

## Bethany Presbyterian Church Roadmap to Reconciliation Working Group Report to Session October 6, 2020

### Background and mandate of the group:

Bethany Presbyterian Church has a long history of commitment to justice, and to care for those who are excluded and marginalized in our society and world. For decades the congregation has given sacrificially and engaged in service with local and global ministries.

(See for example, the attached history of BPC's involvement with refugees)

Building on this heritage, in **April, 2019** the Session authorized the formation of a representative working group to use the resources created by Brenda Salter McNeill in *Roadmap to Reconciliation* and assess next steps in BPC's engagement in anti-racism.

On **July 3, 2019**, as part of its affirmation of Bethany Presbyterian Church's ***Purpose, Character, and Direction***, the elders committed the church to:

- *“invite newcomers into a welcoming church family of worship, relationships, and service,*
- *incarnate Jesus' mercy by caring compassionately for refugees and asylees in our community, and*
- *incarnate Kingdom justice by understanding the privileges we have inherited as a predominantly white church as well as the systems of institutional racism that surround us and practicing antiracism through compassionate and informed action.”*

Catalyzed by the highly visible recent exposure both of anti-immigrant abuse, and of police violence against African Americans, and by the national momentum to address systemic racism, this commitment gained a deeper sense of urgency. We've also been inspired by BPC's in-depth discernment in our two-year process regarding LGBTQ inclusion.

Beginning in **January, 2020**, the Roadmap to Reconciliation working group began nine months of meeting:

- to engage the *Roadmap to Reconciliation* material,
- to evaluate our current programs and practices, and
- to develop recommendations for BPC staff and session regarding specific steps BPC can take to deepen the fulfillment of our commitment to becoming more of a reconciling, anti-racist community.

### Members of the group:

Staff: *Doug Kelly, Daniele Merseles, Marisa Gronholz, Bianca Quezada, Kyle Turver*

Elders: *Gena Morgan, Margui Rutherford, Milton Smith, Mark Russo*

At large: *Asha Windus, Hannah Farkas, Lynne Faris Blessing, Eric Mansfield, Adam Loeffler*

Facilitators: *Kerry and Tim Dearborn*

### Definition of terms:

**Racism:** *The maintenance of racist ideas, attitudes, behaviors, power structures, and policies through actions and inaction that produce and normalize exclusion and inequities based on ethnicity.*

**Anti-racism:** *The active process of identifying and eliminating racism by changing ideas, attitudes, systems, organizational structures, policies, and practices so that power and opportunity are distributed and shared equitably. (Ibram X Kendi)*

**Racial Reconciliation:** *The work of God in Christ to unite all of creation, and our participation in this by the Spirit through repentance, forgiveness, and work to eliminate racism and repair and restore broken relationships, systems, and structures. (adapted from Brenda Salter McNeil)*

**Reparations:** *Concrete actions and policies on behalf of victims and their descendent communities to redress wrongs that have been done and continue to be done, along with the long-term consequences of these wrongs.*

**Repair:** To fix or mend damage

**BPC:** Bethany Presbyterian Church

**WND:** Wednesday night community dinner

**POC:** Persons of color

## **Recommendations**

Because BPC has a strong historic as well as an urgent present commitment to addressing racism, and because there are already excellent initiatives underway that engage many aspects of the life of our church, these recommendations incorporate an overall summary of current activities, as well as recommendations for additional steps to which we believe God is inviting us as a congregation.

We recognize that this list can at first review seem too complex. In reality, BPC is already engaged in many of these areas. Because existing committees and staff are already leading their implementation, we believe that rapid and enduring progress can be made.

These recommendations relate to every aspect of the life and ministry of BPC: *elders, staff leadership, deacons, worship, children, youth, family ministries, art, prayer, healing ministry, finance, facilities, and outreach.*

The Reconciliation Working Group has carefully prayed through these recommendations, seeking to discern God's call to our church. We affirm that this isn't an optional addition to the Gospel of Christ, but an integral expression of the Good News in Jesus Christ. We write them with lament over the sin of racism and our complicity with it; a deep sense of God's call for us to take significant action as we grow into a reconciling, anti-racist community; a strong recognition of the urgency of this moment; with gratitude for BPC's engagement in anti-racism; and with humility, for we know the work of reconciliation and anti-racism is a long-term and complex process.

