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Research Report: The Church's Contemporary Response to Racism

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Summary

The earliest embrace of Civil Rights was a bottom-up development focused on external forms of racism. It led in the late 1960s and 1970s to dramatic changes in the composition, structural relationships, and roles of the Episcopal Church's executive bodies and corporate leadership. Racism had to be recognized before it could be addressed. These changes in place, Church bodies were equipped to turn to confronting racism as an internal blight. General Convention pushed for greater self-examination and Church-wide awareness training, and Council began to respond with expectations of staff. It was not until the 1990s, however, that the first training efforts were made for governing bodies. The first curriculum for the Church was issued in 1997. The intensity of Church-wide anti-racism training developed momentum in the decade of 2001-2009. Anti-racism awareness was broadened to include a multi-cultural approach and a mandated requirement for racial and ethnic competency by Church leaders. National training efforts stalled after that period following budget cuts in 2009. A new curriculum and local trainer pool continued, but anti-racism training languished without the coordination of a centrally-staffed office and an effective means for ensuring compliance.

Early Recognition of the Effects of Racism, 1954-1978

The Episcopal Church's earliest understanding of racism recognized it as a social and moral disgrace embodied in segregation that could be remedied by improving the economic position of African Americans and restoring their civil rights. This sentiment carried weight even after the landmark *Brown vs. the Board of Education* Supreme Court decision in 1954. A resolution was brought forward to the 1958 General Convention stipulating that the Church, "work actively to eliminate racial discrimination in the life of our Church..." The motion was weakened through a series of substitutes and amendments that eliminated self-examination and instead called on Episcopalians to work, "towards the establishment, without racial discrimination, of full opportunities in fields such as education, housing, employment and public accommodations."

The tide towards desegregation revealed a hidden divide that lay beneath the surface in much of the post-Reconstruction treatment and evangelization of African Americans. While few were blameless in any quarter for countenancing discrimination in the post-Brown period, voices for change became more assertive and demanding in northern dioceses where black parishes and clergy were well versed in advocating for their rights. The Church of the 1950s was heavily influenced by an eastern establishment of broad, liberal-minded clerical and lay leaders who carried with them liturgical reform theology and the social gospel ethic, which emphasized respectively, equality by virtue of baptism and a commitment to alleviate injustice and poverty. This reform impulse was in tension with an opposing view, best represented in the southern Church, that attributed the inferior status of African Americans to inherent limitations, rather than to the legacy of slavery. Their response was to control their black populations through education and enforced segregation. The southern Church accepted and tolerated

the General Convention's aided Church schools for training in the trades, and erected separate diocesan jurisdictions to oversee black congregational worship.¹

By the 1960s, the liberal thread turned from a passive *noblesse oblige* to an active and vocal grassroots movement that demanded a response to racism through dramatic changes in polity and policy². The Canon on Laity, which was revised in 1964, stipulated that Church members could "not be excluded from the worship or Sacraments of the Church, nor from parochial membership, because of race, color, or ethnic origin." Executive Council membership was expanded to include four minority representatives, two of which were to be nominated by the Union of Black Clergy and Laity (UBCL). The Church's ability to see racism in its own behavior and institutional practices could only have occurred because governance changes ensured the presence of new diverse voices. Nonetheless, change in the programmatic management at the Church's headquarters was slow to recognize institutional racism. Notably, the General Convention Special Program (GCSP) grants that were given in 1967–1968 were committed to eliminating racism in outside organizations, not in the Church.

The calls for self-examination grew increasingly louder. In 1968 the Lambeth Conference adopted a resolution stating, "Racism is a blatant denial of the Christian faith" and "acknowledges in penitence that the Churches of the Anglican Communion have failed to accept the cost of corporate witness to their unity in Christ, and calls upon them to re-examine their life and structures in order to give expression to the demands of the Gospel..." That same year, a coordinating committee of black Lutheran clergymen organized in Chicago to develop a program to combat racism in the Lutheran Church.

