
THE PLYMOUTH CHURCH

A working group for discovery and discernment

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We all lead busy lives. There is an endless list of articles, books, podcasts, and videos to review. What I've pulled together here is an executive summary of some concepts and language that may be useful as we begin our work.

The most exciting part about this work is that we hope to discover a new landscape &/or come to understand our current landscape from a fresh perspective. The ideas herein are meant to guide and equip us on the journey.

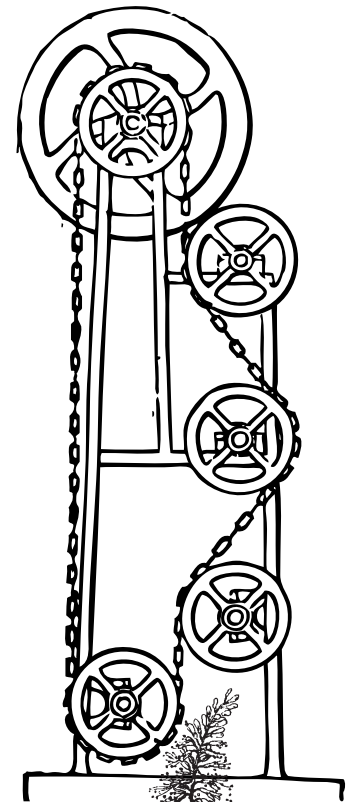
TECHNICAL FIXES & ADAPTIVE SOLUTIONS

There are two kinds of solutions: technical fixes and adaptive changes. A technical fix gets us back to “normal.” An adaptive change allows for innovation and emergence.

A *technical* problem is a broken lightbulb that prevents the lamp from working properly. An *adaptive* dilemma is the lamp — no matter how bright the bulb — not providing enough light, leading you to call an electrician to install recessed lighting in the ceiling. Both responses are necessary and valuable: technical solutions repair or return us to current state and adaptive changes foster growth and progress.

After sharing the Beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus begins a litany: “You have heard it said... *but I say to you.*” “You have heard it said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.” (Matt. 5:21-22, 27-28, 31-32, 33-34, 38-39, 43-44) In each iteration, Jesus names a traditional technical temptation and replaces it with an adaptive option. In this way, Jesus invites us out of stale traditions into a vibrant culture of kin(g)dom building.

The work of this group will be focused much more on adaptive solutions and the culture of our church and less on technical fixes and strategic planning.




STRATEGY & CULTURE

Strategy is what we plan to do; culture is the atmosphere in which those plans are carried out. According to authors of “The Leader’s Guide to Corporate Culture,” “Strategy offers a formal logic for an organization’s goals and orients people around them. Culture expresses goals through values and beliefs and guides activity through shared assumptions and group norms.”

Because culture is the collection of behaviors, mental models, and traditions it functions below conscious thought. If a company sets a strategy to be bold and ambitious, but the cultural patterns don’t encourage grace and teamwork, the strategy will fail. For a seed to grow, it needs to be planted in good soil.

In the Gospel of Matthew, to conclude the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus implores people to be “doers... and not hearers only.” He’s addressing the culture that is required for his teachings to have an impact. “Everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand.” (Matt. 7:26)

 **Culture eats strategy
for breakfast.**

Peter Drucker

Covenant of The Plymouth Church in Framingham

We covenant with God and with one another and do bind ourselves in His presence to strive to know His will as taught in the Holy Bible, and to walk in His Holy Ways. We will strive to be doers of the Word and not hearers only. In the fellowship of this church, we dedicate ourselves to the building of the Kingdom of our Lord, Jesus Christ, here on earth. Recognizing the church as the living Body of Christ, we agree together to sustain its worship, its activities and its charities.

WHITE SUPREMACY CULTURE

The Plymouth Church in Framingham is older than the United States. While we can be proud of our church for vocally participating in the Abolitionist Movement and the Civil Rights Movement, we must also confront our current and ongoing contribution to a culture that is deeply and systemically racist. Because culture is often unnamed and shared by unspoken methods, much of what we might presume is the “default” is, in fact, a racist design.

In her article “White Supremacy Culture,” Tema Okun exposes fifteen characteristics of Western culture that express a white supremacy mindset.