**Implementation:** *While each committee and area of ministry in the church will be guided by this mandate and these recommendations, they will each, under the authority of Session, discern how to implement and shape these recommendations, and create specific, prioritized goals.*

1. **Develop a Guiding Mandate and Planning Document:** We recommend that the *Reconciliation and Anti-Racism Steering Committee* (see 2.1), senior pastor, staff, and elders create and adopt a summary of BPC's commitments, including:
  - 1.1. **Theological and biblical understanding:** A summary of the theological and biblical bases of BPC's commitment to reconciliation, anti-racism, and structural justice
  - 1.2. **History:** A summary of past engagement
  - 1.3. **Objectives:** Objectives of BPC's engagement
  - 1.4. **Ongoing Process:** An affirmation of BPC's commitment to an on-going process of evaluation, discernment, and action regarding BPC's engagement in anti-racism, including discerning if God is calling BPC to a focused action area that addresses systemic racism for deepened congregational involvement

1.5. **Specific goals:** short, medium, and long term

1.6. **Annual Report:** A report of progress on these objectives and specific goals will be presented at each annual meeting of the congregation

- Each area of ministry will provide a written summary of its progress to date on the objectives listed below
- Staff and the Steering Committee (see 2.1) will compile these and distribute to the congregation
- Engage congregational response and recommendations

1.7. **Revise goals**

2. **Worship and leadership transformative goals and actions:** We recommend that Staff, and the *Personnel, Worship, Arts, Prayer and Healing Prayer Ministries, and Finance Committees* implement BPC's commitment to reconciliation and anti-racism through:

2.1. **Leadership:** The Head of Staff/Senior Pastor will be responsible for the oversight of all aspects of BPC's implementation of our commitment to anti-racism, and its integration in every aspect of our life and work as a congregation. In addition:

- Leadership in reconciliation and anti-racism will be included in every staff job description as appropriate for specific areas of ministry
- Establish a *Reconciliation and Anti-racism Steering Committee* to support the other Committees of Session in the implementation of these recommendations and facilitate the ongoing revision of BPC's goals in these areas (see 1.4 and 1.6).
- Explore the realignment of the Outreach elders to create a new elder position for *Reconciliation and Anti-racism* to facilitate the on-going integration and evaluation process in all aspects of BPC's life and ministry through the *Reconciliation and Anti-racism Steering Committee*, coordinate the annual report and revision of objectives (see 1.4). Should it be established, this person will likely also be the Session's liaison on the affinity group for POC at BPC (see 3.2).

2.2. **Training:** Implement professionally-led anti-racism training for all staff, elders, deacons, and key volunteers (requires budget)

2.3. **Hiring:** Commend the current commitment of the Personnel committee in ensuring that POCs are carefully considered in all employment opportunities, and developing a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion policy for employment. (*already being done*)

2.4. **Prayer:** Encourage our prayer ministries to pray specifically for progress in these areas in and through our church, and in our society.

2.5. **Historical Assessment:** Conduct an historical audit of Bethany's participation and complicity in systemic racism (*already being done*)

- Based on the findings of the historical audit prayerfully discern appropriate institutional responses that may include public confession, liturgies of healing, acts of repentance and reparation. (see 5.4)

2.6. **Worship Leadership:** Ensure that leadership in corporate worship reflects our commitment to inclusion, diversity and belonging—ensembles, liturgists, etc. (*already being done but can be strengthened*)

- Develop a checklist of questions for all those who plan and lead worship, sermons and children's sermons that can stimulate their imaginations to be more inclusive in their use of art, stories, illustrations, and quotations. (*already being done*)