In a report submitted to Executive Council in 1969, the Staff Program Group reported on programs combating racism in the Church and listed only external programs. Although criticized for focusing on white racism, the report attempted to define institutional racism. It called for an internal review (or audit), and proposed a base assumption for the study: that racism existed and needed to be disclosed even at the risk of embarrassment. That same year, the GCSP issued its first grant to UBCL for a series of regional meetings and a national meeting to combat racism in the Church. Following the

¹ Even though the southern dioceses seceded from The Episcopal Church during the Civil War, the northern dioceses did not acknowledge any formal separation, nor did they confront the so-called "conflict of conscience" that led to the erection of The Episcopal Church in the Confederate States. North and South reunited in a gentleman's agreement not to address the racial issues that had split other denominations. While black parishes in the northern dioceses thrived on internal resources, despite what one observer called "the arrogance of white liberals" (*ENS*, 1982), Southern patrimony, "made it virtually impossible for Episcopalians...to recognize those formerly in bondage, indeed those who they had previously owned, as equal citizens under the law" (Lewis, p. 53). Many southern Churchmen fought against the recognition of black congregations, and special black missionary districts were established under white bishops. These generalizations do not explain, of course, the attempts of individual leaders to break with past practices. A liberal Southerner (John Hines), for example, turned the Church abruptly to face the realities of civil rights, and a conservative Southerner (John Allin) re-established the Black Ministries Office and promoted black clergy.

²As society became increasingly conscious of racial injustice during the 1960s, a growing number of Episcopalians started calling on the Church to address its own racism. External organizations such as ESCRU (Episcopal Society for Cultural and Racial Unity) called attention to the inequities in Episcopal schools, churches, and institutions; and the UBCL (Union of Black Clergy and Laity) protested the discrimination in hiring, placement, and deployment of black Episcopal clergy.

GCSP, the Church entered a period of quietism on race at the national level, when attention turned to wider social movements for change and racial empowerment. Church reforms in liturgy and women's rights moved to center stage in the 1970s³.

Naming and Confronting the Church's Racism, 1979-1989

By the close of the decade, the General Convention returned to focus on the Church's inactivity on race and national-level efforts to bring about reform. The 1979 General Convention ([1979-B052](#)) called on Council to design programs for dioceses and parishes to combat racism, and requested that Council develop an affirmative action policy for Church employees ([1979-B093](#)). It was the first of many such calls.

The Church first took action on addressing institutional racism in the 1980s. A 1982 Church-wide [Conference on Racism](#) drew delegates from 50 dioceses including bishops and deputies to push for change in the councils of the Church through training and education programs. In response General Convention for the first time requested every diocese and congregation to establish committees on racism ([1982-A062](#)). Convention also endorsed Council's 1981 Affirmative Action policy ([1982-A152](#)). In 1986 Presiding Bishop Browning stated to Executive Council that, "no greater challenge faces the Church than that of racism," and committed the Episcopal Church to set an example of an organization confronting institutional racism. The following year, he closed Church Center for a day in a "first step" process of eliminating racism within the Episcopal Church as staff engaged in an all day training [session](#) on countering institutional racism.

In 1988 the Executive Council organized the Commission on Racism at the request of General Convention ([1988-A092](#)), which mandated that the Church assist the local church in developing programs to combat racism, and provide assistance in evaluating such programs⁴. To assist the Commission, the Church Center conducted a survey that found 55% of dioceses needing and asking for assistance in developing anti-racism and affirmative action programs. In response, the Commission reported to Convention in 1991 that their primary triennial goals would be to develop local training programs, a network of trainers, and anti-racism training for Council.

The new focus on racism in the 1980s was clearly motivated by the post-Civil Rights era realization that African Americans constituted a visible, historic block of parishes and leaders in the Church. Racism as a policy and organized behavior pattern rather than simply a set of personal prejudices and acts of discrimination began to find acceptance in the 1980s and provided a wider cultural net in appreciating the effects of racism. In 1986 Presiding Bishop Browning addressed racism against native communities at Oklahoma II, a conference of Native American ministries. The Covenant issued by the conference stated, "We commend our Primate for the steps he is contemplating in the inclusion of our voice in addressing the issues of racism in the leadership of our Church on the national level," and

³Much attention in the 1970s turned from the U.S. to international race issues, especially the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa. The first meeting of the Anglican Consultative Council in 1971 recognized this global context when it adopted a resolution on racism encouraging Churches, "to re-examine, in penitence, their lives and structures with a view to eradicating all forms of discrimination."