“The characteristics listed are damaging because they are used as norms and standards without being proactively named or chosen by the group. Because we all live in a white supremacy culture, these characteristics show up in the attitudes and behaviors of all of us – people of color and white people.”

Read the list to yourself. Observe your reaction: What do you think? What do you feel? What do you wonder? What do you resist? To learn more about each characteristic read the full article.

“In a racist society, it is not enough to be non-racist, we must be anti-racist.”

Angela Davis

1. Perfectionism
2. Sense of Urgency
3. Defensiveness
4. Quantity over Quality
5. Worship of the Written Word
6. Only One Right Way
7. Paternalism
8. Either/Or Thinking
9. Power Hoarding
10. Fear of Open Conflict
11. Individualism
12. I’m the Only One
13. Progress is Bigger, More
14. Objectivity
15. Right to Comfort

WWW.WHITESUPREMACYCULTURE.INFO



Open & Affirming Covenant

We believe all people are created in the image of God, and we embrace Jesus' call to love one another. We commit ourselves to the ongoing work of being an Open and Affirming congregation.

We strive, with God's grace, to welcome all persons into our community. We celebrate our differences, including age, race, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, socioeconomic status, mental and physical ability, and spiritual tradition. We invite all to share fully the life, leadership, ministry and sacraments of this church. Trusting in the Holy Spirit, we journey together in faith.



GETTING UP TO THE BALCONY

Ron Heifeitz suggests that one aspect of “The Work of Leadership,” is “getting on the balcony” is a metaphor to encourage leaders to step outside the flow of cause-and-effect. It is how we observe the forest for the trees. “Don’t get swept up in the field of play. Instead, move back and forth between the ‘action’ and the ‘balcony.’ You’ll spot emerging patterns, such as power struggles or work avoidance. This high-level perspective helps you mobilize people to do adaptive work.”

British *Practice Supervisor Development Programme* says: “Optimal ‘time on the balcony’ allows you to see patterns, re-evaluate assumptions, and make novel connections. Optimal engagement ‘on the dance floor’ builds credibility, allows you to see and feel what those on the frontline experience, and understand what the work is asking of their people. Both perspectives are necessary, and adaptive leaders must learn to do both.”

A related concept — metacognition — is the ability to think about our thought processes. Educators use this approach to facilitate learning and help students develop “habits to evaluate new materials and make sense of them, helping them grow as competent, independent learners.” Paige Tutti from Edutopia offers five meta-questions.

- What stands out to me? What makes me wonder?
- Which parts or terms are new to me, and which parts do I recognize?
- How does this connect with what I already know?
- What follow-up questions do I have?
- Why is this idea important?



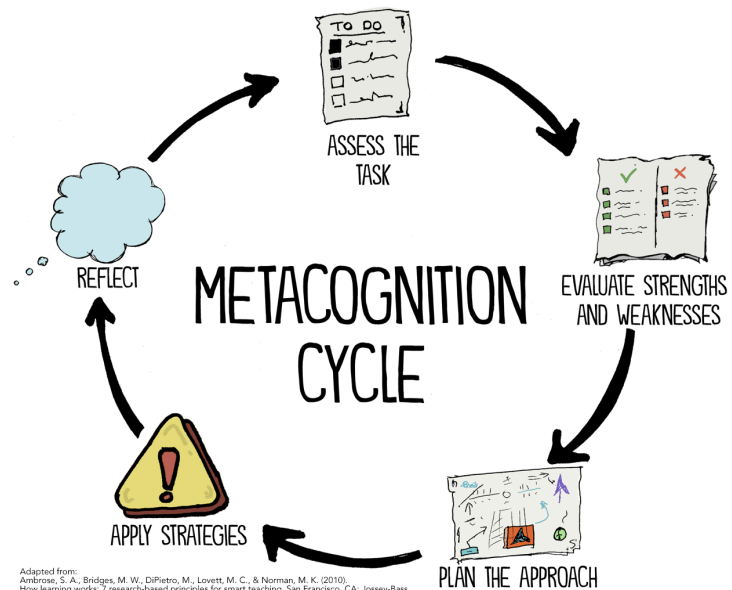
THE POWER OF METACOGNITION

Metacognition is vital for students to thrive in college, in their careers, and in life-long learning. It helps promote autonomy and resiliency. When students improve their metacognitive skills, they are more likely to embrace a Growth Mindset and learn from mistakes.