- 2.7. **Guest Preachers:** Expand the budget for guest preacher honoraria so that at least quarterly we invite preachers from ethnically diverse backgrounds. We recognize that for some preachers from racially diverse congregations their participation in BPC's worship involves significant sacrifice and requires additional compensation (*already being done but requires more budget for honoraria*)
- 2.8. **Music and Language:** Ensure that diverse music genres and languages are regularly included in worship and liturgies, with occasional instructive explanation regarding their meaning and purpose. (*already being done but can be strengthened*)
- 2.9. **Testimonies:** Expand inclusion of "stories along the way" in worship so that people testify to how they see God at work in their lives in response to racism and structural injustice. (*already being done but can be strengthened*)
- 2.10 **Art:** Review all artwork throughout the congregation to discern possible racial and ethnic biases. Commend the current work of the Arts Committee to create public art at the church that witness to both the commitment of the Gospel and of BPC to anti-racism. (*already being done*)
3. **Community life and hospitality (belonging) transformative goals and actions:** We recommend that Staff, Deacons, Personnel, Group Life, and Facilities Committees implement BPC's commitment to reconciliation and anti-racism through:
- 3.1. **Hospitality/belonging working group:** Expressive of our commitment to be a welcoming community, establish a cross-departmental working group to foster belonging that will:
- Coordinate the evaluation by all committees, deacons, and ministry areas of unintended barriers and biases that make BPC inhospitable for newcomers and people who aren't from the "dominant" population;
  - Recommend and oversee the implementation of specific actions to enhance our becoming even more a community of welcoming and belonging.
- 3.2. **Affinity group of POC at BPC:** Explore the interest among POC at BPC in an affinity group for people who identify as POC or non-dominant culture for getting to know each other, to share their experience at BPC and in society, to provide mutual support, and to offer suggestions and recommendations to BPC leadership.
- The group would include a participating liaison who would bring any recommendations and relevant POC experiences to BPC leadership for visibility
  - The liaison will report to the group corporate actions that have been taken in response to their concerns and recommendations
- 3.3. **Use of property:** Ask how our facilities can creatively be used more as a welcoming place for the surrounding community
- 3.4. **Deeper connection with WND:** Develop some key connecting points between the Sunday and the Wednesday Night communities (see 6 below)
4. **Children, youth, and adult education and discipleship training in antiracism and reconciliation:** As we seek to humbly share the heart of God and take inventory of our own hearts, we recommend that Staff, and Children, Youth, & Adult Education Committees implement BPC's commitment to reconciliation and anti-racism through:
- 4.1. **Teacher and volunteer training:** Staff, elders, and key leaders who have received professionally led anti-racism training will in turn conduct training for teachers, lay leaders, and other volunteers

