

Dear saints,

Happy New Year, and Happy Martin Luther King, Jr., Day! This historic government shut down has left many casualties and is creating more chaos as it continues. Yesterday, I heard about one of our clergy spouses who had been affected and was just called back to work. That was an exception, of course. Let me know what you are seeing and how you are responding as the church in your local context. I commend a [litany for this government shutdown written by our Rev. Dahn Gandell, the President of Province 2!](#)

In a season of many such negative manifestations, I am pleased to announce a positive one in the spirit of Epiphanytide. Let me introduce to you the Commission on Racial Reconciliation, Healing and Justice.

Ms. Nicole Hercules and Dr. Melanie May will Co-Chair this Commission.



Ms. Nicole Hercules



Dr. Melanie May

We have identified three specific areas of focus organized into subcommittees:

1. Celebrating out multicultural diversity led by Rev. Rob Picken



2. learning together by reading and watching movies recommended led by Mr. Floyd Bayley



3. training for competency among our leaders led by Mr. West Cosgrove



Other members of the Commission are Rev. Paul Frolick (Facilitator), Rev. Ken Pepin, Mr. Jeremy Cooney, Rev. Mary Ann Brody, Ms. Kristy Estey, Canon Johnnie Ross, Mr. Steve Richards (Communication), Ms. Hannah Sommers, Rev. Keith Paterson, Mr. Richard Reid, Ms. Katherine Pepin, Rev. Abi John, Rev. Dahn Gandell, and Rev. Deacon Andrea Stridiron. The overall goal is to help us intentionally learn together to be equipped in practicing becoming Beloved Community. I invite your prayers and support for the ministry of this Commission. If you think someone who is not listed is could help the work of this Commission and is able, please let me know.

Let me warn you that this is not an easy read. It is heavy because it is about truth-telling, and I do this because I am sharing these thoughts with my family. At Epiphany, we recognize positive worldviews that are made manifest to overcome negative worldviews. We hear even in mainstream media how problematic our worldviews are in loaded words such as white nationalism, and white supremacy. Locally, with a weatherman's racial slur, college students vandalizing a Frederick Douglass statue and more about a demeaning narrative at play both subliminally as well as not so subtly! Here's enough reason for us to keep working to overcome the disease of white supremacy, which is related to every other demeaning cultural/institutional malaise that negatively impacts every kind of recognized and unrecognized vulnerable community. Leading up to Christmas and Epiphany, one of our Advent Collects/prayers asked us to do the real work of casting away works of darkness and putting on the armor of light because Jesus modeled this by coming to visit us in great humility.

When we look at the way we have developed how we know (epistemology), we cannot but notice that we, as human beings, misinterpreted casting away works of darkness to mean out casting dark-skinned people. In this country, we practiced treating black people as inferior by making them slaves for nearly 250 years. Specifically, slavery was legal in this country for 246 years. We have a problem, a spiritual problem, associating darkness with those who are dark skinned while ignoring the real works of darkness that have to do with greed, and selfishness. That's the real darkness that needs casting out while we were, and unfortunately still are, shadow boxing with perceived reifications like the color of people's skin.

Culturally, we have placed unresolved blame on women and LGBTQ people as those who don't fit the norms of holiness in the same continuum as valuing whiteness. We have been comfortable when it comes to inviting people to lead and as long as the power status quo is maintained, and passive peace is sustained. Interruptions such as nationalistic leadership creep into our body politic as though they were interventions when they really are only an extreme manifestation of subliminal assumptions that maintain the power status quo. The adage, "come weal or woe, my status is quo" is an apt description of our culture. I am not calling us to repent but to ponder. Repentance is less important than realizing what our real root problems are. Until we realize this, all repentance is premature and shallow. Our main problem, friends, is that we have followed a lie for a long time. A big, bold-faced lie that some of us are superior to others. For 250 years, we believed in this country that dark-skinned people were inferior to white-skinned people. That's a lot of physical, emotional, spiritual, psychological, and cognitive muscle memory spanning several generations. That's a lot of multilayered stuff to overcome. That's not like switching on a light switch. It involves much learning, and more importantly, much unlearning. That's why we have been working on it since 1865 and the Thirteenth Amendment, which abolished slavery. We are still working on that abolishment in our psyche and practice.

Without a doubt, we have made significant progress from 1619, when the first shipload of Africans was brought against their will to Jamestown, VA to 1808, when Congress outlawed slavery. Then the Abolitionist movement (1830 to 1860) raised free black leaders such as Frederick Douglass, white supporters such as William Garrison, and Harriet Beecher Stowe, who published the best-selling anti-slavery novel Uncle Tom's Cabin. Harriet Tubman and others played a leadership role in the Underground Railroad and supported the women's suffrage movement. Then came the Emancipation Proclamation by President Abraham Lincoln in 1863 followed by the Thirteenth Amendment in 1865.

Since then, the Civil Rights Movement built on the same continuum. These are several sprouting fig leaves like signs of hope to encourage us in developing muscle memory of another sort for a more hopeful season. These

are small yet significant signs that a season when love practiced in public as justice will become real. But we have to constantly overcome the culturally ingrained muscle memory to realize that dark-skinned persons are not an embodiment of the works of darkness, inferiority, and otherness. White supremacy is not some distant insidious notion that members of the KKK believe and practice. It is what we as a culture have embraced and practiced for three to four centuries. It is the lie that some of us are more equal than others using skin color as a prominent lens. We have to work very intentionally to overcome this. Getting to the root of racial issues is key because it is America's original sin. The irony is that Racism is not original to America. We have been practicing a similar thing in India through a sophisticated system (Varnashrama Dharma—duties ordered by color) called Caste, which is decent and work-based discrimination, for at least three millennia.

So, how do we chip away at overcoming this not-so-original Original Sin?

- Consider naming it, like I am doing, right now. Works of darkness have to be named to be exorcized. Naming and renouncing evil is part of our discipleship as followers of Christ.
- Consider behaving like we are family by not excluding anyone on the basis of their differences. The best way to overcome bad muscle memory is to intentionally replace it with good muscle memory. The church is a good place to practice becoming Beloved Community.
- Consider protecting those who are vulnerable from being blamed for their vulnerability. Internalized racism, sexism and homophobia is very real, and spaces of healing are paramount for moving forward
- Consider resisting distractions such as the consumerism that helps numb our senses by overwhelming us with the glitz and shallow mirages of love.
- Consider choosing to follow the [Way of Love](#) by embracing practices that keep us focused on Jesus who came to visit us in great humility. This is how we can prepare to embrace the Incarnation. We cannot receive this deep love without pondering on the false loves that have consumed us.
- Consider letting go of that which has consumed us by constantly renewing our minds to then run and walk the way of love. The way of Jesus! Therefore, I invite you to a season of thoughtful engagement by waiting on the Lord for wisdom and strength. The prophet Isaiah (40:31) says
those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength,
they shall mount up with wings like eagles,
they shall run and not be weary,
they shall walk and not faint.

This New Year, let us wait on the Lord and act to bring love, joy, peace, and hope a little closer to us and those we serve! Let us generate love, joy, peace, and hope by marinating in scripture, teasing out positive aspects of our tradition, and be open to learning from other traditions about how to become Beloved Community! The Episcopal Church is well suited to take this Beloved Community work to the next level, responding to our Presiding Bishop who invites us to [practice the way of love](#)! Blessing on you as you gather and name new and seasoned leaders to lead our churches and our Diocese at your Annual Meetings! You are my family in Christ Jesus, and I love you!

Let your light shine! Let it shine! Let it shine!

Prince
VIII Bishop of Rochester