

*First Congregational United Church of Christ
Washington, DC*

**Racial Justice Audit Report
February 2022**

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I. Executive Summary

A. Process

During 2021, the church conducted a racial justice audit of its programs and operations, utilizing the audit tool developed by the Racial Justice Network Leadership Team of the Central Atlantic Conference. The audit was facilitated by Council and conducted by each of the church's commissions within their program areas and by the Anti-Racism Committee (ARC), a standing committee of SAAC. The audit included a survey of members of the congregation. This report is a compilation of reports prepared by the commissions and ARC. Each commission was asked to reflect on the responses provided to the questions in the audit tool and invited to respond to the following prompts:

- What are we doing well?
- Where do need work? and
- What other principal insights were gleaned from the audit?

In addition, each commission was invited to make recommendations for the church's Comprehensive Plan to Dismantle Racism, to be accomplished over the next 1-5 years, and to suggest potential benchmarks to evaluate progress.

Finally, each commission was invited to reflect on how such efforts connect to our faith and who we proclaim God to be.

B. Overview of Findings

We have a longstanding commitment to racial justice and a strong desire to study and understand institutional and systemic barriers to racial justice and structural reforms necessary for providing equal opportunity for all. Additionally, we seek to reform our own habits and practices so that we become a more multicultural and multiracial community, with a radical welcome to people of all backgrounds.

We desire to provide a greater welcome and spaces of healing to members and friends of color, to provide more opportunities for education and training among professional and lay leaders, to diversity our staff and leadership, to establish policies promoting diversity and anti-racist practices, and to communicate more uniformly among Council and commissions on our diversity and anti-racism objectives.

We believe that working to understand and eradicate the historic structures and implicit biases that have created and continue to sustain different lived realities and outcomes for persons of different races is fundamental to living out our faith as Christians.

II. Program Area Reports (and Reporting Commission)

A. General (Council & ARC)

Doing Well

- The church has a strong commitment to combatting racism and to promoting racial and cultural diversity that is historically rooted and embodied in present policies and practices, including the following.
- Our anti-racism platform document (Statement on Becoming an Anti-Racist Church) commits us to live into our anti-racist calling.
- White Privilege Discussion Groups create a common analysis in a relational setting that values accountability.
- Micro-Aggression Training has offered accessible conversations that model cross-racial co-facilitation.
- Sacred Conversations to End Racism is a cohort-based seminar and discussion series offered by the national UCC under the leadership of the Rev. Dr. Velda Love.
- Anti-Racism educational opportunities provide avenues to build capacity through discussion groups, training, book studies, and events.
- Feedback from the Congregation suggests that First Church members feel better equipped to discuss these issues with their extended family and friends beyond the church walls, and that they want to learn more.

Needs Work

- We have not achieved desired racial and cultural diversity within our congregation or in our worship service. Our professional leadership and membership do not reflect the demographics of our city.
- ARC notes the following areas where we need work:
 - Offering healing spaces for members/friends of color: providing healing conversations, services, and affinity groups that center people of color.
 - Grieving together: Services of lament and healing, conversations, and events invite us to cultivate the spiritual practice of weeping with those who weep.
 - Curiosity about other cultures.
 - Diversifying our staff and leadership
 - Multi-racial Conversations (beyond white discussion groups)
 - Unifying Vision and Analysis across Commissions
 - Policies to support anti-racism training for our leadership

- De-centering white voices/interests to hear the voices not being heard
- Growing our capacity to withstand racial discomfort and move through conflict

Other Insights (from ARC)

- We must prioritize the healing of members/friends of color.
- We lack a consistent policy for anti-racism training for staff and leadership.
- While we have helped individuals build capacity on the anti-racism journey, we must now build capacity on a structural level.
- Our history includes two significant conflicts which ruptured the congregation. We seek conflict resolution strategies that can withstand racial discomfort.
- We seek training to recognize implicit bias and respond effectively.

B. Worship & Celebration (Worship Commission)

Doing Well

- When congregants were asked if they feel welcome in our services, 30 responded “yes.” A majority of people feel welcome/included . . .
 - when People of Color are invited to share in worship or guest-preach
 - when Members share personal experiences
 - in the communion circle
 - in the way we welcome new members
 - during passing of the peace
 - in Rev. Sam’s participatory exercises with the kids
 - in sermons
 - in use of inclusive language
 - through the participation of many people/voices
 - in our focus on racial justice
 - when enjoying the opportunities to have quiet, reflective centering
 - participating in the Choir
 - when we use ethnically diverse hymns, especially when there is variety
 - in sharing prayers of the people
 - through use of name-tags
 - during coffee hour - way to make connections with others

