

PART I: BISHOP'S REPORT

Speaker: Rev. Shayla Johnson

Greetings Friends,

I am Rev. Shayla Johnson, Chair of BMCR, Black Methodists for Church Renewal. We will be speaking to you about our conference's progress since last year on the Northeastern Jurisdiction's Call to Action goals.

As you may be aware the NEJ Call to Action Resolution of 2016 challenged bishops, jurisdictional leaders and conferences to become more pro-active and move "from rhetoric to action" to remedy "the wounds caused by unchecked racism, white privilege and internalized oppression."

The approved resolution called on the NEJ to evaluate and address the impact of structural and institutional racism on people of color. Goals include increasing representative black leadership, strengthening the viability of black churches, and starting a new faith community with black youth and young adults in every episcopal area with a significant black population.

In the 2018 Call to Action report to the Northeastern Jurisdiction Vision Table and Episcopacy Committee, the Eastern PA Conference reported strides and next steps that suggest real movement against racial ignorance and inequity that have too long seemed rooted in place.

Indeed, the Conference's "Racial Justice Transformation Process" potentially made 2018 a turning point for the racial progress that the Call to Action initiative seeks; but that will only happen if the candid dialogues and revealing analyses that emerged can lead to deep learning and real change.

The Racial Justice Transformation Process intentionally engages and equips congregations, clergy, ministry candidates, and staff in seeking inclusion and equity while serving their communities. This approach assumes that transformation begins by changing minds, changing hearts and changing behaviors. The purposeful integration of these aspects creates opportunity for changing systems.

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Additionally, we seek to break the denial, move toward acceptance, and appreciate differences as we move toward authentic cultural proficiency. Progress will be measured by:

1. A demonstrated capacity to engage productively in difficult conversations about race, with progressive understanding;
2. Evidence of shared decision-making and shared power, where people of color have more opportunities to serve, where their voices are heard and their opinions are valued; and
3. Greater financial equity in employment opportunities, appointment-making and equal pay for equal work across the board.

The NEJ Call to Action Resolution charges all levels of the church to be accountable in this vital work of transformation, justice and equity. Bishop Johnson endeavored to continue her efforts to foster personal insight through relationship building and increased understanding of the dreams, desires, and obstacles confronting the racial ethnic clergy in her charge through multiple listening sessions with the various ethnic caucuses and groups.

Additionally, she participated in the development of a process to garner greater support and direction for Cross Racial/Cross Cultural Appointments and Ministries in conjunction with the General Commission on Religion and Race, the Cabinet and the EPA Commission on Religion and Race. This included holding an exploratory sessions for clergy and congregations considering CR/CC Ministry. The Bishop's leadership also propelled the movement toward implementation of the Historic Balance Resolution passed at our 2018 Annual Conference.

Bishop Peggy will continue to host annual luncheons for CR/CC appointed clergy. She plans to attend the BMCR Scholarship luncheon next week, as well as Mother African Zoar's 225th Anniversary Banquet in November. You will also find numerous Bishop's Blogs related to Black History month and a Martin Luther King, Jr Day recognition on the conference website.

PART II: CONFERENCE LEVEL

Speaker 1: Rev. Alicia Julia-Stanley

Speaker 2: Marsena Mungin

Introductions:

I am Marsena Mungin, a member of the Conference Commission on Religion and Race.

I am Rev. Alicia, Julia Stanley, Co-Chair of Commission on Religion and Race

SPEAKER 1: Alicia

We are reporting on the systemic changes across the conference as we have worked in collaboration with the Bishop, our District Superintendents, and administrative staff to address the Call to Action goals. We will also address the recommendations, which grew out of “The Butterfly Project,” an aspect of the EPA Racial Justice Transformation Process.

Today, we are witness to some of the progress here at Annual Conference, specifically the language translation for our Spanish-speaking brothers and sisters. Additionally, Tools for Ministry workshops were conducted in Spanish and in Korean; there is a new Korean ministry on East District.

Our Conference recognizes the value of diversity and seeks to become more inclusive in how we live and how we serve; as well as how clergy appointments and lay assignments are made and supported in Cross Racial/Cross Cultural ministry, abbreviated as CRCC. Many opportunities are offered for clergy and laity to broaden knowledge, deepen understanding, and gain language skills designed to strengthen interpersonal and intercultural relationships. Workshops, retreats, dialogues, task forces, surveys and luncheons have been forums for addressing the proficiency of individuals, intricacies of groups, and complexities of systems.