- 4.2. **Curricular review:** Review Children’s and Youth teaching materials to assure that materials are representing all peoples with dignity. Conduct an audit of curriculum, Godly Play, library and classroom art to be aware of ways Bethany may be misrepresenting the history and principles of God’s Kingdom, and ways we can more adequately convey the rich history of diversity in the Bible and throughout history. *(already being done)*
- 4.3. **Immersion experiences:** Select outreach partners, experiences, and trips that live into our values and commitments to anti-racism.
- 4.4. **Orientation:** Orient youth and parents prior to outreach trips on issues of race, power, systemic injustice, white savior complex, etc.
- 4.5. **Book studies:** Commend and publicize the Adult Education and Outreach Committees’ development of “All Church Book Clubs” such as the study of *Color of Compromise* and *How to be an Anti-Racist*; and future studies of books pertaining to “white identity” such as *The Invention of the White Race*, *After Whiteness*, and *Rediscipling the White Church*.
- Commend BPC’s involvement through Urban Impact with other churches in discussion of these books. *(already being done)*
  - Provide an opportunity for participants to report back to the entire congregation what they learned through these studies and what actions they are taking (through “Stories along the way” in Sunday worship, Bethany Briefs, etc.) *(already being done but can be strengthened)*
- 4.6. **Regular public affirmation:** Regularly share theological underpinnings of anti-racism in Sunday worship, children’s messages, and children’s classes, so that everyone hears BPC’s commitment to this, gains tools to combat racism, and so that it strengthens BPC’s prophetic witness and ministry.
- 4.7. **Training in diversity:** Train children, youth and their families to be comfortable and respectful talking about race, with awareness of the ethnic diversity evident in the Bible, and the fact that Jesus was not white.
- 4.8. **Annual “anti-racism” class:** Offer annual classes for youth and adults on “How to be an Anti-Racist Church” where we dive deeper into history, hesitations, and resources; deepen our awareness of God’s call; take inventory of our own hearts, attitudes, and commitments; and provide opportunities for adults to learn from our children and youth insights regarding anti-racism.
- 4.9. **Resources for families:** Provide resources to parents and families for teaching and instilling anti-racist attitudes and actions within their home and family life.
- 4.10 **Shared experiences with other congregations:** Provide and promote opportunities for congregants to engage in cross-cultural learning and service experiences with partner churches from other dominant ethnic backgrounds. *(already being done but can be strengthened)*
5. **Outreach, budget, and congregational engagement assessment and realignment:** We recommend Staff, and the *Local & Global Outreach committees* implement BPC’s commitment to reconciliation and anti-racism through:
- 5.1. **Review of outreach partners\*:** Commend the current review by the Local and Global Outreach Committees of our outreach partners regarding their connection to BPC, and the possibility of expanding congregational engagement, etc.

- Encourage the Outreach Committees to update current Outreach Guidelines to include BPC's commitment to reconciliation, anti-racism, and social justice.
  - Explore prioritizing partners that express our commitment to anti-racism and diversity, and are led by POC. *(already being done but can be strengthened)*  
*(\*As an outreach partner, Lynne Faris Blessing recused herself from this discussion)*
- 5.2. **Budget realignment:** Explore the realignment of our outreach budgets to prioritize these ministries. *(already being done)*
- 5.3. **Deepened congregational involvement:** Deepen our engagement with key outreach partners (Mending Wings, Urban Impact, World Relief, Seattle Urban Academy, New Horizons, Seattle World School, King County Youth Chaplaincy) who are leaders in anti-racism, and refugee and aslyee care.
- Provide more opportunities to be instructed and led by them, as well as for broader congregational participation in and support of their ministries.
  - Consider partnership with other organizations that have a particular anti-racism/reparations focus such as DADS and Underground Ministries: One Parish, One Prisoner.
- 5.4. **Reparation Fund:** Explore establishing a "Zacchaeus Fund" (Luke 19.1-10) that uses budget surpluses, and well as money from a call for congregants to give sacrificially towards reparations, and righting racist structural injustices and inequities. *(already being considered)*
6. **Involvement with Wednesday Night Dinner:** Explore deepening the connections between the Sunday and Wednesday night communities of BPC. Consult with the WND team, and WND participants to gain their recommendations. Questions to be considered include:
- Should specialized groups on addiction and recovery, financial management, healing prayer, etc. be expanded to include both Sunday and Wednesday participants?
  - Should more focused efforts be made regarding legal, housing, financial planning, nutrition services?
  - Should programs that have been effective in the past to incorporate together Sunday and WND participants be resumed: Alpha, Open Fellowship, etc.?
  - How can we more effectively encourage Sunday congregation members to participate in Wednesday Night Dinner (home groups, youth groups, etc.), and provide orientation for how most appropriately to engage and participate?
  - Should we review, enhance, and require training for all volunteers, both from BPC as well as people coming from the broader community, regarding being an anti-racist welcoming community that fosters belonging and addresses attitudes of "white savior" volunteerism?
  - Should we look for further opportunities to involve people who can only come to QA physically on Sundays in the Wednesday Night Dinner (Zoom prayer time, making centerpieces/cards, holiday drives, etc.)?