- When congregants were asked if they feel welcome in our services, 18 responded “yes” with the following caveats/named moments of exclusion
 - Exclusive language
 - Scripture passages that are gendered &/or include slave/master
 - Reference to political parties and politicians
 - Certain music: classical, old hymns, traditional
 - Formal service
 - When suggest dismissal of potential disagreement
 - Individualistic notions of the divine - confession/assurance, disregard of the covenant (which is communal) could propagate racism and shield it from scrutiny
 - Reference to Roman Catholic traditions as a point of trigger for LGBTQ+ folks
 - Virtual services can be hard to connect with
 - when there are not Prayers of the People
- Regarding artwork, Survey respondents:
 - shared that current art and images are generally inclusive, show that we embrace different expressions of celebrating our faith, and show our values
 - appreciate the Black Lives Matter signage, more signage will attract more people
 - Appreciate the simple art in the sanctuary, would prefer more expression in the narthex
 - Appreciate the temporary/pop-up exhibits that occur around the walls of the narthex, building (Due to the event space, our exhibits get seen by many more people)
- Regarding the question on the survey: “Do our services promote anti-racism, address current/burning race related events in the community, and lead us to being an anti-racist church?”
 - 47 respondents said yes
 - 1 said “we try”
 - 5 said yes with qualifiers including:
 - We need more education (webinars, books, look at history)
 - not as organic/ more intentional on higher level
 - Only occurs in sermons
 - 4 said “yes and no in different aspects of the service”
 - 1 said “not yet”

- 1 said “no” added: what we are doing is white church-grounded but we are trying
- 1 said: “Worship includes talk about the issues of race and anti-racism, but the face of our worship is predominantly white. When a Person of Color worships with us, they would often not see themselves embodied in the leadership or in the style and content of the service.”
- 1 said “no in terms of style”
- 1 said “don’t know if it always does”
- In summary: We seek to expand our understanding. We thoughtfully craft worship and choose music to experience a broader range.

Needs Work

- Would like less Euro-centric worship
- Would like to have more People of Color preaching, leading worship, music
- Currently do not have a responsive worship experience; would like more interaction between worship leaders and congregants during the service and after the service (sermon talk-backs)
- Center away from whiteness, re-interpret scripture, re-center ideas of God, Christ, and Spirit away from raced-based incarnations
- Currently don’t hear as much about what is happening locally/ the DC community re racial justice and race-related events
- Bring into the worship service the justice issues that we receive on email; e.g., potentially add a standing moment of justice
- Strengthen connection among all the parts of the worship service
- Regarding Artwork:
 - We haven’t used interior space to make a statement about our identity
 - Mixed opinions about the white space within the sanctuary: some say use it more, some say focus on hallways. There is a lot of white space in the sanctuary; question is what to do with it and how to bring images into the sanctuary, given the intention to have the space be flexible for other users. For example: we could do a projection of art on the back wall of the sanctuary
 - Use the narthex, hallways for more art and signage
 - Display art that shows we are diverse and invite diversity in full participation in the church; art with clear anti-racist message; anti-racist iconography; have more posters, images related to current events; art that reflects different cultures; display information about the artwork next to it to show context.
 - Rotating exhibits, e.g. including multicultural representations of Christ scattered throughout the church in visible places; Display photos of members doing things

- working at drop-in center, attending marches, etc; Invite artists to reuse art from protests to display in our space; Displays that show how our faith shows our human relation; exhibitions including: community-based, exploring the history, culture, art of our city

- Pay attention to the art and messaging that is displayed on the outside - especially for people who do not ever come into the church building
- Discussion of proposals for display of artwork is itself an opportunity for anti-racism reflection and increased awareness.

Other insights

- Some recognized barriers within congregation to anti-racism efforts:
 - Comfort with sameness, resistance to change, confusing “the way things have always been done” with faith.
 - White members reluctant to embrace their own discomfort, to think about what it might feel like to be a non-white person who may not identify with some of the “traditions”
 - Reluctance to embrace more call-and-response worship styles
 - Tension of letting go of some of the familiar aspects of worship to add more variety - could be a sad/hard change for some.
 - Awareness that many white people may find it easy to say they want change, but difficult to embrace it
 - Majority white church with a sense of knowing what to do/“one way of doing things” thus recommend changing things up so there is not a singular way of doing things.
 - Limited number of People of Color staff, congregants
 - Concern about appropriation
- Suggestions:
 - Increase education/gaining knowledge on --
 - Diverse worship styles and faith expressions. Inviting congregants and guests to share their knowledge would help build that knowledge
 - Language of anti-racism
 - Issues of class, culture, gender, and much more
 - Self-awareness, and awareness of subtle, implicit bias
 - Re concern about appropriation: be intentional, share context, and have comprehensive introductions; be open, unafraid to make mistakes, eager to forgive
 - Re general reluctance to change: just do it.

- We do the intellectual well; we need growth in the spiritual, emotional, healing and renewing aspects of worship.

C. Music (Worship Commission)

Overview of the issues according to the RJA survey, worship folder data gathering, interviews, and Worship Commission discussion:

- Congregation calls for more diversity in music selections, styles, and tempos
- Congregation calls for a more authentic performance/presentation of the music (e.g., pronunciation in spirituals/authentic tempos)
- Congregation believes that the current music program fails to include people of color and those from diverse religious and cultural backgrounds
- We resolve to include diverse music in worship services thoughtfully and with intentionality, not just to check a box
- We understand that there's a breadth of music that First Church hasn't tapped

Survey responses by the numbers:

- 3/9 (33%) of person-of-color (POC) respondents say current music variety is good, with no change suggested
- 11/57 (~20%) of white respondents say current music variety is good, with no changes suggested
- 6/9 (66%) of POC respondents say current music lacks diversity
- 30/57 (~50%) of white respondents say current music lacks diversity
- 6/57 (~10%) of white respondents say music is too slow and stodgy
- 5/57 (~10%) of white respondents urge the church to change the music program quickly, despite perceived barriers
- Compared to the frequency with which sermons, scriptures, prayers and moments of justice promote anti-racism work or addressed burning race related events, respondents feel that the music and song selection does so less often. (More than 50% say "often" for non-music elements, only 20-25% say so for music and song selection.)

