

The Archbishops’ Anti-Racism Taskforce, set up last autumn to recommend changes to ensure greater racial equality in the Church of England, has issued an update on its work.

The Taskforce aims to publish its final report on 22nd April 2021 – Stephen Lawrence Day.

More information on the group and its work is available on [the Anti-Racism Taskforce section](#).

But God has put the body together, giving greater honour to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.

1 Corinthians 12: 24-27

The Anti-Racism taskforce was created by the Archbishops of Canterbury and York in the autumn of 2020 with the taskforce being announced in October. We write now to provide an update on our work ahead of the publication of our report towards the end of April this year.

The work of Racial Justice is a task for the whole church and our work has been guided by the belief and understanding that our work is carried as a joint venture for all the people of God and not only as a concern of Minority Ethnic Anglicans. As a taskforce, we understand that racism is a sin. In seeking to address the sin of racism in our church we do so seeking to follow a biblical imperative which we share with all followers of Christ. Our work is not a battle in a culture war but rather a call to arms against the evil and pernicious sin of racism. Our mandate flows not from identity politics but from our identity in Christ. This is our primary identity and it is in the character and being of Christ that we find the reason and motivation to combat racism. Where racism is found, it must be challenged. Whether masked in our behaviours, whispered in our pews, institutionalised in our systems or paraded on our streets, the Church as the body of Christ is called to oppose those actions which cause others to be treated as less than fully human and to dismantle those practices which prevent the full flourishing of all of God's people.

Just over a year ago, in February 2020, the General Synod of the Church of England [unanimously approved a motion on the legacy of the Empire Windrush](#). As part of that motion the General Synod resolved "to continue, with great effort and urgency, to stamp out all forms of conscious or unconscious racism, and to commit the Church of England to increase the participation and representation of lay and ordained BAME Anglicans throughout Church life; to the greater glory of the God in whose image every human being is made."

During that debate the Archbishop of Canterbury said: "'I am sorry and ashamed....I'm ashamed of our history and I'm ashamed of our failure. There is no doubt when we look at our own Church that we are still deeply institutionally racist. I said it to the College of Bishops a couple of years ago and it's [still] true."

Three months after that debate George Floyd, a 46-year-old practising Christian, who worked to mentor young people and oppose gun violence, was arrested on 25th May 2020 in St Paul Minneapolis. Three other police officers watched as arresting police officer Derek Chauvin kept his knee on Mr Floyd's neck for eight minutes and 46 seconds, even after Mr Floyd lost consciousness, and keeping it in place for a full minute after

paramedics arrived at the scene. Images captured on mobile phones recorded George Floyd begging for his life. “I can’t breathe, man,” Floyd can be heard saying in the recordings “Please, let me stand. Please, man.”

The repercussions of the killing of George Floyd have been felt across America and in other parts of the world including in our own country with the wider Black Lives Matter movement pushing racial justice up the agenda. Protest and demonstrations have been accompanied by public signs of lament and debate about the continuing impact of racism in wider society, including the church.

For many of us this renewed focus on racial justice has been both a burden and an opportunity. A burden in the realisation of how slow the pace of change has been within the Church of England and a reminder of the experiences we have – and continue to have – of being made to feel different because of skin colour and the experiencing disadvantage through racial stereotyping and cultural misassumption. An opportunity because of the wider recognition that the time for lament at such treatment is over and that the time for action has now come.

There has been a recognition in both society and the church that whilst there have been reports, reviews and recommendations on the continuing stain of racism, this has led to little impact in terms of action.

In November 2020 the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights (JCHR) published its report **Black People, Racism and Human Rights**.

- In noting the continuing impact of racism, the JCHR noted, inter alia, in its report:
- The death rate in childbirth for black women is five times higher than the rate for white women in the UK and that while the NHS acknowledges and regrets this disparity, it has no target to end it.
- The impact on the black community of Covid-19 has been disproportionately severe with black males between two and three times more likely to die from COVID than white males. More than 25 years after the McPherson Inquiry into the death of Stephen Lawrence, which identified institutional racism at work within the Metropolitan Police, the report found that 85 per cent of black people are not confident that they would be treated the same as a white person by the police.

