

Calvary Episcopal Church
Becoming Beloved Community Report
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Learning From Our Past

Calvary is, and has been, a predominately white and upper-class parish since it was formally organized by Bishop Charles McIlvane in 1856. Bishop McIlvane had an internationally renowned reputation. Aware of this, the Lincoln Administration sent him to Britain in 1861. After six months abroad, his persuasive leadership induced the Federal Episcopal Convention to support the union war effort, which included Lincoln's Emancipation policy. Thus, from our inception, issues of race have been woven into the fabric of our identity as a community; there have been milestones, but there have also been missteps.

A former parishioner kept a scrapbook in which an Advent sermon from 1918 was archived. The sermon, written by Rev. Frederick Flinchbaugh, touted the merits of assimilation and the marvels of Anglo-Saxon culture. Among other questionable sentiments, Flinchbaugh wrote:

“...It would seem from the position of leadership which God has given the Anglo-Saxon race today as though **He had chosen them to be His servant to the nations** to spread abroad the blessings of constitutional freedom in government, the knowledge of what is highest and best in modern civilization and the principles of the gospel of Jesus Christ...”¹

Here and at other points in the lauded sermon, Flinchbaugh opines that Anglo-Saxonism is not only a superior culture and identity among others (German-Americans, for example), but he goes so far as to suggest that the Anglo-Saxon has a superior divine inheritance. In this and other instances, the view of racial superiority and the realities of racial stratification were reinforced from our very pulpit and couched and cloaked within the context of biblical truth and the living out of “God’s will.”

During the twentieth century, Calvary was not immune to the tensions that surrounded conversations about race in America. At the resignation of the thirteenth rector (Rev. Donald Oakes) in 1956, Dr. Raymond Walters wrote a statement to the parish. In it, he warns that the “bulging” Negro population in Avondale, an adjacent neighborhood, may soon “come up the hill,” and that Calvary needed to be ready for this immanent shift.² The contours of our relationship with our Black neighbors in Avondale is still one that we wrestle with.

And yet, despite the pitfalls of our past, there have been those at Calvary who have taken a firm and progressive stance on issues such as integration. A parishioner, Pat Subbaya, recalls the Sunday morning that the Reverend Al Hanson stood in the pulpit in the late 1960s and declared that the church would integrate Black people into its membership. Half of the congregation stood up and walked out. As Pat Subbaya recalls, **“And the other half of us stayed.”**³ Likewise, there was an intentional effort to install “The Episcopal Church Welcomes You,” signs on our grounds. We learned that these signs were not mere niceties, rather, they were (and are) explicit and somewhat charged statements of welcome to people of color.

¹ Flinchbaugh, Frederick. “A Sermon: In Commemoration of Britain’s Day, Preached in Calvary Church, Cincinnati. 8 December, 1918.

² Walters, Raymond, “Parish Evaluation,” November 1956, p. 4.

³ P. Subbiyya (personal communication with Rector A. English. 1 July 2018).

Our more recent history involves the intentional inclusion of diverse music in our worship, reflecting a commitment to moving beyond the myopic (read: heavily Anglo-Saxon) style that has defined our worship. Starting in the 2000s, Organist and Choirmaster Howard Helvey made a commitment to feature at least one song from the *Lift Every Voice and Sing Hymnal* in every Choral Eucharist. Starting in 2020, the Family Service made a commitment to regularly feature more culturally representative songs. To this end, we have made strides in making Calvary's worship more reflective of the lived experiences and cultural traditions of people of color.

Current Initiatives

Currently at Calvary Episcopal Church we are committed to anti-racism exploration and social justice work within ourselves and our community. After the death of George Floyd, we invited Debby Irving, racial justice educator and author of "Waking Up White," to join us on Zoom. Nearly one hundred people partook in this offering. Since that time, we have formed a team called the Becoming Beloved Community team who is tasked with the job of determining the programming for the greater congregation and living out The Reverend Martin Luther King's dream.

We continue to prioritize our outreach ministries both financially and through service work, including the launch of a new program called "Laundry Love" in which parishioners may serve those in need by providing financial and spiritual resources at a local laundromat each month. In this way, we seek to come into deeper relationship with our neighbors in adjacent neighborhoods and to form lasting and meaningful connections with people beyond the confines of our church walls.

We continue to support multiple programs that address homelessness, a particularly important issue with regard to race, as there are disparities in housing security and housing quality for Black Cincinnatians. Our work with Tender Mercies and Interfaith Housing Network/Found House are two examples. We are also furthering our partnership with Saint Andrew's Episcopal Church and were included in celebrating Juneteenth with them in 2022. In addition to sharing times of fellowship with members of St. Andrew's, we actively support their food pantry, which serves residents of Evanston. Issues of race and access to food naturally arise in this work; we are called not just to donate food, but to actively consider why some neighborhoods have less access to fresh produce and other nutritious items (so called "food deserts.")

In recent years the theme of antiracism has been woven into the youth group educational programming. For example, the youth read and presented to the parish on the book, "This Book is Anti-Racist," by Tiffany Jewell. Additionally, reflecting the reality that "representation matters," the youth of Calvary have grown up seeing intentional images of a non-white Jesus used in sermon illustrations and in art displayed around the parish. Additionally, our Godly Play curriculum just expanded to include saints such as Martin Luther King, Jr., Bishop Barbara Harris, and congressman John Lewis.

Our Hopes for the Future

Calvary Episcopal Church has done significant work in the past 5 years to define who we are as a congregation. From this, we created our vision and mission below:

- Our Mission is: to be *Confident in God's love for us, fearless in our love for all.*

- Our Vision is:

- To grow inwardly in faith through worship, music, and education and outwardly through invitation, welcome, and connection
- To be Jesus's heart, hands and feet, humbly collaborating with our neighbors to realize beloved community
- To open ourselves to God's grace, recognizing that we are all broken saints and redeemed sinners

Using our vision and mission as a guide and our individual spiritual gifts as tools, we hope for more racial diversity in our congregation. We know we have both geographic and demographic barriers to this, and we are working on a strategic plan to address it. We also hope to include the wonderfully racially diverse children of God in our ministries, both in serving and being served. We are doing this, and will be intentional about it, by listening deeply to our parish and to our community neighbors. We hope for all to see themselves in our church and feel the love and presence of God through us.