A Cross Racial/Cross Cultural Ministry Taskforce, under the skillful leadership of the General Commission on Religion and Race, created and is currently implementing a detailed process for insuring effective and successful CR/CC Ministries in our conference. The vision statement created for this work states “As disciples of Jesus Christ, we will live into God’s vision of beloved community by committing ourselves to an enriching journey of inclusivity and equity – that is, love and justice – where relationships grounded in mutual respect for our common

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humanity can dispel fears and foster transformation, even the transformation of God's world." The process designed to fulfill this goal will be led by our District Superintendents and will include:

1. Assessments of readiness for a CR/CC Ministry appointment for both congregations and clergy;
2. Encouragement for personal and collective cultural proficiency and humility through trainings and workshops;
3. Engagement with suggested resources and participation with specially trained CR/CC Mentors during the first two years of a new CR/CC Appointment.

SPEAKER 2: Marsena

Two special teams are being trained to assist and support the work of the Superintendents on each district. The teams are comprised of mixed-gender, ethnically diverse, clergy and lay persons.

A Training and Resource Team is prepared to offer workshops designed to answer the question "Why CR/CC Ministry" focusing on the Biblical and theological imperatives and cultural proficiency. This team is able to work with local churches, church clusters, districts, as well as conference-wide events such as the Annual CR/CC Ministry Workshop. The annual Conference-wide event is open to clergy and congregations currently engaged in CR/CC Ministry, those just beginning a CR/CC Ministry appointment, and those curious and interested in CR/CC Ministry.

The second trained team is the Mentoring Team. These members serve on their districts in teams of two assigned to all CR/CC churches. The Mentoring Team assists the district superintendents in supporting CR/CC clergy, SPRC/Lead Teams and the congregations through coaching, mediation, mentoring and resourcing. There are currently 53 CR/CC churches in the conference.

To address the goal of unchecked racism and white privilege, a cohort of 18 Euro-American clergy leaders are currently on a Whites Confronting Racism journey facilitated by an experienced trainer. This intensive, year-long undertaking is designed as a response to the need for a safe place for white people to do the work specific to them around racism and take on greater responsibility for their own learning. The success of anti-racism work increases in groups when white people take time to do their own work – whether in parallel to cross-race work or before it.

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The work helps lift the “veil” of white privilege, without putting the burden of education on people of color. This is not intended to be the only means of learning skills in racial justice work; rather it is meant to accelerate and complement it. These participants are open to confronting and working on their own inner dynamics of racism, white privilege, as well as the societal and institutional forms of racism. They are also be committed to activating their anti-racist influence within the church and in society as a result.

SPEAKER 1: Alicia

As related to the goal of increasing representative ethnically diverse leadership, our Conference Leadership Committee worked diligently to present to us a roster of leadership nominations that most closely captures all the diverse voices in our conference. This diversity not only includes ethnicity, gender, clergy and lay status, but also age differences whenever possible. We celebrate the work this committee has prepared for us as we embrace the blessedness and the enriched fruitful ministry, which results when all voices are heard and honored. Further, the racial-ethnic diversity of the Conference Staff includes 5 full-time and 1 part-time African Americans; 1 Full-Time Latino, and 1 Part-Time Latino.

SPEAKER 2: Marsena

Last year, the 2018 Annual Conference approved Resolution 2018-25: Relating to an Act of Justice Cancelling All Allowable Apportionments and Other Billings. In response to the action of the Annual Conference:

- EPA Conference released all Black Churches of the former Delaware Conference, Philadelphia Conference, and Eastern PA Conference, and/or their successor entities, from any further responsibility for any and all prior years’ balances accumulated prior to December 31, 2017, except in the those instances disallowed by The Book of Discipline. Twenty-nine Black Churches were released from historical balances, amounting to \$1,394,700.
- At that time, Bishop Johnson publically apologized for the acts of racism and the residual impact perpetrated against congregations of color.
- She also acknowledged that the act of cancelling the historic debt was a symbolic gesture that did not impact the on-going reality of the African American churches.

