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Kaleidoscope

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A Newsletter of the International Racial Justice Conference



Grieving the Past

Racial Justice Conference begins in Freiburg

The International and Ecumenical conference on Racial Justice organised by the Racial Justice working group of the Diocese of Europe of the Church of England began at the Humboldt Hall in Freiburg im Breisgau, Germany today. The morning worship recalled the night of 9/11 of 1938 'Reichsprogromnacht'. All life lost due to violence based on race and related matters were remembered and grieved. From the depth of the hearts, the congregation pleaded God's mercy praying Khudaya Rahemkar. All that God is and God has God gives, all that we are, and all that we have, God asks -The worship reminded.

The Venerable Dr. Leslie Nathaniel, the chair of the diocesan racial justice working group welcomed the gathering and shared briefly about the conference. He pointed out that the most marked feature of the diocese in Europe is its diversity. It poses great challenges and opportunities. He reminded that the conference is following up on the policy framework of the diocese "Breathing Life". Racism has many faces and manifest itself in countless ways. We need to humble ourselves to the stories of the people, their experiences and their pains. It should help us not only grieve the wrongs of the past, but also dream about a racially just future. Giving his words of encouragement to the conference, the Rt. Revd Dr. Robert Innes, the Bishop of the diocese in Europe thanked all those who worked behind in designing the conference and rolling it out. In his greetings, he said "I am hopeful that what we achieve here will be celebrated for years to come as the 'anagnosis point' – that point of recognition and acknowledgement which alters the course of the unfolding of our shared future'.

Ninety nine people with roots from over thirty two nationalities are attending the conference. The first day was set apart to grieving the painful experiences of the past. Bible study, theme presentation, panel discussions, group discussions and all activities were centered on the experiences of the memory of pain. Grieving was identified as the basis of a new foundation for a just future where mistakes of the past would ideally not be repeated.



Conference Theme Song affirms God's Kaleidoscopic crew

From East and West, from South and North, to Freiburg, we have journeyed forth. Thus began the Racial Justice conference theme song which reverberated through the conference's first day's proceedings. Written by Julie Lipp Nathaniel, set to music by Molly Catherine, and arranged by Stephen Brown, the song affirms that the worship, songs and deliberation; the hearing, speaking, sharing and action tell the world that we are one great family in Christ God's son.



The Wild Man unwilling to be tamed - beheaded Sathianathan Clarke reflects on John the Baptist: The uncivilised outsider



The mood of the conference was set with a prolific Bible study by Prof. Dr. Sathianathan Clarke who spoke about the homeless man - John to whom Jesus went to. John could be a voice of dissent because he was not part of the system of production. He ate locusts and fed on wild honey. He clothed himself with camel's hair. We are not able to grieve because we are vested in the system. Grieving for those whose image of God is disfigured is not possible by the ones benefitting from the system. Sathi focussed his Bible study on three key aspects. Born against the anti-kingdom, Born again into the beloved community, Borne by the spirit of freedom. Giving up racial privileges and cleansing all the trauma that come because of racism are not easy propositions. But when the trauma of race is cleansed, it brings in weightlessness - the 'born-againness'. John is not attacking people, but the structures. Taking the participants through a profound journey into the nuances of the born-against experience, he also reminded that among the ministering, there are 'better' angels and 'bitter' angels.

The Bible study was 'wow'! exclaimed several of the participants.



Knowledge and Acknowledgement are important for healing

Affirms Fr. Michael Lapsley

I was bombed because of my theology. Fr. Michael Lapsley said, reflecting on the letter bomb blast in which he lost both his hands and an eye. Speaking on the theme, 'The Colonial Past and Present' - acknowledging what went wrong and daring to dream of a racially just today, Fr. Lapsley said that the issues like apartheid were faith issues. Affirming the importance of apology in healing, he mentioned about bicycle theology where the bicycle thief acknowledges, "I stole your bike. Asks 'you must forgive me'". But says, "I will still keep the bike." Returning the bicycle with new tyres, and a bell is what we must be looking at, he said referring to the Zacchaeus story. Our racism makes God weep. When wounds are not healed, they often play themselves out in very intimate spaces, he said. The church must learn to listen. Part of the vocation of the church is to be a listening church. He also said, healing involves a process of detoxification. Responding to a question on the importance of interfaith initiatives in healing, he said that the future of the world is not a Christian future, but an interfaith future. Quoting Desmond Tutu, he said, "God is not just a Christian God, God has many names."



A diverse panel sets the scene for the conference



An ecumenically diverse panel of experts attempted to define racism and prevailing narratives of history setting the scene for the conference. Those in the panel included Ms Anette Adelmann, Revd Godfrey Adare, Revd Dr. Tomy Karttunen, Dr. Clementine Nishimwe and the Revd Dr. Peniel Rajkumar. "If you don't know where you are going, you will end up where you are heading", Peniel warned.

Wake Up! Stand Up! Speak Up!

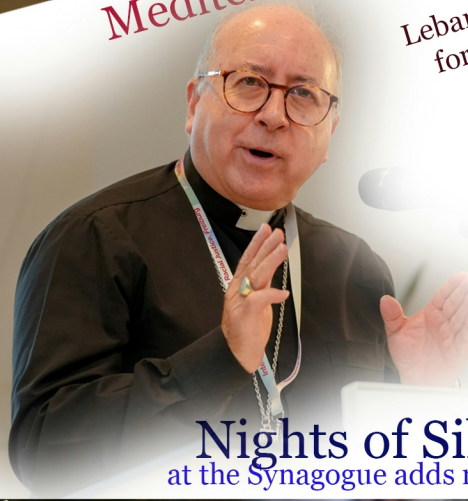
Concluding a panel discussion on the reality of racial injustice - visible and invisible, Bishop David Hamid said, that the need of the hour is waking up, standing up and speaking up. Sharing in the panel, where vocal advocates of racial justice including Dr. Sonia Diaz-Monsalve, Rt. Revd Smitha Prasad, Revd Canon Dr. Bruce Bryant Scott and Ms. Grace Fagan Stewart.





Mediterranean Buffet delights the Participants

Lebanese sisters Mirna and Norma prepared a wonderful Mediterranean buffet for lunch at the conference which was appreciated by all the participants. The barista coffee bar offering varieties of coffee and tea, juices and soft drinks, pastries and pretzels at tea was available through the day. The enthusiastic support provided by the Anglican Church in Freiburg was also much appreciated. The work of the Conference Secretariat and the organizing team received kudos from the participants.



Nights of Silence and Vigil at the Synagogue adds meaning to the Conference

The participants of the conference joined the vigil at the Synagogue memorial commemorating the night of November 9, 1938 and joined the night of silence, readings and prayers of world religions, thus, getting an opportunity to be part of the larger ecumenical life of Freiburg.



Group Discussions provide space for airing out

The participants split into ten groups meeting across ten different venues around the main hall providing space for people to reflect and to internalise the discussions of the day and to vent out grief, anger, pain and trauma. Most of the groups also had powerful envisaging of a just future.

