



**A Racial Justice Audit
of Trinity Episcopal Cathedral**
The Mission Institute
2021-2022

Executive Summary

Background

The year 2020 was one of racial reckoning for the United States. The pandemic, the rise of Christian Nationalism, and the murder of George Floyd exposed the sheer magnitude of systemic and structural racism in this country and raised many unanswered questions for communities like Trinity Cathedral.

The Trinity Vestry responded to that challenge with a renewed commitment to racial justice by issuing a statement of response in July 2020. In accordance with that statement, an Antiracism Task Force was established, convening its work in April 2021.

In August 2021, the congregation and cathedral leadership (lay and clergy) began the process of conducting a racial justice audit with the Mission Institute. The Mission Institute has been conducting audits over the past 5 years, most recently conducting the Episcopal Church's 2020 churchwide Racial Justice Audit of the Episcopal Leadership.

Process

The goal of this project has not been to determine whether or not systemic racism is present at Trinity, but to explore how it operates. Central to this research has been an attempt to answer the questions, what is the demographic makeup of the leadership of Trinity, what is their experience of race and racism in their leadership roles, and how does white dominant culture operate?

This Racial Justice Audit included two sections: a survey tool, to collect both quantitative and qualitative data, and a self-selected sampling of respondents who participated in in-depth interviews about their experiences. In total, we collected survey data from over 113 leaders and interviewed 15. An additional survey was sent out to the congregation, collecting data from 386 people.

Beloved Community, Who Are We?

The overall response rate to the leadership survey was 39%; here are a few key demographic findings.

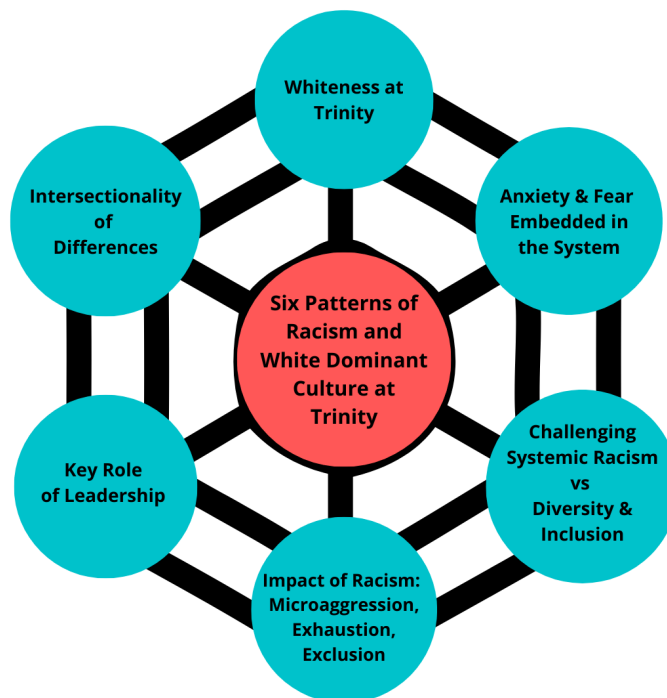
- 19% of leaders responding to the survey identified as part of the LGBTQ+ community - four times higher than the LGBTQ+ of Portland.
- 72% of respondents had a master's or doctorate/professional degree
- 90% of the leaders responding to the survey identified as white compared to 70% of the broader Portland population¹.

Dominant Patterns Theory and Framework

The following theoretical frameworks were used in analyzing the collected data.

- Racism is a **complex adaptive system**, with multiple parts affecting the whole. Engagement with such systems requires a cyclical approach, naming the questions, *what?, so what?, and now what?* again and again.
- An acknowledgement that we are embodied, and that **racism lives in the body as trauma**, have been fundamental.
- **White Dominating Culture** or **White Supremacy Culture** are the dominant, unquestioned standards of behavior embodied and enacted by the vast majority of institutions in the US. These ideas provide a useful rubric in auditing Trinity.
- Understanding **racism as sin**; it distorts our relationship with God and all of Creation. The **Baptismal Covenant** states that when we sin, we must repent and turn back to God. These can be instructive ideas for Episcopalians in the work of anti-racism.