If we want students to grow into problem-solvers and critical thinkers, we need to help them develop metacognition.



JOHN SPENCER



CANOEING THE MOUNTAIN

Church Council recently began studying the book “Canoeing the Mountain,” by Tod Bolsinger. The book uses the journey of Lewis & Clark (and the Corps of Discovery) as a guiding metaphor.

Lewis and Clark’s expedition to explore the newly acquired Louisiana Purchase and discover a route to the Pacific Ocean was built on a false expectation. They assumed the “unexplored” west was a mirror of the geography they knew in the east. They traveled to the mouth of the Missouri presuming they would, at some point, find another river that flowed westward to the Pacific.

Instead, they “discovered” the Rocky Mountains. Thus the title of the book: they were expert river-explorers who, because of their mastery and technical skill, reached a point where, in order to succeed in their task, they had to become novices. They were forced to abandon their canoes and become mountaineers.



CAUTION: Reading this book, requires an active anti-racist, anti-colonialist lens. Had Lewis & Clark asked any number of indigenous tribes they might not have been so surprised by a continent-long mountain range. Indeed, they eventually did come to rely on the expertise and guidance of Sacagawea, a 16 year old Lemhi Shoshone woman who had been captured by a group of Hidatsa and sold into a non-consensual marriage to a Quebecois trapper.

Tod Bolsinger is a white, evangelical pastor. In this book, he often speaks from this position and fails to recognize that others might exist. He offers no critical insight to the force of subjugation and oppression at work. If you do choose to read the book, I strongly suggest skipping Chapter 14, in which he attempts (and fails) to meaningfully include women and BIPOC perspectives.

CANOEING THE MOUNTAIN (continued)

Bolsinger uses this metaphor to suggest that churches like ours have reached a similar moment of decision. We have made it thus far, not only by faith, but because we were excellent in how we did church. We find ourselves here not because we have failed, but because we have succeeded.

However, despite our success, the landscape has changed and is changing. The mainline church is no longer at the center. When the City developed strategies for Covid, they did not consult the church. When the White House adjusts national economic policy, it is not conferring with the national offices of the United Church of Christ.

How we do church has to adapt to a new and evolving culture.



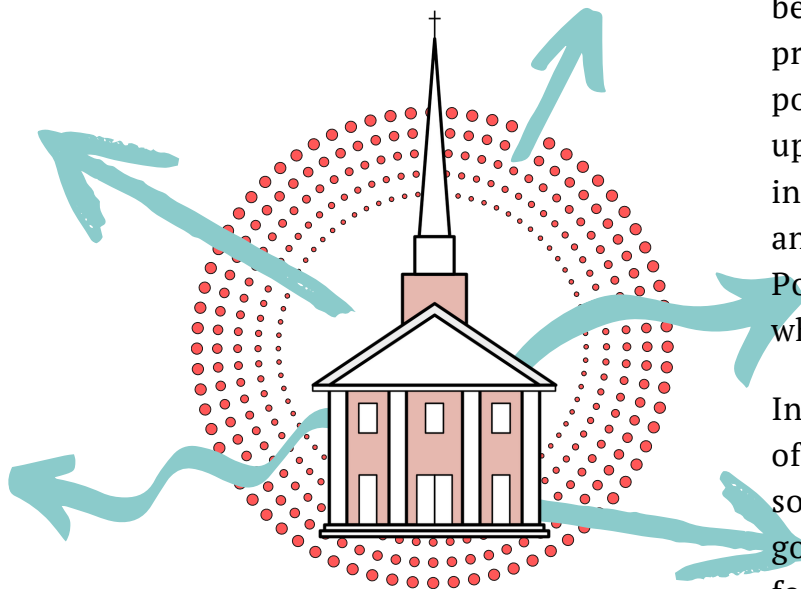
Bolsinger offers practical guidance for transitioning to a new model. What he calls “uncharted leadership” requires a transformation of the way we approach ministry since there is no map for uncharted territories. This kind of adaptive leadership has three characteristics:

1. this *changing* environment often has no clear answer
2. both leaders and followers must learn; leaders especially must commit to their own ongoing transformation
3. new solution will result in loss

ATTRACTIVE & MISSIONAL

Since the middle ages, churches have been the center of the community. We have been the *destination*. People come to us, to our sanctuaries, to sing the songs we sing, to pray in the ways we pray. But “build it and they will come” hasn’t been successful in America for a while now.

