

The purpose of the Racial Justice Team is to provide support to classis and its member churches in praying and working for racial justice and unity in Christ.

NEWSLETTER

November, 2023

Welcoming Pastor Kelsi Jones by Deb Koster, Grace

In February 2023, as Rev. Kelsi Jones stepped into the pulpit of Grace CRC, she had the unique privilege of having her own father, Rev. James Jones of Oakdale Park CRC, deliver the ministerial charge in her installation service. As the lead pastor of Grace, she now shepherds in the same classis along with her dad.

Growing up in the multicultural church body at Oakdale Park, Kelsi felt called to ministry and earned her MDiv from Calvin Theological Seminary in 2020. She then pastored in the Chicagoland area with Jacob's Well Church Community CRC in Evergreen Park and at Grace Community CRC in Oak Lawn. Pastor Kelsi has also served on several denominational committees.

Pastor Kelsi is unique in many ways, being young, single, female, and Black, in contrast to most of the traditional male, Dutch, middle-aged pastors that have characterized the CRCNA clergy. So while Kelsi may not be the traditional looking pastor for the CRC, she is an amazing fit for the ministry of Grace church which has been blessed for years by the gifts of the black community and the ministry gifts of women. In the words of Nina Simone,

“Young, gifted and black
Oh what a lovely precious dream
To be young, gifted and black
Open your heart to what I mean”

Pastor Kelsi brings her unique gifts and passions to Grace CRC which began in the 1940s as a minority neighborhood church plant on the southeast side of Grand Rapids. Grace has benefitted from black leadership throughout its history. Many gifted people of color have served God's church in the roles of associate pastors, elders, deacons, and worship leaders. Their stories line the walls of the Harold Washington lobby, named in honor of the first elder who served Grace church in its formative years. Yet through all these years, Rev. Kelsi Jones is the first ordained person of color to serve as Grace's lead pastor.

Grace has also been on the forefront of women serving in leadership in the CRCNA. Grace acted in protest to the decisions of synod 1992 and agreed to continue having women serving as elders and deacons. Later in 1999 Rev. Ruth Hoffman served as co-pastor along with her husband.

Many associate women clergy have preached from Grace's pulpit over the years, but Pastor Kelsi uniquely serves in the lead pastor role.

Grace church is grateful to welcome Pastor Kelsi into this ministry serving Grace church and its mission to extend the love of Jesus into our neighborhood at the corner of Buckley and Sheldon. Pastor Kelsi is just beginning this role at Grace Church and there is great enthusiasm for her leadership. The congregation is experiencing significant growth as people return to church following Covid absences to serve under Pastor Kelsi's leadership. Grace church is enjoying the many adult baptisms that have happened in the last year as people from our food pantry and narcotics anonymous program have connected with our congregation. It is an exciting season to see the Holy Spirit at work blowing fresh wind through the ministry of Pastor Kelsi's leadership. In the words of Nina Simone,

“You are young, gifted and black”
We must begin to tell our young
There's a world waiting for you
Yours is the quest that's just begun”



Reparations

by Peter TeWinkle, Oakdale

Ta-Nehisi Coates, in *The Case For Reparations*, wrote, “Perhaps no number can fully capture the multi-century plunder of black people in America. Perhaps the number is so large that it can't be imagined, let alone calculated and dispensed. But I believe that wrestling publicly with these questions matters as much as—if not more than—the specific answers that might be produced. An America that asks what it owes its most vulnerable citizens is improved and humane.”

