

A Report of the Anti-Racism and Equity Committee

Presbytery of Southern New England

February 8, 2022

Our mandate as a committee is:

To work towards the creation of an inclusive, equitable, antiracist culture within the PSNE that will be attractive to all people in particular those who have been systematically excluded from full participation in the presbytery, as we seek to be co-creators with Christ of a just, peaceful and healed world/creation.

Committee members:

Kirk Louis, Co-Chair
Rev. Jenny Peek, Co-Chair
James Cramer
Katia Dacunha
Rev. Jenny Davis
Keith Rhodan
Rev. Susan Trucksess
Rev. David Van Dyke
Rev. Kevin White

For Presbytery Information:

The Anti-Racism and Equity Committee has continued meeting monthly with Jessica Vazquez-Torres, the National Program Director of Crossroads Antiracism Organizing & Training every first Monday of the month since June of 2020. In our most recent meetings the team has focused on holding one on one conversations with presbytery members in order to get a sense of our membership's need for increased support, capacity building and intervention.

In response to this need, we are pleased to announce that our work with Crossroads will continue through 2023. At its most recent meeting, Roundtable, voted to approve a new contract with Crossroads. The contract includes a series of presbytery-wide and cohort based trainings & leadership coaching for Presbytery staff, Roundtable and the Anti-Racism & Equity Committee. The new contract is included in our report.

We are also pleased to share that Jessica Vazquez Torres will continue her work with the Presbytery, and her colleague, Ryan Lents will join her in leading the various aspects of our work together in the newest contract. Learn more about Jessica and Ryan below:

Jessica Vazquez Torres (she/her/ella) is a proven leader with 20 years-experience in antiracism, anti-oppression, and cultural competency workshop development and facilitation. An effective communicator and critical thinker, deeply committed to dismantling the socially constituted structures and cultural dynamics that oppress, marginalize, and harm People of Color, Queer, and immigrant communities and limit

their access and control over the resources they need to thrive. Jessica, a 1.5-Generation ESL Queer Latina of Puerto Rican descent, holds a Bachelor of Arts in Criminal Justice from the University of Central Florida, a Master of Divinity from Christian Theological Seminary, and a Master of Theological Studies from the Candler School of Theology at Emory University. She has co-authored a four-session adult study on the history of racism in the United States. Jessica has presented at the American Academy of Religion and the Society of Biblical Studies annual meeting as well as during the gathering of the Society for Christian Ethics. Her papers were titled: *The Suffering that Pulls Us Together & Pulls Us Apart: Moral Injury, Race, and the Challenge of Solidarity in Social Justice Work?* (2019), *Does Moral Injury Have a Color? On Moral Injury and Race in the United States?* (2014), *Grace and Virtue: The Practice and Ethics of Race Based Caucusing* (2012). When not facilitating a conversation virtually or in person, Jessica attempts to become a bread baker, cultivates community with her spouse Laura, listens to too many books and podcasts at once, walks (sometimes for exercise), and sings songs badly with full abandon.

Ryan Lents (he/him/his) began collaborating with Crossroads in 2017, when he joined the Leadership Team of Chicago ROAR. He transitioned to the Crossroads staff as a full-time Organizer and Trainer in 2020. Prior to joining Crossroads, Ryan was a lay minister with the Archdiocese of Chicago and Amate House, promoting Catholic social teaching, leadership development, advocacy, service, and restorative practices. Ryan holds an MA in Justice Ministry from Catholic Theological Union, with an emphasis on racial justice, reconciliation, and peacebuilding. Originally from Indianapolis, IN, Ryan and his family reside in Chicago's McKinley Park neighborhood, where he enjoys running, playing his guitar, cooking, and spending time with family.

For Presbytery Action:

There are no current items for Presbytery Action.