Data gathering results by the numbers:

- 121/562 songs¹ played in worship in the last two years were determined by Worship Commission to be "inclusive or promoting anti-racism" when considering composer, style/genre, and performer
- 110/562 songs were composed by people of color

¹ 492 of the 562 songs surveyed, or 88%, were from January 2019 – March 2020. All others were from March 2020-May 2021 (during virtual worship).

- 102/562 songs were of styles other than traditional protestant or western classical (these styles included Latinx, African, Caribbean, Spirituals, Gospels, Native American, Taize, South Korean, and Contemporary)
- The 8 – 12 opportunities for music in each service have not been effectively used to make the music in worship diverse. In only rare cases have the music choices in a service been intentional, usually un special services .

Lessons from interview with Rev. Amanda on her study/observation/participation in Black church services, as well as additional observations of Black church services by Worship Commission:

- Worship is seen as a time for spiritual renewal and replenishment, and church is a place where one’s dignity as a human being is affirmed.
- The focus of worship is God and one’s relationship with God.
- Praise music is not just about the lyrics but about having a bodily experience of praise.

Suggestions for improvement . . .

. . . from POC individuals (via RJA survey & interview)

1. Decrease the amount of organ-centric music played in the sanctuary*^
2. Increase the use of improv during worship
3. Be responsive to an ever-changing congregation*
4. Use music to help kids and youth connect with worship
5. Move away from the hymnal as the centering object during worship^
6. Make the unexpected expected by normalizing new, inclusive approaches to music (i.e. sung prayers, drumming in the sanctuary, etc.)*
7. Introduce a variety of music, expanding beyond Black church music to Global music as well
8. Re-think the musical role of the choir from “leading the congregation musically” to something else, recognizing that it is not racially diverse
9. Encourage/normalize movement in response to music in order to include those who come from backgrounds in which movement is essential to experiencing music^
10. Invite the congregation before every service to “worship in whatever way you feel led” to make newcomers feel welcome and establish an inclusive environment for those in worship^

. . . from white individuals (RJA survey & interviews):

11. Be open to hiring a team to direct music, doesn’t necessarily need to be one person
12. Pay Howard music students to be section leaders in the choir

13. Tie music more into the worship theme and message
14. Find modern ways to use the organ

. . . from May Congregational meeting:

15. Implement more call and response music
16. Implement a flexible limit of one western classical/traditional protestant hymn per service
17. Have a native speaker sing the first verse of a hymn in a foreign language, then have the congregation follow behind
18. Be more rigorous about teaching the choir the pronunciation of song lyrics when in different languages
19. Have program notes to explain the cultural context of songs

*These were suggested by multiple POC congregants

^These were suggested by both POC and white congregants

D. Education (Christian Education Commission)

As part of the audit, the Christian Education Commission (CE) surveyed First Church members regarding our adult and youth faith formation programs. We sent a focused youth survey to our families about programming and regathering. CE compiled and analyzed lists of recent theology reading group books, nurtures, other adult faith formation activity, movies, and youth social justice trips and visits to other houses of worship. In addition, CE surveyed pastors and members of other churches to gain insights on additional practices.

In the past and up to now, adult and youth faith formation programs have touched upon issues of racial justice and anti-racism. However, this audit has motivated us to learn more about how the church, through faith formation activities, can help the congregation be a more anti-racist and inclusive body and to make antiracism a more intentional focus of faith formation.

E. Pastoral Care

Audit Report/Reflection Pastoral Care

1. What are we doing well?
 - A. Senior Minister holds a certificate in Black Church studies and is trained in anti-racism with personal mentorship in caring for people of color including in the wake of trauma. She has also coached clergy and other faith leaders in responding to racism and microaggressions. She currently leads a community of practice to provide spiritual care and collegial support to a multiracial group of pastors (and attends annual training to do so).

- B. Associate Minister excels in pastoral care and was trained in a diverse setting in seminary. Both SM and AM have mentors, teachers, and colleagues of color upon whom they call for accountability, wisdom, and best practices.
- C. We have provided and will continue to provide chaplains for sacred conversations on race.

2. Where do we need work?

- A. Creating a process, together with Council and backed up by a written policy, on how to follow up after microaggressions occur.
- B. Increasing staff representation of our congregation racially, including in pastoral staff.
- C. Pastoral staff training in caring for members of color and white members through an anti-racist lens.