⁴The Commission was reformed as a subcommittee of the Justice, Peace and Integrity Committee of Executive Council in 1995, and renamed the Executive Council Committee on Anti-Racism in 2000.

asked for "consultation in all programs of the national Church designed to combat the evils of racism." In 1988 Executive Council [pledged](#) to Native Americans "to root out racism" in the Church. Noting the Church had not been doing enough to combat racism against American Indians, Presiding Bishop Browning established a Blue Ribbon Task Force on Indian Affairs, out of which the Episcopal Commission on Indian Ministries (ECIM) was born. Similar efforts were made to uncover racism against Asian Americans in the Episcopal Church and society.

Initiating Anti-Racism Training, 1990-1999

The Commission on Racism was called upon to serve as a primary resource for anti-racism training when the Executive Council [resolved](#) to hold its first training session on racism in June 1990. The following year, the Episcopal Church's response to racism was brought under further scrutiny when many Episcopalians once again demanded a change in the location of General Convention in recognition of an inconsistency with state laws and Church teaching⁵. Arizona had twice voted against measures to provide for a statewide paid holiday honoring Martin Luther King, Jr. prompting many Episcopalians to demand General Convention be moved out of Phoenix. Presiding Bishop Browning was against a move, feeling it was an opportunity for the Church to concentrate on the issue of racism. In the lead-up to a contentious Convention⁶, the Church [established](#) a scholarship fund for African Americans, Native Americans, and other minorities (endorsed [1991-A241](#)), and the agenda of Convention was altered to include a focus on racism.

In the midst of the dissent, General Convention remarkably carried out a racism audit, which was answered by nearly 1500 bishops, deputies, ECW delegates and visitors. The audit concluded that a clear pattern of institutional racism existed at every level of the Church, but the study was faulted for shortchanging Hispanics, Asians, and Native Americans--especially lumping all Hispanics into one category, and using violent language with negative connotations for many Native Americans. Recognizing the general perception that the Church was not moving forward, Browning requested that all resolutions concerning racism be prioritized and several strong statements on racism were adopted that year:

- [1991-A085](#) Instruct Interim Bodies to Examine Effects of Forms of Discrimination
- [1991-D113](#) Address Institutional Church Racism in the Next Three Triennia⁷
- [1991-A199](#) Urge Each Diocese to Conduct an Audit on Institutional Racism
- [1991-D043](#) Urge Dioceses to Commit to Ending Racism
- [1991-A082](#) Require Racial and Ethnic Representation on Interim Bodies
- [1991-A090](#) Reduce Discrimination in Clergy Deployment
- [1991-B051](#) Call for the Removal of Racism from the Life of the Nation

⁵Presiding Bishop Lichtenberger moved the 1955 General Convention from Houston to Honolulu in protest of Texas' segregation laws and the demand of many to change the location to a more tolerant city.

⁶On the first day of General Convention, 35 Bishops declared they were "present under protest" during roll call, and a demonstration in the House of Deputies criticized the Church for "turning its back against people of color."

⁷1991-D113 was the first attempt by General Convention to explicitly address institutional racism within the Church: "*That the Episcopal Church spend the next three triennia addressing institutional racism inside our Church and in society, in order to become a Church of and for all races and a Church without racism committed to end racism in the world, and that greater inclusiveness become one of the Episcopal Church's primary strategies for evangelism.*"

Following the 1991 Convention, the results of the Racism Audit were published⁸. The authors concluded the Church was struggling with racism and recommended that it design a program to address race relations. In 1992 the Presiding Bishop went to Los Angeles in the wake of riots to demonstrate the Church's witness. Executive Council recognized that, "this tragedy is symptomatic of widespread racism that exists in our society, including the Church, which requires the reflections and deep deliberations of all members of this Church," and [called](#) on the commissions, committees, and all dioceses and congregations to respond to the crisis of racism.