Instead of being as shiny as possible so that people are drawn to participate in what *we’re* doing; we have to train and equip our people to participate in what *God* is doing out there.



In many ways, we find ourselves in a similar place as the early church. Just before his ascension, Jesus offered a promise and a directive: “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1:6) Ponder this: if we didn’t have a building, what would our church be and do?

In the attractional model, we spend a lot of time and priority on our *content* — sound teaching, extravagant welcome, good music. In the missional model, we focus instead on *connection*. And isn’t that what this pandemic has revealed — and tested? Our deep need for *connection*.

TWO FEET WALKING

The Leader's Journey offers us another metaphor. The basic premise is that there's work the church needs to do (skills we need to develop, etc) and there's work that leaders of churches need to do (individual skills, growth and maturity). And that for the church to succeed, we need to be working on both.

The first foot includes *individual* skills like: knowledge, awareness of gifting, boundary-setting, curiosity.

The second foot are the *organizational* development skills: discernment, generating and sustaining creative tension, accountability, leadership coaching.

Depending on our experience or the season we may find ourselves stronger or in need of development on some of these competencies. My hope is always that your service on a committee of the church adds to your life and to your faith. What if we each named something we want to work on and sought out tasks and work that could aid in that growth?

Trisha Taylor and Jim Harrington of **The Leader's Journey** offer a course called "Deep Change or Slow Death." This course focuses on changing church culture. The course includes a **Case Study** and series of lectures, all of which are available to us.

theleadersjourney.us



MENTAL MODELS

A mental model is a rationale of how something works. Consciously and unconsciously, we all carry around assumptions that “connect the dots.” Sometimes they work; sometimes they don’t. These are sometimes valuable shortcuts to assess a situation quickly. When things are simple this is effective. When a situation is complex or evolving consider instead cultivating a “beginner’s mind.”

Peter Senge defines a mental model as “deeply ingrained assumptions, generalizations, or even pictures and images that influence how we understand the world and how we take action.” Mental models are formed by experiences, beliefs, and values. They shape how we experience and interpret the world.

In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus asked his disciples: “Who do you say that I am?” He was a charismatic teacher, who wielded power, and yet was *not* a priest of the Temple. Jesus wanted to know how they were adding this up. Some said “John the Baptist,” others suggested “Elijah.” Jesus, recognizing that these mental models would need to be challenged, and so ordered them not to say anything.

In the course of our work, we will confront our individual and shared mental models. And we will learn to test them. When the story doesn’t make sense, what unconscious bias or assumptions are we inserting to have it line up? How do we stop and test that action to know we got it right?



In the Hidden Brain episode “Putting Our Assumptions to the Test,” guest Abhijit Banerjee was the child of two professors. When he failed to succeed in grade school, the teachers assumed he was bored and advanced him into the next level. They had pieces of data – parents’ education, his bad grades, and an assumption that he must be smart. They couldn’t fit the pieces together. Rather than test the assumption, they imported a fourth data point: the presumption of his boredom. They added on to the story to preserve the existing mental model.

According to his own reporting, Banerjee wasn’t a particularly curious or attentive kid. And advancing him to the next grade did nothing to improve his performance. Among the faculty of his school, the mental model was so strong that they almost advanced him a second time!

CORE VALUES & GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Our values and principles refer to those agreements that drive our behavior. They are created and reinforced by culture.

Core values are implicit and unnamed. They drive our unconscious choices and behavior. Guiding principles are more *aspirational* — what we say is important and hope to become. They require development and focused intention.

Core values are not always constructive and positive. On her podcast *Dare To Lead*, Brene Brown discusses “shadow values” with researcher Jim Collins. For example, many of us at The Plymouth Church unconsciously are driven by a core value of comfort. When push comes to shove we choose the more familiar, less risky option. In times of trauma, this is holy; in seasons of change and growth the value of comfort can limit us.

