed to birth the new anti-racism identity of the Pittsburgh Presbytery.

### **Partnering in the Community**

The selection criteria of the Anti-racism Transformational Team includes identifying individuals who have influence in the Pittsburgh community such as the areas of Justice, Law Enforcement, Education, Real Estate, Business/Corporations/Employment, Government, and church denominational leadership. In that way, the Transformational Team will be positioned to foment a grassroots process of change as others observe us confronting our history of racism, and changing behaviors that subtly enforce this insidious system. The Transformational Team will also prepare a public relations campaign and provide educational materials to raise awareness across our region.

The newly formed Anti-racism Transformational Team will build on past collaborations as well as seek new partners. It is expected that the Transformational Team will be working with various community organizations to support the on-going work to dismantle institutional racism in our region. Likely partners and resources may include: Pennsylvania Interfaith Impact Network (PIIN), Commission on Racism of the Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh (past partner of Amos 5:24), YWCA Center for Race & Gender Equity (past partner of Amos 5:24), North Hills Anti-Racism Coalition, The Alliance for Police Accountability, The Thomas Merton Center, and the Race and Reconciliation Dialogue Group of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Pittsburgh.

### **Funding and Support**

The Anti-Racism Task Force of the Amos 5:24 Ministry Team is seeking a total of \$58,560 over two years (2015 & 2016) to form and establish this ministry, train congregational volunteer leaders, and institutionalize its overall goals. Towards that goal, a grant of \$41,530 has been received by Amos 5:24 from the Great Ends of the Church Fund. This support will provide twelve (non-successive) days of extensive training, institutional analysis, skill building, and long-term planning in consultation with Crossroads representatives for the 20-24 members of the newly-formed Anti-racism Transformational Team (TT) from Fall 2015 to Fall 2016. Funding is still being sought for the remaining \$17,030, of which \$11,400.00 will provide a 2.5 day Workshop on “Understanding and Dismantling Racism” for 40 additional people (beyond the TT members), and \$5,630 will provide a third, 6 hour workshop, “Cultural Competency,” for another 40 - 60 people to prepare Presbytery congregants for the work of the Transformational Team. In place of or in addition to the “Cultural Competency Workshop,” anti-racism educational events (film series, book discussions, exhibit attendance, community conversations, etc.) may be offered, depending upon funds secured. Together, the two year budget of \$58,560 (12 days of TT Training, 2.5 days of Dismantling Racism, & 1 day workshops & educational events) will provide important and faithful, anti-racism organizing for over 100 people over the next 2 years. For 2017, it is expected that ongoing yearly expenses related to the training of new members coming on to the Transformational Team will be between \$8,000 - \$11,000 per year.

In conclusion, it is important to reiterate that anti-racism work is necessary within Pittsburgh Presbytery now in order that we might live into our scriptural values and our professed denominational ideals. With education, honest confession, and humble action, our desire is that Pittsburgh Presbytery become a model for the entire region (and denomination) of lives being changed by policies and practices that confront the sin of racism and prevent future racially pejorative actions by creating anti-racist structures for all church councils. Our hope is that the congregations will assist Pittsburgh Presbytery to support this faithful endeavor so that our “unity may become visible [and] that the world may believe that separation, enmity and hatred between people and groups is sin which Christ has already conquered, and accordingly that anything which threatens this unity may have no place in the church and must be resisted.” (*Confession of Belhar, September 1986, 11.2*)

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