

FROM RIPPLES TO WAVES

God's Kaleidoscope and the Church's Journey toward Racial Justice

Introduction

In recent years, racial justice has moved from the margins of public discourse to its very centre. Impelled by our Diocesan Policy Framework **Breathing Life**, that was adopted by the Synod of the Diocese in Europe on 20 December 2020, what once appeared as isolated ripples of concern have now become powerful waves demanding attention, accountability, and transformation. For the Church, this is not merely a sociological or political issue, but a deeply theological one, one that embraces *belonging*. A *belonging* that is God's initiative rather than ours. Our faith provides us entry into this community (see "*Meeting God in Paul*" by Rowan Williams).

The Racial Justice Conferences organised within the Diocese in Europe have sought to engage this reality through prayer, reflection, dialogue, and action. Under the evocative theme *God's Kaleidoscope*, these conferences have invited the Church to look again—to see humanity in all its diversity as God intends it to be seen—and to respond faithfully to the call of justice, reconciliation, and hope.

What Is Racial Justice?

Racial justice goes beyond the absence of racism. It is the proactive work of recognising, challenging, and dismantling systems, structures, and attitudes that privilege some racial or ethnic groups while marginalising others. At its heart, racial justice affirms the inherent dignity and worth of every human being, created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). It seeks equity rather than mere equality, acknowledging that historical and ongoing injustices require intentional redress.

The Convention of the United Nations defines the term "racial discrimination" as: *any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life (International Convention On The Elimination Of All Forms Of Racial Discrimination entry into force 4 January 1969).*

Racial injustice operates at multiple levels: personal, cultural, institutional, and structural. It can be overt, such as explicit discrimination or hate crimes, or subtle and hidden, manifesting as unconscious bias, exclusionary practices, or the normalisation of inequality. Racial justice, therefore, demands both self-examination and collective responsibility. It calls individuals and communities to repentance, transformation, and sustained commitment to justice.

Why Racial Justice Matters in the Life of the Church

For the Church, racial justice is not an optional agenda item; it is integral to the gospel itself. *It is first of all a kind of space, cleared by God in which people may become what God made them to be (God's sons and daughters), and that what we have to do about the Church is not first to organise it as a society but to inhabit it as a climate or a landscape.* This quote

by Rowan Williams fittingly encapsulates the rational and purpose undergirding the Racial Justice themes in the Diocese in Europe.

Furthermore, the logic of the cross is the hope that violence and injustice will be overcome. If we as Christians wish to embrace the challenges of the cross, we are compelled to also see such challenges through the eyes of those discriminated against. The biblical narrative consistently affirms God's concern for the oppressed and marginalised. From the liberation of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt to the prophetic denunciations of injustice, and from Jesus' ministry among those pushed to the edges of society to the vision of a reconciled humanity in Revelation, Scripture testifies to a God who acts for justice.

The Church is called to be a sign and foretaste of God's kingdom—a community where divisions are healed and new relationships are formed in Christ. As St Paul writes, "There is no longer Jew or Greek... for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28). This seminal verse can continue to resonate with fresh meaning in our current context. Paul would like us to understand *belonging* in a different way. A belonging which makes origins, status and the like inconsequential. All meet at the same level in Christ Jesus. Such a belonging is not colour-blind or culture-erasing. Rather, it is a reconciled diversity that honours difference while resisting domination and exclusion.

When racial injustice exists within or around the Church, it undermines the credibility of Christian witness. Silence or neutrality in the face of racism becomes complicity. Conversely, a Church that names racism as sin, listens to the voices of those harmed, and works actively for a justice that embodies the reconciling love of Christ in a fractured world.

The Diocese in Europe: Commitment to Racial Justice and Inclusion

The Diocese in Europe, marked by immense cultural, linguistic, and ethnic diversity, occupies a unique space within the Anglican Communion. Stretching across many nations and contexts, it reflects both the richness of global Christianity and the complexities of living together amid histories of colonialism, migration, conflict, and exclusion.

The Diocese has made an intentional commitment to racial justice and racial inclusion, recognising that diversity alone does not guarantee justice. Through policies, theological reflection, training programmes, and public engagement, the Diocese has sought to foster communities where all are welcomed, valued, and empowered to participate fully in the life and leadership of the Church.

The intention is an appeal for all to flourish together, and that it is good to learn and grow alongside Christians, so that the dynamics of *Inclusion Exclusion* are overcome. The appeal is also about equal opportunities through the creation of an environment for each one of us to be open to discover the gifts and potential in *the other*. Anything less is but the disfigured face of Christ.

The Racial Justice Conferences are a key expression of this commitment. They have provided safe yet challenging spaces for clergy and laity to engage honestly with difficult questions, to confront uncomfortable truths, and to imagine new possibilities for being Church together.

God's Kaleidoscope 1: Freiburg

Naming Racial Discrimination as Sin

The first Racial Justice Conference, *God's Kaleidoscope 1*, held in Freiburg, laid the foundational framework for this ongoing journey. People from across our diocese and beyond participated in the Conference. There were practitioners and experts, young people and many other interested groups. It was a much needed space to share experiences, ask difficult questions, pray and reflect and to forge a way forward. There was a clear focus each day: grieving the past, challenging the present and envisioning the future. There was affirmation that racism could not be treated merely as a social problem or personal failing, but as a theological and moral violation of God's will. The naming of racial discrimination as a sin, was accompanied by honest engagement with both intentional and unintentional biases. Participants were encouraged to reflect on how prejudice can be consciously expressed, but also how it can operate unconsciously through assumptions, habits, and inherited narratives. They were enabled to move together from reflection on past experiences to joining together in the task of advocacy, and the need to speak out, affirming that a radically just tomorrow is possible.