To discover what a person or organization values, ignore what they say and study their actions. Jesus was remarkably consistent in both his preaching and his behavior. He taught servant leadership. And in his life he did not amass power and wealth for himself. He remained devoted to a ministry of healing and care for the poor and sick.

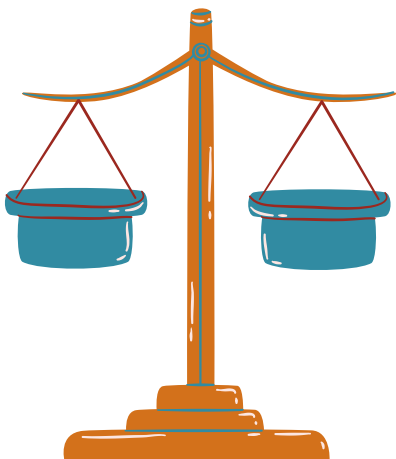
“Our culture wants to turn mysteries into puzzles to be explained or problems to be solved, because maintaining the illusion that we can “straighten things out” makes us feel powerful. Yet mysteries never yield to solutions or fixes— and when we pretend that they do, life becomes not only more banal but also more hopeless, because the fixes never work.

Parker Palmer, *Let Your Life Speak*

YOUR “GATOR” AND “JUDGE”

Zoe Chance, an Assistant Professor of Marketing at Yale University, calls them your “gator” and your “judge.” “The gator part is our unconscious, intuitive, emotional, habitual part of us that drives up to 95% of our decisions and behavior. The judge part is the slow, conscious, rational, deliberative decision-making system.”

Neuropsychologists used to refer to this as your “reptilian brain” — responsible for base-level fight/flight/freeze — and your “mammalian brain” — more capable of abstract thought and weighing competing interests. The reptilian brain reacts; the mammalian brain responds. Turns out, there isn’t much biological evidence to suggest the brain works this way. Still, it can be a useful metaphor; another way to talk about feeling “with the heart” and thinking “with your head” and instinct “in your gut.”



SELF-DIFFERENTIATION

To navigate anxiety and the inevitable sabotage, leaders must learn to self-differentiate. Differentiation is a normal developmental process as children they mature into adulthood. As they take on more and more responsibility, they come to understand themselves as distinct from their parents. They learn to make more independent choices.

Systems-thinker Ed Friedman defines this self-differentiation as “a progressive, internal interplay between autonomy (separation) and connection (togetherness) while progressing toward established and evolving goals.” Self-differentiation is not a mid-way point between self and togetherness, but rather the understanding that *independence* and *connection* are two necessary ingredients for relationship.

Trisha Taylor explains, “It comes down to being able to clearly and courageously say what I think, what I believe, what I want, what I will and won’t do... And at the same time allow you to say for yourself what you think, what you feel, what you want, what you will or won’t do. Then in the midst of that, especially if there’s a gap between us, to still be able to stay appropriately connected.”

ANXIETY AND SABOTAGE

Anxiety is a response to a real or perceived threat. It is less a conscious fearfulness of the future and more a deeper, more primal reaction. Anxiety short-circuits our thoughtful intent with knee-jerk reactivity.

Mature organizations know their values and respond in accordance with their guiding principles. Organizations with high levels of anxiety react out of a survival mode — drawing members into an unhealthy closeness (enmeshment) or detachment (cut-off).

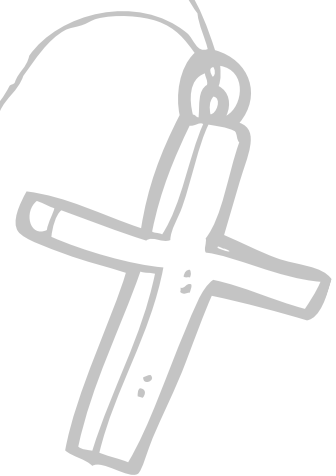
Human systems prefer predictability and stability; they often push back against the forces that might lead to change — even good change. And while people resist change, what they really fear is loss.

In the face of Ed Friedman cautioned: “If you are a leader, expect sabotage.” Many of us assume that the mark of good leadership is that people follow. Another good a test might be that people resist.

