

Community Assembly focuses on Recognizing Racism and Replacing it with Love by Linda Taylor, CSJ, Andrea Tande, Consociate and Jill Underdahl, CSJ

Relationship and Association Commission hosted the Community Assembly on October 28, 2017. Facilitators, Cara Anthony, Friend of St. Joseph, Cheryl Behrent, Consociate, and Mary Ellen Foster, CSJ, explained that “this commission’s focus on increasing diversity in the CSJ Community and circles of relationship compels us to embrace racial, generational, and cultural diversity. The commission recognizes that a lack of racial diversity is a wound in our community. To invite a diversity of people to join us requires us to get out of our set patterns and boundaries in our community.” They then introduced Signe Harriday, a racial justice presenter/facilitator/actor who would lead the morning. Signe is a gifted facilitator, actor, director, and former member of the Multicultural and International Programs and Services team at St. Catherine University. Her incredible skills and strong ties to the community made her and her team very effective leaders for this assembly.

The opening ritual began with singing “Lord, I want to be more loving in my heart.” Participants added words like “more understanding in my heart”, “to have more room for people in my heart.” After the song, Signe invited us to name all that is in the room that we don’t want, e.g. racism, fear, inequality, privilege, mistrust, white supremacy, closed-mindedness.... To each of these the assembly responded, “We do not submit to you!” Following this we named all that is in the room that we want to welcome, e.g., “love, peace, wisdom, acceptance, hope, appreciation, honesty, action for justice....” To each of these the assembly responded, “We welcome you!”

Structured conversations invited assembly participants to begin the slow work of recognizing and understanding the impact of racism on people of color and how white people hold privilege. Participants answered and considered the questions: “Who am I?” “Who do people think that I am?” “What power and privilege do I have in the roles that I play in my life?” “How do I locate myself in anti-racism work?” “How do I move myself from being an “ally” to being an “accomplice” in the struggle against racism?”

When some participants expressed desires to act for racial justice, Signe challenged us to “slow down and feel the discomfort.” Signe said this as a caution, especially to white people. Rushing blindly into action may end up being more harmful than helpful in the long run to the cause of greater racial justice. She suggested that white people need to avoid feeling or acting like ‘saviors’. For white people some of the work is to learn and recognize systems that privilege and oppress. Signe gave the example of using a compass. “Sometimes you need to sit with the compass for a while as it wiggles and settles on the cardinal directions. Can you sit in the discomfort of not knowing what to do?”

After the morning with Signe Harriday, groups from the larger community who work for racial justice joined the assembly. These included representatives from Come Together Twin Cities, St. Joan of Arc Catholic Community, and Twin Cities Non-Violent. Each group met with interested assembly participants, lead conversations about the work they are doing and suggested how others can join them.

The collection of \$1,650 went to support our Puerto Rican brothers and sisters through Catholic Charities Hurricane Relief.