**Supplemental Document:**

*Summary of the Analysis of BPC's Identity in regard to Reconciliation and Anti-Racism*

## Supplemental Background Resource to the Roadmap to Reconciliation Recommendations:

### Analysis of BPC's Identity in regard to reconciliation and anti-racism: Assets, Values, Obstacles, and Possible Responses

The following tables summarize the findings of the congregational review by the Roadmap to Reconciliation Working Group. These formed the basis of the recommendations provided above. The analysis was a work in progress and not intended to be comprehensive nor does it necessarily reflect the consensus of the entire Working Group. However, the recommendations in the final Report have been prayed through, thoroughly discussed, and endorsed by the entire group and are submitted to the Session for its discernment.

1. Worship and leadership	Assets and Strengths	Obstacles & Limitations	Possible Responses
Committed to well-implemented, highly participatory worship that incorporates contemplative, charismatic, justice, and holiness expressions of faith	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Comfort with silence, lament</li> <li>• Quiet, “introverted” ethos in worship</li> <li>• Openness to listening to the Spirit</li> <li>• Use of “Godly play”</li> <li>• People are drawn to BPC because they like the relative predictability of our services</li> <li>• Short sermons and 75 min (or less) services</li> <li>• Yet also willing to engage with “Tongues and interpretation”, spontaneous dancing in worship, and spontaneous songs, prayers, and inspired words</li> <li>• Value high quality, well organized and implemented worship services and programs</li> <li>• Clear governance and decision process</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Less emphasis on exuberant praise or joy in worship</li> <li>• Greeting time in worship feels forced</li> <li>• Pews and worship structure tend to make worship mono-directional rather than corporate (except for time of intercessory prayer)</li> <li>• Tend to listen more to “educated” and “unemotional” voices</li> <li>• Avoid anything too radical or potentially divisive as long as possible</li> <li>• History of people having experienced racism and exclusion at BPC that has never been corporately acknowledged, repented from, nor repaired</li> <li>• Change occurs slowly</li> <li>• Role of elders tend to be combination of discerning prayer and administration—with little programmatic leadership</li> <li>• In our desire to “do things right” we tend to preference a dominant culture understanding of “right”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All leadership of Bethany needs to have clear lenses of racial equity and anti-racism that are used to evaluate every decision, from hiring to program to curriculum (especially our youth curriculum).</li> <li>• Develop an ethos statement such as “This is a ministry of grace, etc with passion about reconciliation and justice.”</li> <li>• Have broader and more diverse representation of church members in front of the congregation during services.</li> <li>• Recommend to worship committee and to staff that all worship services include diverse leadership</li> <li>• Encourage the incorporation of more diverse worship styles and liturgies</li> <li>• We affirm the Session’s commitment to study BPC’s complicity in racism and engage in whatever appropriate corporate repentance and reparations are necessary</li> <li>• Include stories from wider variety of people in congregation as part of “news from the front”—not just outreach partners</li> </ul>

<p><b>2. Church ethos and community life</b></p> <p>Committed to being a welcoming community</p>	<p><b>Assets and Strengths</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relationship rather than program centered church</li> <li>• Value being a warm, inviting, inclusive church</li> <li>• Home groups</li> <li>• Neighborhood hospitality: Wednesday night dinner, Christmas festival</li> <li>• Very strong individual engagement as followers of Christ in personal lives</li> <li>• Growing number of people from beyond the dominant culture (Asian Americans, African Americans and Africans, people who identify as LGBTQ+)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Obstacles &amp; Limitations</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Few “congregation wide” initiatives</li> <li>• Difficult for new comers, and people who aren’t from dominant white, (upper) middle class to break-in and feel genuinely welcomed</li> <li>• Access to relationships that go beyond awkward chatting in the coffee hour is difficult</li> <li>• Can feel “insiderish” to newcomers.</li> <li>• Long term POC at BPC may still feel like visitors, and that they don’t “own” equally what happens at BPC</li> </ul>	<p><b>Possible Responses</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evaluate all programs to discern and address ‘barriers’ to newcomers and to people who aren’t from our dominant culture</li> <li>• Prayerfully discern what is needed for BPC to have a more hospitable ethos</li> <li>• Develop questions to ask as prepare for every gathering. How to not further white power structure in this gathering? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-what symbols are visible?</li> <li>-who is up front?</li> <li>-whose songs do we sing?</li> <li>-who do we turn to for guidance</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Address “white Jesus symbols”- art and the stained glass window that send a strong message to our youth and community</li> <li>• Combine/blend the WND community with the Sunday gathering into one community committed to justice for all.</li> </ul>