Jesus is an excellent model of calm, non-anxious leadership. He engaged with people of all perspectives and stages of understanding. He treated each with love and respect, without compromising his own message or dialing back the urgency with which he preached.

Jesus’ presence inspired the disciples to be less reactive. Instead of being provoked by their critics, the disciples learned to respond from their values; they chose principled action over panicked *reaction*.

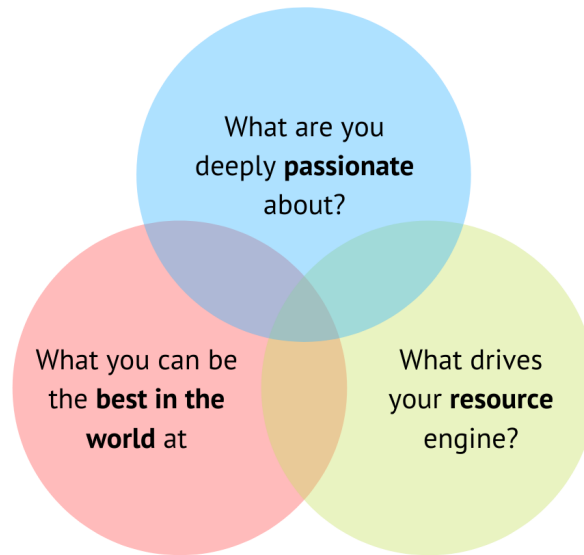
Ultimately this was a threat to the authoritarian rule of Roman imperialism and Jesus was executed in an effort to return Jerusalem to the passive colony it was supposed to be.



HEDGEHOG CONCEPT

Isaiah Berlin divided the world into hedgehogs and foxes, based upon an ancient Greek parable: “The fox knows many things, but the hedgehog knows one big thing.” Jim Collins, author of *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap and Others Don’t* used that insight to create “The Hedgehog Concept.”

It is a methodology for identifying our calling; it clarifies what we can be great at based on three factors: passion, expertise, and resources. Originally, Collins designed this concept for business and the third circle was “economic engine.” He updated it for “social sectors” recognizing that in non-profit organizations we deal in more than just money — also time and brand.



Open & Affirming Covenant

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DOING THIS WORK DURING A PANDEMIC

We are coming out of a species-level trauma. The covid-19 pandemic killed over 6 million people globally. We are nearing the 1 million mark in the United States. The impacts of the last two years are still rippling out through our schools, the economy, and our souls.

David Rock, in his essay “We Need Time to Rehabilitate from the Trauma of the Pandemic” names three deep psychological needs that were interrupted:

1. our need for certainty and predictability
2. our desire for control and autonomy
3. our need for connection.

Like an elite athlete who didn’t train in the off season, we have to be careful how we return to the field. First, don’t move too fast. We have to build back up our muscles. Second, value progress. Incremental growth and recovery is still growth and recovery. Third, compassion. We are all still processing these wounds. We are all detoxing from our body’s surging levels of cortisol and adrenaline.



We must confess insufficient self-care as a subtle but lethal expression of personal and social violence. Well-doing, devoid of proper self-care is, at best, doing well poorly. Exemplary care for others is rooted in vigilant [care of the self].

Rest in the Storm, Kirk Byron Jones

THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST STATEMENT OF FAITH



a just
world
for all
ucc.org

We believe in you, O God, Eternal Spirit,
God of our Savior Jesus Christ and our God,
and to your deeds we testify:

You call the worlds into being,
create persons in your own image,
and set before each one the ways of life and death.
You seek in holy love to save all people from aimlessness and sin.
You judge people and nations by your righteous will
declared through prophets and apostles.

In Jesus Christ, the man of Nazareth,
our crucified and risen Savior,
you have come to us and shared our common lot,
conquering sin and death and reconciling the world to yourself.

You bestow upon us your Holy Spirit,
creating and renewing the church of Jesus Christ,
binding in covenant faithful people of all ages, tongues, and races.

You call us into your church to accept the cost and joy of discipleship,
to be your servants in the service of others,
to proclaim the gospel to all the world and resist the powers of evil,
to share in Christ's baptism and eat at his table,
to join him in his passion and victory.