The JCHR noted the repeated reviews and reports have been written over many years and notes: “The lack of progress in implementing the findings of those reviews has become a source of intense frustration and concern. Where actions have been taken, they have often been superficial and not had lasting effect.....It is hard to escape the conclusion that what has been lacking is the sustained political will over successive governments to prioritise implementation of recommendations. At best this can be viewed as negligent, at worst there is a sense that these reviews, which are undertaken by excellent people in good faith, are used by governments as a way of avoiding taking action to redress legitimate grievances.”

The Anti-Racism taskforce was created by the Archbishops of Canterbury and York with two objectives:

- To review recommendations made in previous CMEAC reports, and how far they have been acted upon. Identify and act upon some previous recommendations and changes which can be implemented swiftly.
- To advise the Archbishops on the composition and remit of the Racial Justice Commission including terms of reference and membership.

Our work relating to the first objective began with a review of more than 20 reports presented to, and approved by, the General Synod of the Church of England relating to Racial Justice. We identified over 160 recommendations since the publication of Faith in the City in 1985. We also recognised that many of the actions approved and adopted by the Church had not been acted upon or followed through.

Reviewing these recommendations we identified five key areas in the life of the Church where urgent action is needed:

- Participation (including appointments)
- Education
- Training & Mentoring
- Young People
- Governance & Structures

In November 2020 we undertook a consultation inviting comments and action points linked to these areas and received 75 responses to the consultation from a range of individuals, institutions, groups and dioceses.

Members of the taskforce have been working together in sub-groups on the priority areas with the intention of publishing an action implementation timetable in our final report which will seek to identify specific actions to be taken alongside those responsible for implementing those actions and how implementation will be monitored and made accountable.

These actions will be accompanied by a timetable recognising the urgency of the task and that the time for talking and lament has now given way for a time for action. As a taskforce we are united in our view that any failure by the Church to act both intentionally and urgently will lead to an existential crisis brought about by over 30 years of well-intentioned talk accompanied by decades of inaction.

Our work in relation to establishing the Racial Justice Commission focused on those areas which required more detailed consideration and work than we were able to provide within our remit. We have identified the following areas as workstreams for the Commission:

Theology

- Slavery (including Monuments)
- History & Memory
- Culture & Liturgy
- Participation
- Patronage

In our final report we will suggest that each of these workstreams will be chaired by individuals who will also sit as a member of the Commission.

These 6 members will work with a Chair, two deputy chairs, and also a member of the taskforce to ensure continuity.

We have identified a number of individuals who might act as members of the Commission and working groups. We remain open to suggestions or nominations for individuals who might wish to be involved as members of these groups recognising that the final decision will be for the Archbishops and for the Chair of the Commission.

Our report will contain the full implementation action timetable in each of the five priority areas and suggest the scope of areas of work for the Commission. The publication of the report will act as a transparent call upon the whole church and to be owned by all of us with the hope that racial justice will become a mainstream part of our lived discipleship as a whole church rather than a concern for a few.

Our final report will be published on 22nd April 2021 – Stephen Lawrence Day – in recognition of the continuing impact of institutional racism both within society and the church, combined with the hope that we have reached a Kairos moment where the wind of the Spirit is leading us as a body to permanent change.

Our hope and prayer is for the healing and reconciling of power of Christ to be the spur for our common commitment to racial justice in our church and our land.

Love incarnate,
Fountain of Mercy and Justice
In a world of inequity and pain
May our actions be our prayer.
We cry out for Shalom, fullness of life to all.
Let the Spirit of Truth guide us.
Let the Spirit of Love free us.
Give us the compassion, courage and resolve
to become the light, we seek
that many may see life and their dignity restored
Inspire us to embody a world without injustice and prejudice
Form us into channels of your love and peace
Let the river of justice and mercy flood our imperfect world
Quenching the thirst of parched souls and lands.
Abide in us o Liberator that we become the Word
so that the world may have Life, Life in all its abundance.
Amen

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