Recommendations for the Comprehensive Plan 2022:

1. **Pastoral Staff training:** create a plan, assess possible trainers, undergo training
2. **Microaggressions Policy:** create a policy re: how to follow up after microaggressions occur
3. **Pastoral Staff Formalizing Relationships of Accountability:** pastoral staff will meet with clergy of color who specialize in pastoral care to grow skills and establish formal relationships of accountability

5. Connection to faith and who we proclaim God to be:

In theological school we learned about liberation theology's assertion that God has a preferential option for the poor and oppressed. In other words, God constantly centers those who have been marginalized. In pastoral care, we seek to do the same, offering particular care to those bearing the burdens of racialized trauma and microaggressions. For members of color, we value providing culturally competent care, the kind of care that is informed not only by an antiracist analysis but also is filled with love for the fullness of their identity. For white members, we seek to equip and encourage them to move further into the work of liberation from white supremacy and deeper, more skillful love of neighbors impacted by racism daily. We are mindful that we do not do this work alone, God's Spirit attends us and divine forgiveness and grace make a way forward when we make mistakes. God is constantly calling us into the work of healing and repair, which requires accountability and an acknowledgement of both our brokenness as well as our ability to grow and transform so that we might follow more faithfully the ways of Jesus.

F. Membership & Hospitality (Care of Parish)

- *Doing Well.* COP feels like the consistency of coffee hours and potlucks is a good reliable touch point for the congregation. COP also feels like special events are well received and welcomed by the congregation.

- *Needs Work.* COP believes that there's opportunities within coffee hour, potlucks, and special activities to encourage people to represent their own culture and expose the congregation to diverse experiences.
- *Other Insights.* COP recognizes the need to balance safety and predictability of food at coffee hour and potlucks (e.g., ensure foods without common allergens are served at coffee hour) with the flexibility to allow people to bring the food that represents themselves. We also recognize the financial obligation and rigidity that can come with hosting coffee hour, and how that might alienate certain members.

G. Social Justice (Social Action & Awareness Commission)

Doing Well

- We have adopted a strong formal anti-racism statement approved by the congregation.
- We participate in city and national in-person and online advocacy events, and write letters and emails to officials. Our efforts are amplified when we work with others (e.g, UCC churches on housing policy, Washington Interfaith Network on housing for specific sites, etc.).
- Racism and racial inequality are central in worship and programs of study.
- We serve as a step-off, respite and hospitality site for demonstrators coming to Washington to participate in demonstrations.
- The anti-racist, inclusive signage we post in the windows of our building are a visible presence in downtown.
- We have joint efforts with neighboring institutions in our dynamic downtown neighborhood which serve primarily black populations: Pathways to Housing, Drop-In Center with Sasha Bruce Youthwork (SBY), and, beyond downtown, Shaw Community Center; as well as sporadic program collaboration with our neighbors: DC Public Library and Ford's Theatre.
- We serve immigrant people of color through Faith in Action (national) and Congregation Action Network (local).
- We have a formal Memorandum of Understanding with Sasha Bruce Youthwork for the operation of the Youth Drop-In Center which serves young people, primarily those of color.
- We have carried out multiple effective sessions of the UCC White Privilege training class. Many have participated, and subsequently dialogue within the church has changed.
- We have great intentions, albeit mostly without formal policies, that support antiracist goals.

Needs Work

- We note a lack of outreach to people of color dealing with continuing racism in the community. We should do more.
- We need to be better at supporting members of color, especially after public traumatic events.
- We need to form intentional relationships with communities of color, especially local UCC churches.
- White individuals need to learn to sit with discomfort when racism is uncovered, explained, or called out, and then offer places of healing.
- Our outreach efforts are scattered and siloed.
- We should examine partnerships through racial justice lenses.
- The congregation told us in the Racial Justice Audit survey that SAAC needs to share more information about social action programs for which First Church actively participates or donates.
- We can make better strategic use of our location and space, building user relationships and collaborations, going beyond the passive host role for others' events.
- White folks need more exposure to black culture. We can facilitate and encourage white folks to do their homework.
- We can do research to understand the changing housing scene in the neighborhood.
- We need to learn to be more effective in supporting people of color in dealing with continuing racism, within the congregation and outside.
- Generally, we lack plans/policies with specific strategies and goals to center anti-racism in SAAC activities.

Other Insights

- We can and should be more intentional about our internal relationships, build trust and understanding, better empathize, and should be better allies so that people of color, both black and brown, feel comfortable expressing strong feelings.
- White folks need to be better at living with discomfort; bold intentional action causes discomfort; we need to learn to listen, sit with discomfort, and engage in dialog without fear of rupture.
- We can and should be more intentional about our external relationships. Build more allyship with organizations of color, and see how we can support them, trust them to lead and partner.
 - Look at partnerships through racial justice lenses. How well do they serve people of color, look at their mission and staff and anti-racist values.
 - How do we trust our closest partner organizations?

- o Partners are sources of powerful stories to build empathy.

H. Evangelism & Outreach (Outreach & Membership Commission)

The Outreach and Membership Commission (O&M) has found our discussions conducted as part of the racial justice audit to be helpful in thinking about the challenges ahead. We are proud to be part of a congregation that tries to live out our values through the mandate of our faith to “welcome the stranger” and “love our neighbor as ourselves.”

Nevertheless, we recognize that our welcome may not be provided as extravagantly to some individuals, especially persons of color. We may also be off-putting and seemingly judgmental in our interactions, such as through questions about particular aspects of an individual’s background (e.g., “What college did you attend?”). Our space may not be used to its fullest potential in recognizing the value of all cultures and perspectives. And despite our meaningful discussions, we recognize that conversations should be geared toward outcomes as part of a progression, albeit an evolving journey.