Jolted into action, the Episcopal Church strengthened its efforts at eliminating racism from its structures. The signal marker of this new effort was the declaration of the sin of racism in the [Pastoral Letter on Racism](#) issued by the House of Bishops in the spring of 1994. In response, a new Covenant on Racism was adopted at General Convention that summer ([1994-D136](#)) and overcoming racism was resolved to be a priority ([1994-A047](#) and [1994-A048](#)). An ambitious agenda was set by Convention to eliminate institutional racism ([1994-D135](#)), but the failure to implement the resolution led to a dispirited re-affirmation at the subsequent Convention ([1997-A039](#)).

In February 1996, the Executive Council made their first commitment to self-examination and training with a one-day [workshop](#) on racism. That same year, Presiding Bishop Browning and President Pamela Chinnis created an Ad Hoc Committee for Anti-Racism Dialogue that published the *National Dialogue on Anti-Racism for Martin Luther King, Jr. Day 1997 and Beyond* utilizing a \$60,000 Constable Fund [grant](#) to implement, monitor, and revise the curriculum. In an effort to increase the number of resources available to the Church on the topic, the 1997 General Convention charged Council with establishing a resource center of materials "available to combat this sin" ([1997-D075](#)).

Anti-Racism as a Continuing Charge, 2000-2014

The emphasis that Bishop Browning and President Chinnis placed on racism and inclusivity rallied the Church in many quarters and dovetailed with the evolving concept of ministry. The Council on Ministry had in 1988 given extravagant consideration to the expanded ministry of the laity as an outgrowth of the baptismal covenant, and recommended attention to indigenous leadership. Convention adopted their recommended canon to require "studies in contemporary society, including racial and other minority groups" for all ordinands. By 2000, the concept of the "Ministry of All Baptized Christians" was well established as the full theological fruition of the 1979 Book of Common Prayer.

Anti-racism education, training and cultural competency can be understood as trying to keep pace with and respond to an expanded, diverse comprehension of "total ministry." In 2000 the General Convention renewed the commitment to anti-racism for another three triennia ([2000-A047](#)) and required anti-racism training for all lay and ordained leadership, CCAB members, and staff ([2000-B049](#)). A staff member (the Rev. Jayne Oasin) was recruited to centrally coordinate a Church-wide training program. In 2003 the Anti-Racism Committee estimated 1,500 people had taken some type of anti-racism training (not including those trained at parish level or through affiliated organizations) and 50 trainers had been certified to deliver the curriculum. The Committee noted that obstacles to success included resistance when training is mandated and that many potential trainers dropped out of the training early at a point when the reality of institutional racism was confronted.

⁸National Training Laboratories Institute. *Race and Ethnic Relations in the Episcopal Church*, 1992.

Behind resolutions and canonical reforms was the issue of how far the Church was willing to go to require all its ministers in local and national leadership positions to be culturally and racially competent leaders. Two cross-currents of ministry reform captured the dilemma and made Church-wide implementation difficult. A 2003 revision of the Title III canons on ministry expanded the non-discrimination clause for purposes of opening up the discernment process to all, and required that all ordinands complete anti-racism training (see highlighted text, [Title III, 2003 Canons](#)). In the same revision, however, the Ministry Commission's recommendation was accepted to eliminate the specific training requirements that had previously governed licensed lay ministers (see highlighted text, [Title III, 2000 Canons](#)) in favor of achieving diversity through local discernment and licensing criteria. In their report to Convention, the Standing Commission on Ministry Development noted that "bishops of the Church, acting individually, are our Episcopal accrediting agency." Stripping the specific Church-wide training requirements for lay ministry in 2003 made it impractical later to reimpose a single education requirement such as anti-racism training.

The Church's decision to rely on local training options, left the Anti-Racism Committee to recommend standard criteria. In their 2003 Report to Convention, the Committee recognized the need to reconcile the many training methodologies and develop measurement tools. In response, the General Convention recommended the National Dialogues methodology for dioceses, required all CCAB members to complete training within a year of appointment, and extended anti-racism training to encompass racial profiling ([2003-A010](#)). Executive Council [committed](#) to providing training each year of the 2003-2006 triennium and [adopted](#) a plan for successful anti-racism training, which they [voted](#) to increase to eight hours. To support this work, the Committee issued a revision of the *National Dialogues* curriculum entitled, *Seeing the Face of God in Each Other: A Manual for Antiracism Training and Action*⁹.