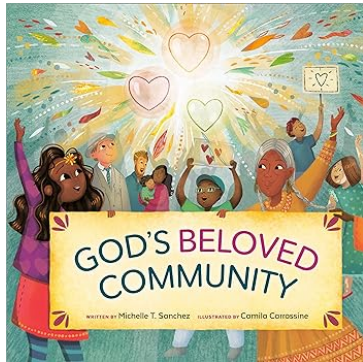
A group of those interested in wrestling with questions of reparations attended their first meeting on November 2, with eleven in attendance. If you are interested in this side of the justice issue, you are invited to join this working group which will meet again on December 7th at 7:00 pm at Oakdale Park Church. In preparation, we're reading Ta-Nahisi Coates articles called "The Case for Reparations" and "Revisiting Reparations." Please contact Peter TeWinkle with your request copies an your questions. [petertewinkle@gmail.com](mailto:pertertewinkle@gmail.com)

Book Review: *God's Beloved Community*

by Michelle T. Sanchez, illustrated by Camila Carrossine
Reviewed by Peter TeWinkle, Oakdale Park

Oakdale Park has begun a year long series on “God’s Beloved Community.” It’s a long-standing phrase that comes to us through the civil rights movement. We’re listening to the call for beloved community through Scripture and a book called *Color-Courageous Discipleship* by Michelle T. Sanchez. It’s accompanied by a youth version and a children’s book called *God’s Beloved Community*, written by Sanchez and delightfully illustrated by Camila Carrossine. All three books are useful resources, but the children’s book is special.

Its colorful pages begin with a young girl learning about Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. for the first time. She learns about his dream and the God who inspired it. From there, each page is a bright splash of color and a poetic retelling of the Biblical story. Creation, fall, and redemption are there. The conclusion of the book is a call to live into God’s dream, “this dream of love that he’s had for a quite a while.” As with the resources for adults and youth, this children’s book is a call beyond color-blind to being color-brave.



While the poetry can be clumsy, the book is a delight. Like the qualities of beloved community itself, the book is filled with color and peace and joy on every page, illustrating Scripture in ways that children will relate to, including those left out, standing up to bullies, and more. Younger children will enjoy the bright illustrations and older children will see themselves in the story. I’m delighted to recommend it to any and every Classis East family.

With Gratitude and Appreciation

Becky Witte, our co-team leader with Cindy VanderKodde, has had to step away from the work on this committee. Her leadership and willingness to contribute during the last few years are greatly appreciated.

Racial Justice Team Members:

Cindy Lanning Burch, Calvin
Bob Dekker, Neland Ave
David Malone, Boston Square
Pastor Peter TeWinkle, Oakdale Park
Cindy VanderKodde, COS, *Team Leader*
Ruth VanStee, Fuller Ave
Steve Timmermans, First, *ex officio*

Last Mile Cafe

1006 Hall Street Southeast

I would like to take this space to share thoughts and experiences about the racial justice team's visit to Last Mile Cafe, which is located on Hall and off of Kalamazoo Ave. It is a small quaint coffee shop that sells environmentally and sustainably made coffee. It was co-founded by a team with an extensive engineering, nonprofit, and community health background. The founders are Arik Davis and Sarah Laman. Their goal is to “make the world a better place.”



They serve all the teas and coffees you usually find in most coffee shops, including chai, cappuccino, and latte. They also sell online packaged coffee and subscriptions.

We’re including the Last Mile Cafe in this newsletter because it represents what we want to promote regarding DEI, an acronym from the *Diversity Playbook* by Michelle L. Paige; Michelle Williams, whose values and visions align with our Christian values in these areas, reviewed in the recent newsletter, standing for:

Diversity: difference

Equity: meeting needs in proportion to the needs and context.”

Inclusion: bringing people together

The Racial Justice team encourages our classis to use and explore minority-owned businesses in the area. This is one we highly recommend. Arik would love to connect with you. He is a BIPOC (Black Indigenous Person of Color) West Michigander and a pretty cool guy to talk to. There is also a meeting area in the back for small church committee meetings. Check it out!

Digging Deeper *Racial Justice Resources*

Read:

Fortune, by Lisa Sharon Harper

Color Of Compromise, by Jemar Tisby

Reparations, by Duke Kwon & Gregory Thompson

Act: Grass-roots organizing and advocacy

Partner: Together West Michigan (organizewmi.com)

Watch: 9 Movies & Shows that Explain America’s Justice System” <https://bit.ly/9justicemovies>