O&M sees many opportunities for improvement. We can be more intentional about our welcome to all persons who walk through our doors. We should ensure we give abundant and quick attention to follow-up with visitors, especially letting them know we look forward to getting to know them more and that we are available to respond to any questions they have about our community. This may involve an explicit effort to increase awareness among congregation members about how to be more actively welcoming. Additionally, we need to demonstrate our honor of particular cultures and perspectives, such as those of African, Latinx, Asian and Pacific Islander, and Native descent, through our decisions (e.g., the art and exhibits we display). We need to be aware of the ways in which our demographics make it harder for some to walk through our doors or find home here. We are seeking to welcome authentically, but we need to acknowledge it takes more courage and more work for some to feel at home in our space than others.

I. Business Relationships (Finance Commission)

Doing Well

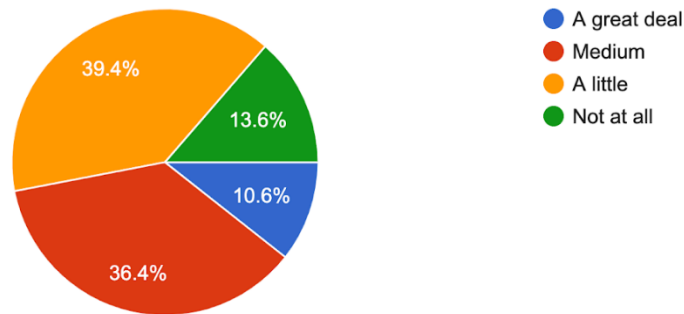
- Finance is fulfilling its oversight responsibilities around the budget process, monitoring expenses, promoting areas for growth in income, and planning stewardship.
- We are somewhat aware of the racial/cultural identity of the owners of the business/financial services the congregation uses.

Needs Work

- The following graph (responses to a congregational survey question) shows where we need work – the involvement of more diverse voices in financial decision-making.

To what extent do you feel diverse voices within the congregation and in the community are engaged in the church's business/financial decisions of where the church hires or buys services).

66 responses



-
- Finance needs to find ways to solicit broader feedback on its work. This year we held a hearing on financial issues and provided an explanation on the importance of the endowment prior to developing the budget. Afterward we circulated information from this session to the larger community. This helped solicit wider feedback but not necessarily more diverse.
- From the all-church survey: *We have an extremely white (and generally older) leadership, and they provide most of the input into business/financial decisions for the church. It's always about the bottom line which means other voices are not prioritized.*
- We need to remove barriers to partnering with businesses that are owned by Black people and marginalized groups by expanding our contacts and networks and being clear that doing business with these groups is a priority.

Other Insights

- The primary places for working with minority owned businesses are contractors/vendors related to our building and our financial institutions.
- Finance and Facilities should develop a policy around seeking bids for major work on the church. For example requiring three bids, two from vendors of color. If all things are equal, we go with a vendor of color. If their bid is higher, we ask if there is room for negotiation. If not, have a benchmark, e.g. that at least 50% of our

contracts/vendors/suppliers will be of color, and then we choose based on meeting our goal.

J. Organizational Policies & Procedures (Council)

- *Doing Well.* In 2016, Council set anti-racism as a high priority for the church. In our search for a new senior minister (2017) and for a designated senior minister (2019), we emphasized the goals of anti-racism and racial and cultural diversity. In 2020, our (then) Designated Senior Minister and Council developed a Comprehensive Plan for Dismantling Racism, and in 2021, the congregation adopted a Statement on Becoming an Anti-Racism Church developed by SAAC, which will guide internal operations and facilitate external advocacy. Led by our Senior Minister, we committed substantial time and resources to conducting this racial justice audit. These efforts built on earlier congregational votes to become a multiracial and multicultural church.
- *Needs Work.* Our organizational structures (Council and Commission) are cumbersome, requiring significant commitments from lay leaders that may discourage participation. We should explore ways to streamline our structures to ease the burdens on volunteers to encourage greater participation and diversity among lay leadership. We should also consider changes to the bylaws and other policies to explicitly incorporate anti-racism policies and diversity goals.

K. Nominations & Appointment Process (Council)

- *Doing Well.* Our process for nominating and appointing church officers and members of Council and commissions is largely ad hoc. Council appoints two or three volunteers to select/recruit persons to fill positions for the upcoming year. That slate (along with the nominations committee) is presented for vote at our annual meeting each January. This process has the potential to be rather insular. However, because the Bylaws impose strict term limits and mandate frequent turnover, and because we have prioritized anti-racism and diversity, we have been relatively successful in nominating and appointing slates of officers and volunteers that reflect a broad cross section of the congregation and the diversity of our community.
- *Needs Work.* In our desire to achieve racial and cultural diversity among our lay leaders and volunteers, we can sometimes ask too much of members from minority groups. We should consider ways to reduce the burdens of the various offices and appointments to promote broader participation. We should also consider whether changes to the nominations and appointment process (to make it less ad hoc) might better promote diversity goals.