At the end of the triennium in 2006, the Committee on Anti-Racism reported that 16 interim bodies of Convention, 63 dioceses, 2 provinces, and 5 seminaries had completed, or scheduled, the mandated training program. The Committee applauded the creativity of the diocesan anti-racism committees for continuing the national anti-racism program locally. Noting "the overall purpose of our work in this area is not focused on training as an end in itself, but as a means to bring about the transformation of the Episcopal Church and our wider society," the Committee proposed that the final three years of the 2000 mandate be focused on truth, reconciliation and restorative justice. The House of Bishops echoed this move beyond recognition of racism to reconciliation in their [Pastoral Letter](#) issued that spring. General Convention requested that all dioceses study the sin of slavery ([2006-A123](#)) and asked Council to develop study materials for the wider Church ([2006-A127](#)).

In 2007 Executive Council [set the minimum requirement](#) for anti-racism training at fourteen hours for CCAB members. In their Report to the 2009 General Convention, the Anti-Racism Committee noted that 77 of 100 dioceses had completed training. The 2009 General Convention reaffirmed diocesan training programs and requested "dioceses and provinces develop programs and ministries to dismantle and eradicate structures of racism, both internally and externally, and integrate the practices of anti-racism into their ongoing life" ([2009-A142](#)). The Convention renounced the Doctrine of Discovery, encouraging each diocese to reflect upon its own history with indigenous peoples ([2009-](#)

⁹Social Justice Ministries and Antiracism Committee of Executive Council (DFMS). *Seeing the Face of God in Each Other: A Manual for Antiracism Training and Action*, 2003.

[D035](#)), and extended the 2006 resolution requesting dioceses to study their complicity in or benefit from slavery ([2009-A143](#) and <http://www.episcopalarchives.org/anti-racism/>).

Church-wide anti-racism efforts were stalled with the dramatic downsizing of staff after the passage of the 2009 Budget of the Church, which eliminated the program. Before leaving, the staff officer managed to update *Seeing the Face of God in Each Other* to incorporate user suggestions that it address racism and classism particular to Latinos and other ethnic groups. Council [endorsed](#) the revised curriculum, as the primary resource for the anti-racism training in provinces and dioceses.

In 2012 Executive Council [reaffirmed](#) the importance of anti-racism training. The Anti-Racism Committee cautioned, however, that anti-racism training was hampered by the absence of coordinating staff and cited the Committee's lack of even a list of qualified trainers to call on for support. The 2012 General Convention responded by recommitting to eradicating the sin of racism and affirming local training programs ([2012-A125](#) and [2012-A127](#)), and charged the Committee to continue its work to oversee anti-racism training and local compliance ([2012-A161](#)). Convention also endorsed a study of the impact of the Doctrine of Discovery on "all people, especially people of color" ([2012-A128](#)), which was [reaffirmed](#) by Council in 2014.

The current state of anti-racism awareness in the Episcopal Church might be best expressed in the "Core Values for Anti-Racism Training," which were compiled and issued by Council's Anti-Racism Committee in 2012. These are rendered here.

- The Church acknowledges that racism exists and that it is a sin. We are called to dismantle racism in the Church and in our communities.
- Anti-racism awareness is an ongoing process in the life of individuals and the Church and is grounded in our Baptismal Covenant.
- Focus on the oppression and discrimination of all people of color in the local context while always acknowledging the racism against African Americans and Native Americans as primary expressions of racism that must continue to be challenged and overcome.
- Clarify basic definitions.
- Participants should examine issues of power, privilege, and changing oppressive structures.
- Share personal experience, engagement and stories of individuals involved along with theoretical and didactic information.
- Find ways to extend anti-racism work beyond church walls into the wider community and society.
- Involve diverse community-based populations in conversations and in training experiences to the greatest extent possible.
- Ongoing substantive training in addition to a core immersion training experience for Church leaders is encouraged. Anti-racism work is never completed.
- Recognition that the Doctrine of Discovery (repudiated by the 76th General Convention in Resolution [2009-D035](#)) is foundational to racism in America and the world.

