**CHICHESTER DIOCESAN SYNOD**

**RACIAL JUSTICE VISION**

**1, Why do we do what we do?**

**1, To alleviate pain and hurt.** We need to be involved in this work simply because the time has come to say, ‘enough is enough’. People of colour have gone through so much cruelty, abuse, discrimination and harassment for many years. The pain and hurt which many minority ethnic people in this country and elsewhere have gone through cannot be ignored anymore. We need to learn from the history of racism and racial discrimination which GMH/UKME people were put under unnecessarily. The emotional (and sometimes physical and spiritual) wounds and scars which GMH/UKME people carry for no reason and no fault of their own other than their skin colour attest to the iniquity of racism and make the total unacceptability of the scourge of racism evident and pronounced.  In other words, racial justice is about safeguarding people, irrespective of their racial origins, and their right to live with dignity. Racial Justice ministry is joining God in his work of healing the wounds and hurt of those who have been despised, discriminated against and dehumanised because of their ethnic origins. It is about working to wipe racism off the face of the earth.

**2, The church has discerned.** Racial justice ministry is something that the church itself has discerned for itself. We believe that God works through the discernment of the church. As we know the church has discerned that the work of racial justice cannot wait any longer. It has produced the ‘Lament to Action’ report. It is a recognition of the persistence of racism and responsibility of the church to become a part of the fight for racial justice. Our vision is to take this as our call and implement its action plan.

**3, God loves justice.** To work for racial equity is to work for justice. We do this work because God loves justice. God weeps when we act unjustly. We act unjustly when race becomes a consideration in our relationships with other people. God wants and expects us to treat not people of one ethnicity but people of all ethnicities, colours and backgrounds impartially and fairly and empathize with them all. Racial justice work might involve developing policies and practices to ensure that no harm befalls another, and that, where harm is alleged, a remedial action is taken. Some people might feel a moral obligation to get involved in racial justice work as it is working for justice. Such people are most welcome to join in the fight for racial justice.

**4, Theological basis.** Racial justice ministry has solid biblical, theological and ecclesiological foundations. For instance, the scripture is clear that humanity is created in God’s image. The glory of God has to be beheld in black, brown, white and people of all colours and features. Theologically speaking, God loves all people equally. God so loved ‘the world’ - the ‘world’ representing the entire humanity - and not people of this race or that race. The church must do the same. St Paul sees the church as the body of Christ. And, we too should. Sadly, some parts of the body were deemed and treated as superior, and the other parts as inferior in the past. Racial justice ministry seeks to put this right.

To be racially just is not just about not being racist but actively involving in the fight against racism. With migration on the rise, we know that inter-cultural churches are the churches of the future. Some questions to ask ourselves are - are we ready for what truly pursuing intercultural church looks like. Are we ready for our structures, habits and worldviews to be challenged? Are we ready for the messiness and beautiful chaos that weaving people of different views, voices, colours and different approaches to time and community brings?

**5, We want to be on the winning side.** For many (including me) Revelation 7 is the motivation for their involvement in racial equality work. It is foretold in the book of Revelation that people of all nations, tribes and languages will dwell in heaven eternally. In the recent past, some people have asked me what churches with only white people can do for racial justice. In this context we need to be clear about the purposes of the church as stated in the Bible. The focus of Jesus’ teaching in the gospel of Mathew is on the Kingdom of Heaven. It follows that churches have a role to perform in preparing congregations for the kingdom.

It should dawn on mono-coloured churches that the kingdom will not look like their church. We should ask ourselves what we can do for our churches to get a glimpse of heaven. We should endeavour to do our best to make the church look like a ‘rehearsal’ for the Kingdom of Heaven. Monocultural congregations must be aware of this eschatological reality and become more and easily accessible to people of colour and accommodate them. They should join in with those championing and advancing the cause of racial justice. It would fit very happily with our calling and God’s eternal plan for us.

In the light of Revelation 7 we can say for sure that the fight for racial justice is bound to win.  The win is foretold in the Bible. We are fighting a winning battle. Racial justice is a done deal in relation to the everlasting life which we are invited to by God in Christ. Now is the time to make friends among those who don’t look like us ‘in a project of sharing our common humanity’, to coin a phrase. Now is the time to join the winning side.

**2, What can we do to promote racial justice?**

First, we can all pray. We can pray that God guides us in this work. We have to start with God and end with God and make sure that we work with God all the way.

Second, education has a significant and transformational role to play in this. There are several books available which talk about racism and racial justice. Seminars and conferences are beginning to be held across the country. We can offer training events in our diocese. The message in the Bible is clear and unambiguous - we are all one in Christ. It could not have been put better than this - the verse reads, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” (Galatians 3.28) We can see teaching about and advocacy for racial justice embedded into the regular teaching and preaching life of our Diocese throughout the year, for example through the Year Of / Lent Courses / The Department for Apostolic Life Programmes / IME Training.

Third, we can increase visibly where this is possible. Church leaders can actively seek to involve Minority Ethnic People in Church Leadership and unlock their potential as they often shy away despite having great potential. They can bring a different perspective on faith and social matters.

Bishop Martin hosted Bishop Leon from the diocese of Jamaica for a week to mark the 75 th anniversary of Windrush. They both visited churches, schools and a NHS trust together and sent out the message that it is God’s will that all people come together and actualise God’s wish to see all people as one family. It is hoped that we will have more and more similar events in the coming months and years.

Fourth, we have to be sensitive to people’s feelings while dealing with the issue of racism, but at the same time we must have the courage of conviction and be bold enough to talk about the injustice inherent in racism. We can do it persuasively. We need to conscientize people about the importance of racial justice for a better and fairer world. We can resource parishes, schools and chaplaincies to create safe spaces for open, honest, frank and amiable conversations about race. We talk about racial justice today in the hope that one day there wouldn’t be a need for it. We have to form a better understanding of the issue of racism and make tireless efforts for the emergence of a society free from racism..

Fifth, this work is not limited to churches. We can think in terms of ensuring the participation of our Church Schools (and other schools) and our young people in the fight against racial inequality and for racial equality and strive to make it possible. A sense of respect for all, irrespective of their racial origin, needs to be inculcated in children in churches and schools in the formative years of childhood. It is important to ensure that race consciousness does not creep into children at an impressionable age. School (many schools are doing this already) as well as Sunday school programme should lay greater emphasis on racial equality and the need to repudiate all past notions of superiority and inferiority on the basis of ‘descent’ and replace them with the Christian ideals of fraternity and fellowship.

**3, How do we do it?**

First, our diocesan racial justice team with the support of the National Racial Justice Unit will be organising study days and seminars within the diocese in the new year 2024. Please look out for publicity (the details of schedule and venues) soon.

Second, working initially with the Diocesan Senior Leadership Team and with the DDO and the Discernment team we hope to attract and retain UKME/GMH individuals into (a) the discernment process, and (b) roles of ordained ministry as well as lay ministry across the Diocese.

Third, work with the education department to see that at least 5 Growing Partnership schools have diversity days. This will aid in raising awareness and encouraging needed culture change for facilitating racial justice in their communities.

Fourth, we plan to continue to host an annual Black History Month service of celebration at Chichester Cathedral or another venue within the diocese and increase the number of Racial Justice Sunday services offered in parishes/chapels each year.

Fifth, every culture has unique gifts to offer. We are all God’s gift to each other. We will encourage people of different ethnic origins to offer their gifts at inter-cultural events. Whether we are black or brown or white we are gifts of God to each other. What more could (we need to) enrich our lives!

Godfrey Kesari, Diocesan Racial Justice Officer