

St. Columba's Strategy for Antiracism

The mission of St. Columba's Episcopal Church is to live God's love. Our commitment to antiracism is an essential step in living God's love, which the Vestry has recognized by making it one of the five core priorities in the church's strategic plan.

The Confession calls upon us to confess not only our acts and omissions, but the evil done on our behalf, past and present. Our Baptismal Covenant obligates us not only to seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving our neighbor as ourselves, but also to persevere in resisting evil and to renounce the powers of this world that corrupt and destroy the creatures of God. We are therefore called to renounce and resist racism in all aspects of our life and actively work toward the Beloved Community—a vision of global community, in which we will no longer tolerate poverty, hunger and homelessness, will work to dismantle all forms of racism, bigotry and prejudice, and will love our neighbors as ourselves, sharing the wealth of God's creation. It is this vision that compels us, as God's people, to action.

We recognize and acknowledge that St. Columba's has benefitted from, and been complicit in, racism. At its founding, the church received land and wealth that had been accumulated by generations of a local family who had relied on the labor of enslaved persons. In the first half of the 20th century, the Tenleytown community reserved housing opportunities in our neighborhood for Whites and displaced the Black residents of "Reno City" and the area around Lafayette Elementary School. Our actions forced St. George's Episcopal Church—a mission church of St. Columba's where the Black community worshiped—to relocate and to do so without financial or other support from St. Columba's. Today, the legacy of those racist policies and actions is that few Black people make their home in our neighborhood, and St. Columba's is an overwhelmingly White church. We acknowledge this history of our church and community, as well as the broader history of racism and exclusion, and aim to chart a new path.

This outline describes St. Columba's strategy for becoming an antiracist church. We understand this work will require sustained focus over a long period of time—indeed, becoming an anti-racist church may never have an end point. Antiracism is a way of being—a way of striving, of supporting one another, of setting priorities and living God's love.

Our Guiding Principles

As important as it is for St. Columba's to undertake specific actions to become an antiracist church, how we undertake them is just as important. In engaging in this work, we strive to:

- Remain grounded in our faith and our calling to live God's love;
- Acknowledge our collective history, reckoning with its racist past and present;
- Be humble, asking for forgiveness, forgiving, and remembering that none of us have all the answers;

- Be open-hearted, with grace towards ourselves and others; be authentic and present, aware of the physical and emotional impact of the work of anti-racism;
- Act in partnership with others in the Episcopal Church and in our wider community; and
- Persist when the work is hard and appears not to bear fruit; commit to longer term engagement with the community that is essential to sustained effort and impact.

Our Focus

We, the people of St. Columba's, commit ourselves to engage as individual Christians, as a church, and as members of a community to the work of becoming an antiracist church. This three-fold commitment does not describe an inventory of activities, but the ways in which we will support engagement at multiple levels. We commit ourselves to:

- **Antiracism as individuals:** “Whoever you are, wherever you are in your journey of faith, you are welcome at Christ’s table.” Each of us comes to the work of antiracism with a different family history and set of personal experiences, and with different perspectives and levels of understanding. An essential part of becoming an antiracist church is for each of us to deepen our understanding of the legacy of racism and to undertake efforts to remedy this legacy by:
 - Learning (and supporting learning) about racism, including through Weekly Forums, Sacred Ground, book groups, small circle discussions, and youth formation;
 - Being mindful of the ways we may act from a privileged vantage point;
 - Being open to the personal transformation;
 - Being courageous, addressing racism when we observe it; and
 - Supporting each other as we deepen our understanding, acknowledging when something we say or do hurtful things, and seeking forgiveness.
- **Antiracism as a church:** Like most institutions, St. Columba's and the Episcopal Church have supported structures of racism. Unless examined and challenged, that history can affect how we function now. We seek to understand and acknowledge our history by:
 - Reviewing the church's practices, policies, operations, and worship—and changing them when they are inconsistent with being a welcoming and inclusive
 - Parish for people of all backgrounds;
 - Creating events and programming that appeal to people of diverse backgrounds and perspectives; and

- Building understanding of the church's role in supporting and reflecting structures of racism, facilitating repentance, and making reparations for past wrongs through our ministries, service, and giving.
- **Antiracism as members of our community:** Living God's love involves not only looking inward, but acting outward, standing with and lifting up those who are hurting or vulnerable. Our parish and parishioners can undertake specific actions to help create the Beloved Community we seek. As members of this wider community, we seek to combat racism by:
 - Building relationships with individuals and communities of different races and ethnicities;
 - Advocating for justice and for anti-racist policies, including through the Washington Interfaith Network; and
 - Acting to dismantle the legacies of racist policies and promote justice wherever they exist, including through the parish drive to end family homelessness in Washington, DC; through St. Columba's many Ministries; through support for refugees; and much more.

Our Objectives

Through this work, we will:

- Integrate antiracism into faith development for all ages and into St. Columba's programs and ministries;
- Deeply commit and engage across the entire parish in dismantling racism in our community, in our homes, and in our church;
- Be better equipped to identify and have conversations about the issues of racism;
- Welcome and embrace all people and build longer-term partnerships in the broader community of the Washington DC region;
- Make a difference in the lives of others, and
- Continually invite one another into this work and commit to hold ourselves accountable to live our values and reflect the Beloved Community.