Episcopal Church Resolutions Referred to in this Report, 1979-2014

General Convention Resolutions

- 1979-B052 [Implement an Institutional Program of Racial Justice in the Church](#)
- 1979-B093 [Implement an Affirmative Action Program for Church Employment](#)
- 1982-A062 [Request Dioceses and Congregations to Establish Committees on Racism](#)
- 1982-A152 [Ratify the Executive Council's Affirmative Action Plan](#)
- 1988-A092 [Request Executive Council to Establish a Commission on Racism](#)
- 1991-A082 [Require Racial and Ethnic Representation on Interim Bodies](#)
- 1991-A085 [Instruct Interim Bodies to Examine Effects of Forms of Discrimination](#)
- 1991-A090 [Reduce Discrimination in Clergy Deployment](#)
- 1991-A199 [Urge Each Diocese to Conduct an Audit on Institutional Racism](#)
- 1991-A241 [Approve the Episcopal Martin Luther King Jr. Legacy Scholarship Fund](#)
- 1991-B051 [Call for the Removal of Racism from the Life of the Nation](#)
- 1991-D113 [Address Institutional Church Racism in the Next Three Triennia](#)
- 1991-D043 [Urge Dioceses to Commit to Ending Racism](#)
- 1994-A047 [Establish Overcoming the Sin of Racism As a Priority in Parishes](#)
- 1994-A048 [Encourage all Church Bodies to Make Overcoming the Sin of Racism a Priority](#)
- 1994-D135 [Oversee Monitoring of Full Integration of People of Color in Church Structures](#)
- 1994-D136 [Recommit Church to Combat Racism Through a New Covenant](#)
- 1997-A039 [Reaffirm General Convention Resolutions on Racism](#)
- 1997-D075 [Establish Resource Center for Materials on Racism](#)
- 2000-A047 [Extend Anti-Racism Commitment for Another Nine Years](#)
- 2000-B049 [Require Anti-Racism Training](#)
- 2003-A010 [Continue Anti-Racism Program](#)
- 2006-A123 [Study Economic Benefits Derived from Slavery](#)
- 2006-A127 [Endorse Restorative Justice and Anti-Racism](#)
- 2009-A142 [Recommit the Church to Anti-Racism and Request Annual Report on Diocesan Actions](#)
- 2009-A143 [Extend 2006 Resolution to Examine and Repent for Complicity in Slavery](#)
- 2009-D035 [Repudiate the Doctrine of Discovery](#)
- 2012-A125 [Recommit to Anti-Racism Work](#)
- 2012-A127 [Recommit to Anti-Racism Work](#)
- 2012-A128 [Examine Impact of Doctrine of Discovery](#)
- 2012-A161 [Amend the Anti-Racism Committee's Mandate and Appointments](#)

Executive Council Resolutions

- 02/1982 [Resolution from the Conference on Racism Received](#)
- 05/1988 [Pledge Against Racism Toward Native Americans](#)
- 06/1990 [Training Sessions on Racism](#)
- 04/1991 [Establishment of the MLK Legacy Scholarship Fund](#)
- 06/1992 [Addressing the Issue of Racism](#)
- 04/1997 [Income from the Constable Fund](#)
- 10/2003 [Continuation of Anti-Racism Training](#)
- 02/2004 [Adoption of Anti-Racism Plan](#)
- 11/2004 [Participation in Anti-Racism Training](#)
- 06/2007 [Establishment of a Minimum Time Length for Anti Racism Training](#)
- 10/2011 [Council Resolution to General Convention Reaffirming Anti-Racism Efforts](#)
- 04/2012 [Reaffirm the Importance of Anti-Racism Training](#)
- 10/2014 [Affirm that *Black Lives Matter, Too*](#)
- 10/2014 [Ongoing Work in the Repudiation of the Doctrine of Discovery](#)