L. Search and Call (Council)

- *Doing Well.* In our last two search and call processes for the senior minister position—to call a new senior minister in 2017, and to call a Designated Senior Minister in 2020 when the prior call proved unsuccessful—we emphasized our goals of anti-racism and diversity. The search committee for our new Director of Music Ministry underwent anti-bias training before engaging candidates. We also encouraged applications from persons of color and other minority groups in our recent search for our new Administrative Assistant.
- *Needs Work.* We should consider whether changes to the Bylaws or other policies are warranted to formalize anti-bias training and/or the goals of anti-racism and diversity in the search-and-call process and process for hiring all staff.

M. Physical Plant & Building Design (Facilities Commission)

Doing Well

1. While we acknowledge FCC’s mixed history regarding racial relations, we are not captives to that history. We see the building as a vital, evolving space. For this reason, we don’t have rooms named after people, nor do we put up pictures of individual members.
2. Similarly, we don’t have permanently affixed symbols of our faith. We believe that this makes the space more inviting to other faith groups that may use the building, as well as non-religious groups that seek to bring all together to work towards a common purpose.
3. We make our space available as a gathering place for the broader community. Specifically, we have ongoing building use or rental arrangements with local organizations that serve primarily People of Color (POC), including Pathways to Housing and the Drop-In Center in partnership with Sasha Bruce Network.
4. We also have occasional cultural program collaborations in our space with our neighbors DC Public Library and Ford’s Theatre.
5. The building serves as a gathering and hospitality site for social activists visiting Washington to participate in meetings, marches, and demonstrations.

Needs Work

1. Identifying and actively engaging with groups involving or representing POC that could benefit from free or reduced cost use of our space. One comment from the survey: “say yes to partner organizations using our space even when it’s uncomfortable or difficult.”
2. We need to be more intentional about identifying and contracting with building-related vendors that are owned and operated by POC.

3. Engaging congregation in ongoing conversations about allowing our building to be used for free by certain groups or to advance anti-racist work and what that costs in dollar terms to our budget.

Other Insights

1. It is an observable fact that many of the outside groups that currently use or rent our space are composed primarily of white people.
2. We need to actively identify more groups involving POC, and encourage them to consider using our facilities for their meetings and events.
3. While we desire to use our building to advance justice, we also rely on building income to balance our budget. Making our building more available to organizations working on anti-racism efforts is likely to have a budgetary impact. How much income is the congregation willing to forego to make our building available?
4. Need to think beyond what we currently do - some suggestions from survey include providing space for ESL classes, citizenship classes, small music/arts groups, DC Statehood organizations, Howard or other HBCU sponsored activities, Empowerment Liberation Cathedral, and Community UCC.

III. Recommendations (by Commission or Committee)

A. ARC

Recommendation for the Comprehensive Plan 2022

- Healing Opportunities for People of Color: Rev. Jason Carson-Wilson will gather members/friends of color to discuss and make recommendations to the wider congregation on the following:
 - A regular gathering of members/friends of color for support, fellowship, or particular programming
 - Healing opportunities including: worship services, healing conversations, and healing resources from the wider church (such as the Central Atlantic Conference)
 - Opportunities for dialogue for our children and youth of color.
- Anti-Racism Training Plan:
 - The Anti-Racism Committee (ARC) will make recommendations to Council regarding anti-racism training staff, leadership, and possibly other groups such as Sunday School teachers. The recommendations will address the specific needs of various groups, scheduling, and possible consultants who can create a training plan specific to our needs.
 - The ARC will seek to pilot the training.
- Chaplain for Sacred Conversations:

- A leader (such as pastoral staff member, Member in Discernment, or ordained clergy members) will be designated to serve in the role of “chaplain” for any congregational conversations related to racism.
- At the start of the conversation, the chaplain will be introduced and participants will be instructed that anyone experiencing grief, anger, or frustration can excuse themselves from the conversation and receive care (prayer, dialogue, ministry of presence) from the chaplain.
- Inter/Multi-Racial Dialogue Opportunities: such as congregational reads, book groups, author events, small groups, response to current events.

B. Christian Education

Below are some topics and recommendations for Christian Education and the CE Commission in 2022:

Staff, Volunteer, Teacher Training Around Anti-Racism Awareness

- During the first quarter, identify educators to conduct the Anti-Racism training
- During the first quarter, research and identify tools and complementary resources to help our faith formation achieve its anti-racist objectives
- During the second quarter, schedule and implement one training with a group of staff and CE volunteers
- During the third quarter, work with those who have completed the training to identify recommendations and best practices to help the content and culture of CE be more anti-racist.

Theology Book Club

- Explore with Young Adults and appropriate Commissions on how to re-constitute the Theology Book Club in a way that it can sustain itself.
- Once the Club is re-constituted, have members of the Theology Book Club identify measurable ways in how the book club can help advance the congregation’s anti-racist goals.

Young Adults

- Continue to support and encourage the Young Adult community
- Listen to and support ways the Young Adult community would like to act upon issues of racial justice.

Sunday School

- Ensure that the curricula and school culture are grounded in the specific values and objectives from the Anti-Racist Training for Staff and CE Volunteers.

- Continue to foster and strengthen partnerships with diverse communities, such as our outdoor gatherings with People’s UCC
- Create service opportunities for youth and adults that help create a more just world and foster a deeper understanding of racial justice issues including history, micro-aggression, safe spaces, inclusion, and community organizing.

