

# Striving for racial justice in the Diocese of London

*The Racial Justice Priority Group 5<sup>th</sup> March 2021*

This document outlines the broad theological rationale and strategy for the striving for racial justice priority within the Diocese of London.

## Context

At a recent debate in the General Synod of the Church of England the Archbishop of Canterbury said in no uncertain terms that his church was ‘institutionally racist.’ The statement he signed in 2021, along with leaders of other church denominations brings out his sentiments:

*“We as Presidents of Churches Together in England have responded to the killing of George Floyd in the United States, and the widespread call for real change to combat racial injustice in our world, above all in our own country. We have spent time over the past few weeks listening to voices of people from the black community, especially the younger generation. This has been a deeply moving experience and illustrated powerfully the many profound changes of heart and actions that need to be made. The attitude that regards black people – and indeed other people of ethnic minorities – as inferior is evil and mars our common humanity. We challenge this unreservedly, recognising the constant experiences of racism, including micro aggression, which black people face.*

*We believe that churches have a significant role to play in combating racial injustice. If we are to be effective in doing so, we must look at ourselves.*

*We are painfully aware of the racism that blights the life of our churches. We are intent upon a process of identifying racial injustice within our churches – current and historic – repenting of it and taking action to effect real change. This includes the potential for discriminatory behaviour in the way that we make church appointments, which we know can happen at the conscious or unconscious level. We want to ensure that these processes are just and demonstrate the so often neglected gospel truth of Colossians 3:11 “there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all”. In this verse Paul makes it clear that racial injustice and discrimination is not only profoundly unjust and an affront to God but also the very denial of Christ who reached out to all human beings.”*

*(Churches Together England , 2021)*

## The call to celebrate ethnic diversity

*<sup>26</sup> From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. <sup>27</sup> God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us. (Acts 17:26-27)*

In Acts 17:26-27 we see clearly that ethnic diversity is a key part of God’s glorious plan for the story of the world. At creation, God made one race – the human race – from which all ethnicities descend. All are made in his image (Gen 1:26-28) with an inherent dignity and worth (James 3:9). And yet the purpose of this diversity is unity around the person of Jesus Christ. The diverse ethnicities of the world exist so that some would “reach out for him and find him,” (Acts 17:27) and so become part of one Christ loving community (Jn 17:22) that will one day to join in the eternal praise of Jesus Christ (Rev 7:9). On that day

ethnicity will not be obliterated but continue to be celebrated since 'the glory of the nations' will be brought into the heavenly throng (Rev 21:26).

The apostle Paul draws out this purpose at length in the book of Ephesians. The purpose of Christ's work on the cross was, in part, to draw together in the church the diversity of humanity in such a way that even the heavenly beings would look down in awe (Eph 2:14-16, 3:10). The unity in diversity seen in our churches is meant to point to the power, wonder and beauty of Christ and the gospel. It is not unity *at the expense of diversity* (so that all are expected to simply assimilate to the dominant culture). Nor is it diversity at the expense of unity (so that there is no persevering patience in the face of cultural challenges). It is *unity in diversity* with Christ at the centre. To put this glorious calling into practice takes the power of God (Eph 3:16-17) and a constant seeking for peace among the community of the church (Eph 4:3).

This call to loving, multi-ethnic community extends beyond the borders of the church in the teaching of Jesus who said to love your neighbour as yourself (Mt 22:39), a specific encouragement to love the outsider wherever you might meet them (Luke 10:27ff cf. Lev 19:33-34).

We long that this vision would be enthusiastically celebrated in our churches. To that end we will strive to:

- Encourage theological colleges to highlight the diversity of cultural contexts from which our theological heritage has emerged.
- Ensure that theological students are equipped to minister in the variety of cultural contexts that they are likely to be exposed to in the communities.
- In collaboration with the London Diocesan Board of Schools, review, consider and suggest potential updates which need to be made to the historical and cultural school curricula in order to celebrate our diverse cultural heritage (for example Black History Month), and learn from our past (for example colonialism and Empire).
- Ensure that all diocesan training days and one-off educational events pay proper attention to relevant issues of cultural diversity e.g. discrimination and healthcare, impacts of Covid-19, inequalities around educational attainment particularly affecting people of colour and global perspectives.
- Encourage leadership training programs to include options for leading multi-ethnic congregations and diaspora congregations.

### **The call to seek justice**

Despite our grounding in scripture, we must acknowledge that there has been a dissonance between our rhetoric and our behaviour. As we have previously noted from the lips of the Archbishop, the church is institutionally racist. Racism is one manifestation of the sin of partiality. The book of James highlights this sin as evil and inconsistent with the character of God (Js 2:1, 4). What James describes as partiality is treating people preferentially and being prejudiced against others, purely on the basis of external characteristics (Js 2:3-4). Although James' focus is socioeconomic difference, his conclusions clearly apply to other external differences such as ethnic difference as well. For this reason, celebrating our ethnic diversity must go hand in hand with calling out ethnic injustice and racism. James not only describes this sin but describes our Christian response to those who are treated unjustly - we are to support them in their affliction and champion their cause (Js 1:27 cf. Prov 31:8-9; Jer 22:3; Psalm 146:7-9; Micah 6:6).

