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**Church Center Examines Institutional Racism**

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*Episcopal News Service*

NEW YORK (DPS, Sept. 24) -- Business as usual was *not* the order of the day at the Episcopal Church Center on Sept. 16. The building was closed and the staff assembled at a nearby church for an all-day training session on countering institutional racism.

Presiding Bishop Edmond L. Browning, who, in his message from the chair at last November's Executive Council meeting stated, "no greater challenge faces the Church than that of racism," initiated the program as part of the Church Center's response to General Convention's call for elimination of racism within the Episcopal Church.

Intended as a first step in bringing the Church as a whole to examine the racism still existing in its midst, the day's program was entitled, "Healing the Racism in Our Community: Toward an Authentic Spirituality." It was designed and led by Dr. Linda Brown Bragg and Yvonne Johnson of Greensboro, N.C., and the Rev. Henry Atkins of New Brunswick, N.J. Working with them were members of the Church Center staff: the Rev. Earl Neil, executive for National Mission; D. Barry Menuez, executive for mission operations; and Dr. Irene Jackson-Brown, resources program officer in the Education for Mission and Ministry unit. Other staff served as small group facilitators.

The day began with a greeting from Neil, who welcomed participants and opened the session with a prayer written by the late Dr. Charles Lawrence, former president of the House of Deputies of General Convention. He then introduced the Presiding Bishop, who described the day as one to "learn more about those things that hinder us and those things that can push us forward" and so "become better channels for the Lord's grace."

Neil then introduced the design team. Bragg made some introductory remarks and Atkins, speaking on the theology of anti-racism, said, "Where oppression exists, there the will of God is not being done," and called on the staff to "be concrete, as the Bible is concrete" and to "identify pharaohs and say, 'Let my people go.'" Bragg then returned to outline the agenda for the day.

Staff then broke into small groups, by race, to answer the questions: What is good about being white/people of color? What do you like about other people in your racial group? What can't you stand about other people in your racial group? The non-white groups had an additional question: What is hard about being non-white? A late morning plenary led by Johnson heard reports from the small groups on their responses. Noting that the white groups had difficulty coming up with things they liked about their group, she said, "If you don't fully claim your pride in who you are, you cannot move forward."

Atkins then spoke on deepening commitment to anti-racism, active and passive racism and the nature of institutional racism, which he defined as having four points:

1. Whites reserve for themselves most positions of significant decision-making power.
2. Whites discourage minority access to institutional resources through various formal and informal arrangements.
3. Whites assume that their cultural values and norms are superior.
4. Whites explain and justify #'s 1-3 by pointing to faults among the minority community.

Following lunch, the staff again broke into small groups, this time racially mixed ones, to answer questions about moving into change: If we are successful in anti-racism work in the next year, what would it look like? What keeps us from it? What aids us? What is my individual role in that?

In the closing plenary, groups shared their ideas, discovering wide areas of agreement in their answers. These are being collated and will be distributed to staff to form the basis for future planning.

The day's work was summarized by Bragg for the group. She also noted that healing requires an owning of evil, and pointed out a medical parallel -- that if a wound is not cleaned out, it will fester. She said, "Forgiving, overlooking and tolerating racism are different," and added, "Forgiving is an active work." In closing, she said, "We are called to give before the time is perfect, before the place is perfect, before the Church Center is perfect."

The Presiding Bishop then thanked the staff, promising that the day's work would be used as a basis on which to build, and pronounced a benediction on the group.

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