C. Care of Parish

- Coffee Hour: COP recommends adding money to the budget to have shelf-stable food available to serve at coffee hour that can be utilized by those who are not able to buy food. In general, we suggest scaling back expectations for coffee hour to make it more feasible for everyone. We also suggest modifying instructions to welcome a variety of food (taking into consideration food allergies) and encourage people to share about this food either through signs or discussions with attendees.
- Potlucks: COP envisions continuing monthly potlucks, and encouraging diversity through food through themes. COP can also provide creative grouping of people during potlucks (e.g., birthday months, favorite season, etc.) so that people feel that they have a place to sit and are integrating with a variety of people.
- Special Events: COP suggests hosting ad hoc special events that integrate diverse cultures (e.g., celebration of a holiday from a different culture, cooking class preparing a food from a different culture, etc.). We envision COP planning a couple of events like this for each year.

D. Facilities

- Conduct a census of building users to determine current use of building by POC and anti-racist groups, and identify category of use (i.e., music, social actions, continuing education). Conduct annually as a way of gauging progress toward broader use by POC and anti-racist groups.
- Broaden our community outreach, so that POC know that FCC is a physical sanctuary from fear and micro-aggressions, and a place to be one’s true self.
- Make better use of our strategic location and space in order to enhance our relationships with communities and groups that are meaningful to POC.
- Expand beyond a passive host role for events, and actively engage with building users and groups from racially diverse communities
- Actively contract with building-related vendors owned and operated by POC.
- Identify what portion of our building income we’re willing to forgo in order to provide our space free to groups run by POC that also work to forward an anti-racist vision.

E. Finance

- Finance and Facilities should develop a policy around seeking bids for major work on the church to achieve a balance between budgetary considerations and diversity. Smaller and emergency projects may or may not fit into the goal of diversity because of time constraints.
- Finance and Facilities should develop guidelines around purchasing services and supplies from minority owned businesses,
- We should consider a benchmark to increase our minority-owned business contracts to at least 50% of the vendors with which the church does business.
- Finance and Facilities should consider how we can be fiscally responsible and proactive in providing space at a reduced rate to organizations that are diverse and/or working on racial/social justice issues.
- Finance should take lead in asking about banking relationships and whether we should change from Sun Trust to black-owned, Industrial Bank. We should also look at payroll processing company.

F. Outreach & Membership

First Church should make an intentional study of who is in our neighborhood, including occupants of our building. We should leverage opportunities for publicity throughout the wider community and our building through avenues such as news articles and mailings, and advertise the church as a gathering spot and place of comfort, peace, and nurture for marches and rallies.

We should also strengthen our existing relationships. Other congregations (e.g., Peoples UCC) and Howard University hold opportunities for collaboration, developing a wider sense of community and friendship.

G. Social Action & Awareness

- Generate a SAAC outreach plan and policies to carry out our priority recommendations.
 - Support outreach to external organizations, especially those led by people of color and serving people of color, engage in conversation, listen to learn about challenges to people of color, to generate and improve intentional and continuing relationships.
 - Evaluate current relationships, determine where new relationships are needed (e.g., black churches).
 - Set up a policy on relationships with external organizations.
- Develop a more intentional Second Sunday offering program with a racial justice and equity focus and intent, with more congregational engagement in selection of

recipients and education about recipients, and with opportunities for action. Set up a policy as a framework for Second Sunday Offerings.

- Support the Anti-Racism Committee in training and education on building relationships within the congregation.
- Review, evaluate and update as needed the Social Action and Advocacy Commission charter and clarify the roles SAAC plays.

Benchmarks:

- Annually survey the congregation on questions SAAC raised in the Racial Justice Audit to see whether and how responses have changed.
- Within SAAC, annually review the SAAC Racial Justice Audit to see what progress we have made.

H. Worship

Overall

- Articulate the cohesive vision that will guide worship planning and execution
 - Place on worship's agenda every month
 - Have a retreat of the ministers, worship commission, and selected others, annually or semiannually –
 - to plan the entire worship year or season, and
 - to evaluate progress to date and articulate objectives for the upcoming time period specific to racial justice in worship

Worship

- Advocacy in worship
- Include local racial justice issues and burning race-related events in worship services on a regular basis, and don't neglect DC issues
 - Recommend partnering with members of SAAC and the Anti-Racism Task Force for assistance in generating content
- Emphasize what the UCC is - steeped in justice-seeking - add this to the worship folder, add language to the banners
- Diverse and inclusive worship leaders and experiences
 - Offer People of Color greater voice in worship planning
 - Increase opportunities for Black, Indigenous, People of Color guest speakers and preachers
 - Hold joint services, e.g., with Peoples Congregational UCC
- Learning in worship -

- Have a nurture(s) on micro-aggressions within worship, e.g. singing Spirituals w/different grammar
- Spirituality, emotionality –
 - Encourage call/response/amens
 - Be more in our bodies, allow for the emotion and vocal response

Music

- Congregational singing –
 - learn new hymns; benchmark would specify some number of hymns over a set period.
 - Foster connections with crossover music
- “Performances” - Establish diverse in-house musical performing groups in addition to traditional choir –
 - Choir(s) that focuses and specializes in multicultural music. (Participants can overlap with traditional choir.)
 - Instrumental groups that focus and specialize in multicultural music
 - Children’s choir
 - Opportunities for seasonal choirs throughout the year that focus on various genres
 - Diversity in guest musicians and the music they provide
 - Recommend that specific milestones be set in coordination with a new Director of Music Ministry
- Partnerships in music
 - Washington Chorus director, Eugene Rogers, is African-American. (Washington Chorus is a new tenant in the building)
 - Choir exchanges
 - Connecting with Howard University

Art/space (i.e., visuals in sanctuary and narthex)—

- Plan and design major change(s), or set of changes, in the space. Multi-year undertaking: Determine cost, ensure funding, and install by end of year 3 (for example)

Partnerships

- Collaborate with Peoples UCC about joint opportunities (i.e. worship services, book groups, events, etc.)