What makes partiality a problem is that it suggests that some are less worthy of kingdom privileges than others (Js 2:4). In fact, none of us are naturally worthy of God's favour. Christ had to shed his blood for every member of the church (Acts 20:28, Rom 3:23). To deliberately make this a pattern of life is to bring ourselves under the judgement of God (Js 2:8-10). Hence racism cannot be tolerated.

For any majority culture, the idea of defining oneself by your ethnicity can seem unnecessary. *However the option of pretending our ethnicity is irrelevant is not only unbiblical but simply not possible for people of colour.* Moreover, we hinder racial healing when we fail to acknowledge the reality of racism in our churches. Some are not aware of showing favouritism, but are also unaware of the burden that people of colour must bear when it exists. This is because it is impossible to feel what it is like to live in a society that is dominated by another ethnic culture (and in which those cultures matter greatly). In order to address these issues we commit to:

- Identifying a training course (or creating one), that addresses how one should mitigate harming victims of racial abuse and enable one another to flourish
- Ensuring that training and teaching on anti-racism is seen as equally as important as - our training and teaching on safeguarding.
- The mentoring of senior staff by people of colour, to increase understanding, to bring about change, and to help develop an ability to be good allies.

We recognise too that there are some processes and practices within our church structures that consistently disadvantage people of colour. We see Acts 6 as a model for recognising where such processes and practices exist and addressing them. In Acts 6 it seems that the main way that the issue was resolved was by altering the balance of ethnicities tasked with overseeing the process (Acts 6:5). Implicit in this decision is the idea that sinful human beings, may (deliberately or inadvertently) create processes that tend to disadvantage certain groups. To that end we seek to work towards increasing representation of people of colour at every level of diocesan structures by:

- Increasing the cultural diversity of the London College of Bishops
  - E.g. aiming to have two Bishops of colour among them in the next 3 years.
  - E.g. encouraging mutual mentoring arrangements among the Bishops with people of colour.
- Creating better training / mentoring for a pipeline of more culturally diverse leaders.
  - E.g. ensure fairer recruitment practices
- Considering the interim steps that might move towards a better structure
  - e.g. Deans and other senior lay people becoming members of Senior Staff meeting and other strategically important meetings
- Provide a structure of leadership from episcopal level that can coordinate, support and enable the work of the Deans of Cultural Diversity.
  - e.g. a racial justice priority enabler who, under the direction of the Bishops can facilitate the formation of a reference group who support the deans in their work of integrating and furthering this agenda in areas.
- Ensuring that this work is clearly integrated within the work of the central diocesan teams, particularly, but not only ministry, HR, safeguarding, and education.
- To ensure that our data collection is robust enough to enable us to monitor how effective our interventions are being.

### ***1. The call to prophecy, prayer and patience***

The book of James deals was written to a church struggling to remain unified in the face of the temptation to allow divisions to overly influence things. James does not hesitate to not only address the evil of individual partiality, but the reality of systemic oppression caused by power imbalances (James 5:1-6). We can discern a few priorities from his writing:

### **Prophecy (James 5:1-6)**

James denounces the behaviour of those who have abused their status in order to oppress those more vulnerable. This is aimed at those outside the church but clearly indites those within who practise the same things. We seek to model this prophetic call by:

- Naming, discussing, acknowledging and repenting of any systemic racism or part of the C of E which has been built on the backs of enslaved people.
  - E.g. ensuring that people feel able to call out bad behaviour at every level and have allies who will support them
- Consider how our heritage might tell the whole story of colonialism.
  - E.g. new artwork and statues

### **Patience (James 5:7-11)**

James calls the church, even in the midst of partiality and oppression to be patient, standing firm in faith and avoid grumbling in the light of the fact that Christ will bring justice in the end. To this end we seek to encourage:

- An ongoing dialogue on these issues which models being slow to speak, quick to listen and slow to become angry (James 1:19-20)
  - In other words a culture of real active listening with open honest conversation in meetings and relationships
- Forgiveness by those who have faced racism in the light of repentance
- Patience by those who continue to face racism, given the scale of the task

### **Prayer (James 5:13)**

James calls the suffering to prayer and praise. Despite the sins of the past that must be acknowledged and the work that must be done to address these issues in the present, we move forward as broken church, bearing the scars of the past but also the healing grace of the Christ which enables us to persevere.

We acknowledge that any belief that we can overcome “the world” merely through external social change and revolutionary social action is misguided. Our heritage teaches us that it is “out of the heart” that “proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies” (Matt. 15:19). Therefore while we must change our structures out of love for our neighbours, we cannot recreate the hearts that have created these unjust structures, nor the hearts that continue to reinforce them. We acknowledge that hearts are changed by the preaching of the gospel. Therefore we commit to:

- Highlighting and / or developing liturgy that allows us to lament our sin, express our desire for change and hope for the promise of a just new creation.
- A hopeful narrative that points to Christ as one who can heal the deepest wounds, mend broken hearts and bring unity out of deep division.

- Encouraging the proclamation of Christ as integral to any approach to racial justice as the only way to change our hearts.