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- In an effort to identify and understand the realities & needs of African American churches, interviews are being conducted which solicit answers to the question, “What would be good news financially and programmatically?” There were 5 recurring responses:
 1. Apportionment reduction
 2. Interns to assist clergy with administrative tasks
 3. Assistance with the infrastructure of the buildings
 4. Plans for repurposing the buildings
 5. Establishment of community partners for building usage

SPEAKER 1: Alicia

Other efforts to respond to the NEJ Call to Action have included using proceeds from the sale of churches to fund an associate pastor in an African American congregation as a way of supporting a smooth transition of the long-term senior pastor; and to establish a new mission Center in the city of Chester. Also, the Conference supports the efforts of an urban congregation in the development of its community project through affiliation with Partners for Sacred Places.

PART III: Programmatic: Conference, District & Local Church Level

Speaker: Rev. Olivet Brown

I am the Rev. Olivet Brown, a member of the Conference Commission on Religion and Race. I intend to speak about the programmatic dimension at the levels of the Conference, Districts, and Local Churches.

All Connectional Ministries have been encouraged and charged to address racial equity and justice within their leadership and programming. This has resulted in many creative efforts, trainings, gatherings and events, geared to challenge and also engage participants. Each ministry is asked to not only offer opportunities that educate, but to engage in relationship-building across ethnic divides and cultural differences. As we continue to inform minds, build relationships with the potential of warming and changing hearts, we will then begin advocating and experiencing changed behaviors. As we collectively desire and expresses a change of behaviors, we will be able to effectively dismantling the racist systems in which we all participate. To this end, many ministry groups are actively engaged in education and relationship building efforts with accountability.

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To highlight a few examples, let me mention:

1. The Board of Ordained Ministry's efforts to increase cultural sensitivity and humility. They have worked with the experienced facilitators of the conference Changing Racism workshop to accomplish this task. In addition, we will have the opportunity to affirm a resolution requiring each clergy person and leader in the conference to engage in at least 1 continuing education training on racism each quadrennium, very much aligned with the requirement for Advanced Sexual Ethics refresher courses for all clergy.
2. The Camping Board engaged a consultant to assist campers of color with transportation, scholarships and cultural support. They expanded their ongoing PEACE Ministries by developing a process of training and engaging Camp Champions from our urban and lower-income churches who are recruiting children and youth to our existing camps. They are also exploring ways to create camping locations and experiences in urban areas for easy access for those living nearby.
3. The Children's Ministry is identifying a Christian Education curricular focusing on race relations, racial justice, and cultural humility for use in our local churches.
4. The Conference Commission on Youth Ministry engage in diversity training and cultural competency activities in each of its gatherings. The Youth Diversity Retreat, held this past Spring, was very well received by those in attendance. It is the desire of this ministry's leadership to expose more of our UMC youth to such valuable experiences in the future. Additionally, the CCYM and Young Adult Ministries intentionally engage a culturally and ethnically diverse leadership team.
5. Leadership on the South District implemented a process for relationship building across cultures through the Supper and Sharing events. These are dinners where diverse groups gather in homes for meals and meaningful dialogue through the use of carefully scripted discussion questions which foster deeper reflection and engagement. These dinners have blessed many in the past two years, with the most recent one held for the conference leaders in May. Supper and Sharing: Fostering Intercultural Competence and Authentic Community One Meal at a Time is a model for all districts to engage.

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6. Additionally, the South District in conjunction with the Commission on Religion and Race hosted a MLK, Jr. Day of Recognition speaker event with the Rev. David Billings, author of the book *Deep Denial: The Persistence of White Supremacy in U.S. History and Life*.
7. The Board of Higher Education and West District held multi-racial clergy and laity gatherings to educate, promote and advocate for Educational Equity funding for PA public education. In partnership with POWER they have written petitions, written suggested legislation, and attended rallies at the state capital. Currently 200-300 people are engaged in the work in one way or another.
8. The Urban Ministry is supporting anti-gentrification campaigns in partnership with West District's Manifest Urban Alliance. They also work with the South District's Urban Alliance and the My Brothers'/Sisters' Keepers Antiracism Project. The East District Urban Alliance has embarked on an initiative called "Ministry in Motion."

We pray these efforts continue to grow and expand as all members of the Eastern PA Conference - leadership, clergy, ministries, and local church members - all strive to open and change minds, hearts, and behaviors. Our goal is to model to all our communities what the Beloved Community can look like and be. Authentic relationships forged beyond traditional cultural divisions promise riches and blessings in ways we have yet to discover or experience. Let us follow our Lord's commandment to love one another as He has loved us. May we all truly be one in Christ where there is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male or female. May our work to dismantle the vestiges of racism shine forth, with the help of the Holy Spirit.