<b>3. Children, youth, and adult education and discipleship</b>	<b>Assets and Strengths</b>	<b>Obstacles &amp; Limitations</b>	<b>Possible Responses</b>
Committed to nurturing faith in next generations, and to holistic discipleship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eagerness to cultivate multicultural sensitivities and skills</li> <li>• Shared mission trips with other youth groups</li> <li>• Willingness to take time to pray and discern, engage in long-term process</li> <li>• Use of appreciative inquiry</li> <li>• Wide support of church reading of common texts regarding white privilege and anti-racism</li> <li>• Eagerness to listen to Spirit and hear from he Lord</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children of color in Sunday school at times have felt tokenized, misunderstood</li> <li>• Some parents have voiced discomfort when youth of color, and non-(upper) middle class youth come to BPC's youth groups</li> <li>• Adults can tend to value prayer and discernment over action</li> <li>• In our desire “not to get ahead of the Spirit” we may miss out on ways the Spirit is already at work and on the move</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recommend to the Children and Family Ministry committee that more intentional programming addresses issues of cultural diversity so that children are raised to recognize that Jesus isn't “white” and that they are comfortable and skilled in talking about issues of race and ethnicity</li> <li>• Provide tool kits for families to use at home to teach and talk about racial diversity in God's Kingdom, racism and its effects in our country, and what we are doing about it.</li> <li>• Adapt Godly Play as a teaching tool to focus on stories and interactions involving racial reconciliation, and not use just light wood pieces for people.</li> <li>• Listen to stories of white parents of black/brown children, or non-white parents at Bethany.</li> <li>• Expand children's leadership in worship</li> <li>• Recommend Adult education committee develop opportunities for people to deepen anti-racist attitudes and be equipped for anti-racist engagement in their daily lives</li> <li>• Learn from members of BPC who are engaged personally and professionally in justice and anti-racism</li> </ul>

<b>4. Outreach, budget, and congregational engagement in outreach</b>	<b>Assets and Strengths</b>	<b>Obstacles &amp; Limitations</b>	<b>Possible Responses</b>
Committed to long-term, non-paternalistic, mutually transforming partnerships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• History of being internally frugal so we can give generously</li> <li>• Have strong, entrenched values for who should be supported</li> <li>• Long-term engagement with partners</li> <li>• WND</li> <li>• History of engagement with refugees, street population</li> <li>• Eagerness to incorporate multicultural/multinational worship liturgies and music</li> <li>• Willingness to admit issues of ‘white privilege’ and embrace commitment to being ‘anti-racist’ without significant opposition or debate</li> <li>• Strong support of joint worship services with other congregations</li> <li>• Commitment to non-paternalistic engagement—genuinely seeking mutually transformative relationships</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More comfortable supporting others’ ministries than with having non-dominant culture people shape our life and ministry</li> <li>• Some historical outreach partners have no meaningful relationship with the congregation, nor reflect our current commitments and priorities, especially to anti-racism and racial justice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recommend the Outreach Committees review and revise BPC’s outreach budget so over the next several years it transitions to reflect our commitment to inclusion and anti-racism</li> <li>• Focus on outreach partners who reflect BPC’s values and commitments to anti-racism and inclusion, and deepen our relationship to more significantly support them and encourage their guiding and shaping BPC’s life and work</li> <li>• Engage intentionally with Seattle Public Schools to encourage greater equity</li> <li>• Focus on a few key anti-racist outreach partners in which a broad range of BPC members can participate</li> <li>• Work on developing onramps to opportunity for underserved POCs in conjunction with outreach partners, BPC employers, and Sea Public Schools</li> </ul>