You promise to all who trust you forgiveness of sins and fullness of grace,
courage in the struggle for justice and peace,
your presence in trial and rejoicing,
and eternal life in your realm which has no end.

Blessing and honor,
glory and power be unto you.
Amen.

FRAMINGHAM TOGETHER: UNITING IN SOLIDARITY AND COMMUNITY



Framingham is a mosaic - Many people, many beliefs, many hopes, many dreams. We aspire to be a just, equitable community.

A collective of stakeholders and community partners who are committed to actively engaging in rooting out the causes of racism at the individual, institutional and systemic levels of our organization and community. As institutional leaders we hold ourselves accountable for acknowledging that justice will not be achieved until inclusion is viewed as a right and not a privilege for every member of our community. As leaders in this work we commit to the following:

- We name racism, anti-semitism, white supremacy, colorism and anti-Blackness.
- We name that these operate at the individual, institutional, cultural, and systemic level.
- We acknowledge the significant impact racism has had and continues to have on Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) communities.
- We acknowledge the significance and importance of intersecting identities and the additional hardship it causes individuals who identify as BIPOC as well as Women, LGBTQIA+, immigrants and individuals with disabilities.
- We acknowledge that racism is not relegated to one part of the country but built into the fabric of our nation and present here in Framingham and in the MetroWest community.
- We acknowledge the labor that BIPOC leaders in our community continue to shoulder in these efforts.
- We call on white community members to take the lead on dismantling white supremacy
- We believe that equity begins with empathy and humanity. By working through a lens of justice, using a language of love, we can rebuild a culturally inclusive and equitable community.

FRAMINGHAM TOGETHER: UNITING IN SOLIDARITY AND COMMUNITY



THE PLYMOUTH CHURCH IN FRAMINGHAM

Background Statement

Racism is the opposite of what God intends for humanity. It is the rejection of the other, which is entirely contrary to the Word of God incarnate in Jesus Christ. Racism is a lie about our fellow human beings, for it says that some are less than others.

Racism and racial injustice have persisted throughout our society for centuries, often despite our very words and intentions to the contrary. It will require concerted effort, education, wisdom, love, humility, and commitment to overcome racism. To attain the Beloved Community, we all must aspire to advancing the Racial Justice implicit in the Christian faith.

Our Intent

- Participate in a collective of community partners working to understand and apply this understanding to eradicate racism, bigotry, and all forms of hate against Black, Indigenous and all People of Color (BIPOC) in Framingham and beyond
- Affirm the Black Lives Matter initiative
- Utilize and collaborate with community partners

Our Institutional Commitments

- Mandate ongoing anti-racist training for our staff, governing board, and leadership team
- Work to develop a comprehensive understanding of the various layers of racism (internalized, interpersonal, institutional, and structural).



THE PLYMOUTH CHURCH IN FRAMINGHAM

- Identify a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) consultant to provide part-time support and training.
- Provide education and support to our congregation and invite community residents of all ages to join us in creating an anti-racist world.
- Establish safe and supportive places within our organizations through the use of affinity groups.
- Establish clear and measurable Diversity, Equity and Inclusion goals that are aligned and embedded within our church's strategic plan, including a specific commitment to diversify our leadership.

Creation Care and Justice

We aim to answer the call to be better stewards of God's creation. We are working to be the greenest church we can be, through education, advocacy, and service. We have made significant building improvements to decrease our carbon footprint. Our mission is to be caretakers of God's amazing Creation through conservation, education, and advocacy. We aim to embrace all of Creation as God's beloved, be a network of grace as we learn together to deepen our stewardship, support one another as we move outside our comfort zones and into advocacy.

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Doing this work during a pandemic

Rest in the Storm, Kirk Byron Jones

“A Survival Guide for Leaders,” by Ronald Heifetz & Marty Linsky, *Harvard Business Review*

a Google document with active links will be provided.

God, you don't need my praise,
but I need the humility that comes from praising you.
You don't need my thanks,
but I need the gratitude that comes from thanking you.
You don't need my petitions,
but I need to know my petitions,
I need to be reminded that our needs are all known to you.

Glenn Pruszinski