Bible studies and theological reflections played a crucial role, grounding discussions in Scripture and Christian tradition. Storytelling emerged as a particularly transformative practice. As individuals shared lived experiences of racism and exclusion, abstract concepts became painfully concrete. Listening to these stories fostered empathy, repentance, and a deeper commitment to change. Importantly, the conference also explored possible remedial measures, emphasising that awareness must lead to action.

The image of the kaleidoscope was both powerful and instructive. A kaleidoscope does not erase difference; it brings fragments together, allowing light to pass through them, creating patterns of beauty that shift as perspective changes. So too, God's vision for humanity is one of dynamic, reconciled diversity.

God's Kaleidoscope 2: Bad Boll

All of Us or None of Us

The second conference, *God's Kaleidoscope 2*, held in Bad Boll, deepened the journey with the theme *All of Us or None of Us*. This gathering invited participants to reflect on the tears caused by racial injustice—past, present, and future.

This follow-up Conference ***ALL of us or NONE of Us*** is taking the Racial Justice agenda further in our ongoing journey ***From Lament to Action*** and continues to be aligned to education and expanding horizons, participation, raising confidence, churches responding to conflict, peace building and healing in a rapidly changing and challenging context, and will be a further significant contribution in redesigning the ecumenical and Inter-faith landscape for a racially just, radically inclusive and healing community.

Looking back, the conference acknowledged historical wounds: the legacies of colonialism, slavery, antisemitism, and systemic exclusion that continue to shape societies and churches today. These were not examined to assign guilt alone, but to understand responsibility and the need for healing.

Attention was also given to the tears being shed today—those of migrants and refugees facing hostility, of minority communities experiencing discrimination, and of individuals whose dignity is daily eroded by racism. Lament became an important theological practice at this conference. By learning to weep together, participants recognised that racial justice work must be rooted in compassion as well as conviction.

Crucially, the conference looked forward with hope, drawing on the biblical promise of a future where God “will wipe every tear from their eyes” (Revelation 21:4). This eschatological vision did not encourage passivity, but inspired active hope—a commitment to work toward a world where justice and peace are not distant ideals but lived realities.

We shared our dream that no person shall be judged by outward features, but that all people shall be seen as children of God, in all their diversity; we shared the hope that God’s love will enable us to see our own shortcomings in making this dream come true, and we repented of our failures towards those in need of our solidarity; we shared a commitment, that we will ceaselessly work to form a communion of faith in which this vision can start to become a tangible reality for everyone, celebrating the splendour of God’s creation and the colourfulness of our community.

God’s Kaleidoscope 3: Berlin

Hopemakers: From Hostility to Hospitality

The third conference, *God’s Kaleidoscope 3*, held in Berlin, turned attention to the present moment and the future, under the theme *Hopemakers: From Hostility to Hospitality*. Participants examined the many manifestations of hostility in contemporary society—xenophobia, racism, political polarisation, and the erosion of democratic values in several contexts.

The conference offered a sobering assessment of how fear and exclusion are often normalised, and how these dynamics affect both society and the Church. Participants brought stories of democratic backsliding; polarised societies; a populism that has seeds of fascism; racialised violence and a resurgence of unashamed, open racism; ecological devastation; weakening trust in institutions; digital manipulation; and rising hostility and fear. Our young participants – the inheritors of all that today’s decisions will shape – expressed frustration, urgency, and determination. They called for wider participation, formation for leadership, and the courage to act before opportunities close.

Yet the Conference refused to remain in despair. Participants affirmed that the tears and fears did not overwhelm them. Rather they sharpen our vision. They deepen our resolve. The Conference issued a call to become *hopemakers*—people and communities who actively cultivate hospitality, inclusion, and solidarity.

Hospitality was explored not as a superficial welcome, but as a radical Christian practice that challenges power imbalances and creates space for genuine belonging. Drawing on biblical narratives and practical examples, the conference encouraged churches to become places where strangers are received as gifts, where differences are honoured, and where hope is embodied in concrete actions.

Why Racial Justice Conferences and Public Theology Matter

Racial justice conferences serve several vital purposes. First, they create space for *naming reality*. Racism often thrives in silence, denial, or minimisation. By bringing people together to listen, learn, and speak openly, conferences help expose injustice and break the isolation of those who suffer from it.

Second, they contribute to *formation*. Racial justice is not only about policies or statements; it is about shaping hearts, minds, and practices. Through Bible studies, theological reflection, storytelling, and dialogue, participants are invited into a deeper, more faithful understanding of God, humanity, and the Church's mission.

Third, such gatherings contribute to *public theology*. They enable the Church to reflect theologically on contemporary issues and to speak into the public square with moral clarity and compassion. In a time when public discourse is often polarised and hostile, the Church's engagement with racial justice can model a different way—rooted in truth, humility, and hope.

Conclusion: From Reflection to Transformation

Taken together, the Racial Justice Conferences represent more than a series of events; they mark an ongoing pilgrimage. From naming sin, to lamenting injustice, to cultivating hope, the journey of *God's Kaleidoscope* calls the Church to continual conversion.

The movement from ripples to waves is not automatic. It requires sustained commitment, courageous leadership, and the willingness to be changed. Yet these conferences have shown that when the Church dares to look through God's kaleidoscope—to see humanity illuminated by divine love—new patterns of justice, reconciliation, and hope can emerge.

In a world fractured by racism and fear, the Church is called to be a sign of another way. The Racial Justice Conferences remind us that this calling is both urgent and possible, when we walk together in faith, truth, and love.

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