- Partnerships with more churches (i.e., Indigenous church, Latinx church)
- Visit other churches, 2 X 2 (as Rev. Amanda has suggested)

General suggestions not specific to racial justice:

- Allow for longer prayer requests (take out other non-participatory elements in order to accommodate for longer time of prayer requests)
- Collective ethic for worship - it's not just transactional, recognize while one aspect may not connect deeply to me, it may connect deeply to another person
- Consider education on improv, as the tenets of improv could help our congregation embrace the unknown, lean into discomfort
- Open church to speakers, partners, other churches - to hear their stories, experiences
- Hearing personal experiences of change over time/ becoming aware of one's own biases - helps others to see theirs
- More diversity in language & think about our language and the structure of the liturgy
- Bring in different languages and ways of expressing in the liturgy, look at the structure of communion and change it up

IV. Faith Reflections (By Commission or Committee)

A. ARC

Scripture teaches all humans are created in God's image (Genesis 1), worthy of freedom and wellbeing. In Exodus, God is a liberator from oppression and enslavement. According to the prophet Micah, our faith requires us to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God. We are followers of Jesus, who fiercely defended the oppressed. The Rev. Dr. James Hal Cone, the father of Black liberation theology, revealed to us that Jesus was the child of the God of the Oppressed. Dr. Cone intersects the suffering of the cross with the suffering of the lynching tree, acknowledging Jesus' death as an act of solidarity with all who suffer oppression and violence. The kingdom that Jesus came to inaugurate is still calling forth the beloved community in our time. Our history and faith call us to renew our commitment to eliminate racism. We do this in an intergenerational community accountable to one another. We acknowledge our failings, both personal and collective, and rely on the promise of forgiveness, so we are not bound by our failures but set free to act justly. In the words of our Covenant, we seek to bind ourselves, in God's Redeeming Presence, to walk together in ways revealed to us by the Holy Spirit in sacrament and word.

B. Care of Parish

COP believes that we are on a journey together to be more loving people, and that can be done through better understanding of different cultures. We also believe that we need to ensure that everyone feels cared for in our community, regardless of their background.

C. Facilities

As we profess to be an Anti-Racist Congregation, we need to put words into action and truly engage with POC in our community, which means building true relationships and friendships.

Our building is a remarkable resource. We have the opportunity to use that resource in very powerful ways in the community. This takes time and commitment, but the potential outcomes in terms of allyship and support for POC and anti-racist initiatives in our community are eminently worthy of those efforts. In that respect, we will be seeking to live out the covenant that we share as a congregation.

D. Finance

Finance believes budgets reflect values. By presenting financial information to the congregation on a regular basis, members see how our money is spent, enabling discussion of whether it aligns with our values -- spiritual transformation, standing for justice and peace, and striving to heal our city, nation, and the world. Finance is committed to being a good steward for the resources of the church in order to support our mission and vision.

E. Outreach & Membership

God's extravagant welcome is revealed to us, in part, through the ministry of Jesus who challenged the status quo and social norms of who is welcome. God calls us to embrace and engage with the uncomfortable, that we may grow into unqualified and unreserved hospitality. We must further commit ourselves to being a congregation that lives out its faith by welcoming the stranger and loving our neighbors as we would ourselves, including those of different skin colors, cultures, and backgrounds.

F. Social Action & Awareness

We benefit from telling and hearing personal stories, from members, from partner organizations, as well as from Jesus' stories intended to transform.

It is OK to be angry. Jesus was angry and we are a church of Jesus Christ. We need to step back from intellect, to feel anger and to empathize with anger.

We follow a God that is angry against injustice.

First Church is a sanctuary from fear, a safe place to be true to self. It is a place of healing for people of color, a place to calm yourself, without worrying about upsetting white folks.

Jesus let his anger with injustice fuel his action in the world.

G. Worship

Worship is the celebration of the Beloved Community in all its expressions, and praise for the God who loves us all and wants to protect and make us all whole.

Recalling the First Church tagline starting in the 1980s –

SEEK right relationship with God, others and self (in what we say and do, in our quiet meditative moments, in sharing our stories and sorrows with each other -- including learning and confronting our microaggressions and genuinely changing),

SERVE God and serve the people (therefore include advocacy as an element in worship),

CELEBRATE the Beloved Community, be inclusive in all aspects of worship

Imago Dei – we are all made in the image of God; by lifting up and responding to local and national racial justice issues and burning race-related events in our worship services, we acknowledge the image of God in those who are experiencing injustice. When we welcome people and incorporate worship expressions from various cultures, we encounter God.

V. List of Contributors

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