Dominant Patterns of Systemic Racism in Trinity



¹ <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/portlandcityoregon,US/PST045221>

Key Recommendations for Trinity

- Identify and commission a core team of leaders (6-10 people) who will hold this work. The initial commitment should be for no less than three years and consideration should be taken to stagger when people go off and come on to the team, enabling more consistency in leadership. From the beginning, identify ways in which leadership development is taking place, so that each person has someone who can replace them if/when they need a break.
- Move at the speed of trust and increase resilience by building relationships.² A key place to start is by strengthening muscles for engaging healthy conflict. We recommend this workbook, *Turning Towards Each Other*.
- Spend considerable time as a team engaging Tema Okun's article *White Supremacy Culture - Still Here*. Specifically focus on the characteristics of White Supremacy Culture. Pay particular attention to the section on fear. Use this [worksheet](#) to engage it more deeply.
- Guide the congregation and broader leadership through unpacking and grappling with these data and dominant patterns of the audit. It is common for most communities to receive the audit, read through it, and jump right to solutions or intervention. However, communities need to spend adequate time digesting and metabolizing the impact of the information, which is really people's stories and experiences.
- The *Decision-Making Process* section of the audit highlights that large numbers of leaders don't know, or are not sure, how decisions are made. Trinity's core leadership needs to make this transparent: how *are* decisions made and by whom? Ask this question whenever a decision is being made: Are the people who will be most impacted by this decision the ones driving the decision-making discussion?
- The *Culture* section of the audit points to the need to engage in healthy practices around conflict and different ways to respond to one another. Have the vestry, staff, and other key leadership bodies undertake the workbook, *Turning Towards Each Other: A Conflict Workbook*

Going Deeper with the 6 Dominant Patterns

Whiteness at Trinity

Most people mentioned the reality of how "white" Trinity is as a church. The white dominant culture of Trinity permeates almost all of the other patterns. People have trouble naming the exact instances of these cultural behaviors but sense them and are often left feeling confused or feel like they don't quite "fit".

Anxiety & Fear Embedded in the System

² Emergent Strategies, adrienne marie brown, p.42.

One pattern that has been palpable from the beginning of the audit is how central anxiety is to the overall function and system at Trinity. Anxiety surfaces around the work of racial justice. People expressed over and over their love of Trinity and the good work happening. Sometimes this was laced with a tinge of anxiety, making sure we as outsiders knew that they were trying to do the *right thing*.

Key Role of Leadership

Many interviewees cited the ordained leadership as a key reason for why they joined Trinity or brought their leadership to the efforts of the church. Some people point to the formal leadership as a symbol of inclusion, while others point to the lack of diversity in leadership as a sign of exclusion or failure. Most POC interviewed see the approach to leadership as a mono-culturally white professional, which misses and often devalues other cultural leadership styles, protocols, and values.

Intersectionality of Differences

A majority of those interviewed alluded to the fact that addressing racism is deeply connected to addressing other differences. Most interviewees saw it as a given that Trinity is a wealthy and highly educated congregation. This was seen as both a point of comfort and belonging for those who fit that reality and a barrier for those who do not. Many also lifted up gender, age, and sexuality as barriers to full inclusion. Some experienced exclusion from cliques of power as a barrier to diverse leadership. Several are asking to what extent this creates an unwelcoming environment in general.

Challenging Systemic Racism vs Diversity & Inclusion

There is a real tension and struggle around addressing systemic racism and the desire to be diverse. The former suggests that, despite who is present or the outcome, we can work to liberate all from racial injustices and white dominance. The latter looks at who is present and asks if diversity is even possible in an overwhelming white city and state.

Within the congregation most people want more diversity and more conversation. This is in contrast to people who want more substantial change, and people who want the church to stop *talking* about racism and instead *do* something about racism.

Impact of Racism: Microaggression, Exhaustion, Exclusion

People at Trinity who are committed to racial justice expressed just how exhausted they were and are. This was particularly true of the POC who, while trying to do the work on behalf of Trinity, found themselves also navigating microaggressions, implicit bias, tokenism and “white” monoculturalism. The majority of POC and some white interviewees lifted up microaggressions as the primary way they witnessed and/or experienced racism at Trinity. At the same time, some white people committed to this work do not see racism or racist behavior themselves.