

Trinity Episcopal Church, Hartford
Trinity Community for Racial Justice
Findings in response to ECCT 2020 Convention Resolution 7
January 29, 2023

O Peace of God, settle over me and within me
so that I cannot tell mine from thine
and thine from mine."

— Howard Thurman, [Sermons on the Parables](#)

Resolution 7 requires that churches in ECCT “take steps to discover and document historic complicity in racism in their parish and communities”.

The Trinity Community for Racial Justice began work in the spring of 2021 on our response to the requirement of Resolution 7 which was passed during the ECCT Convention in 2020. This report is not meant to be a new history of the founding of Trinity Church, but instead a widening and opening of our understanding of our history in relation to our complicity with racism and white supremacy present in Hartford and the church during its 164 years. The language quoted in the primary source materials of the time to describe Black people was not updated, specifically in the Hartford Courant articles, serving as a reminder of the language of white supremacy of that time.

We remember the indigenous peoples who lived on the land preceding our founding and were displaced and decimated by early white settlement in Connecticut. They included but were not limited to the people known as Pequots, Podunk’s, and Tunxis in the areas closest to the Connecticut River in what is now Hartford.

We focused our research on three eras beginning with our founding in 1859 on the eve of the Civil War, and our findings confirmed that the history of our parish aligned with the larger history of complicity with racism and white supremacy in 19th and 20th century Connecticut. None of this was surprising, but it challenged notions that Hartford and New England were places without an enduring legacy of enslavement.

Hartford was a place of deeply rooted and persistent racism, whose economy was fully integrated with the economy of enslavement, despite our history of prominent local abolitionists and anti-slavery movements.

However, we also discovered important contradictions in Trinity Church's early history. Founded by a group of extremely wealthy and influential white men of Hartford, we learned that during the late 19th century, despite the racism and inequality that was daily life for Black people in Hartford Connecticut, Trinity Church was a place where some Black Episcopalians worshipped and were included as members of our church community, at least for a time. This provides us with an understanding of how we came to be the church we are today.

Era 1: Founding of Trinity in 1859 - Hartford Wealth and Complicity with Enslavement Before and after the Civil War.

A recent report by the Equal Justice Initiative called "The Transatlantic Slave Trade" helped us understand the extent to which the economies of the slave trade influenced and built the economies of large cities such as Hartford. It is this economy and the social conditions it produced which made the founding of Trinity Church in 1859 possible. Wealthy Connecticut merchants manufactured and sold their goods to Caribbean and southern plantation owners as part of the global trade that sustained the enslavement of people and generated enormous profits for each of its participants.

As the report notes, "Even after some called for abolition of the Transatlantic Slave Trade and steps were taken toward "gradual emancipation", white New Englanders remained committed to the system of slavery that sustained their local economies". Enslavement remained legal in Connecticut until the decade just prior to our church's founding.

Several of our founders were presidents or directors of Hartford insurance companies at the time of our founding, and the wealth to start the church came in large part from the insurance industry. However, we could find no direct ties between their companies and

the insurance of enslaved persons (published research ties this practice to the companies that later became Aetna and NY Life as well as insurance companies based in the Carolinas). Nevertheless, the wealthy of Hartford “reaped the profits of slavery’s corollary commercial transactions in banking, shipping and insurance” as Kathleen Harris writes. Indeed, prior to the abolition of slavery in Connecticut in 1848:

“All the principal families of Norwich, Hartford, and New Haven owned one or two enslaved Africans.” (African American Connecticut Explored)

Our church founders’ wealth and influence came from an economy and society built on the back of enslaved persons and was inseparable from that pervasive economic and human exploitation.

Senator James Dixon, one of the most prominent of our founders, was an important national figure whose former home is located on the premises of today’s Aetna headquarters. Dixon was also a leader in the Hartford insurance industry. A key confidant of Abraham Lincoln, Dixon was elected as a Republican to the U.S. Senate in 1856, serving until 1869, making him a US Senator when Trinity Church was founded. He was a strong opponent of slavery and argued in the Senate for the prohibition of slavery in any territory acquired in the Mexican American War. In addition to being anti-slavery, however, Dixon was in favor of colonization of freed Black men and women, and made speeches that were pro-colonization.

”About 1850 Dixon may have played with an impractical plan to solve the slavery problem. He considered a proposal of Commodore Joel Abbott USN for an expedition to open American trade with the African interior through a colony of free blacks”. (Nelson Burr’s US Senator Dixon, 1814-1873 Episcopalian Anti-Slavery Statesman, Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church, Vol 50).

This colonization movement was viewed by some whites as a practical and humane solution for freed persons, but it indicates the unwillingness of white northerners to grant freed men and women of color equal rights in their own society. There was no similar plan to re-colonize freed white indentured servants, for example. In *African American Connecticut Explored*, Katherine Harris writes:

“African Americans viewed colonization as a means of defrauding them of the rights of citizenship and a way of tightening the grip of slavery. For Southern pro-slavery supporters, colonization was a means to strengthen slavery by removing free African Americans who, they argued, made enslaved persons restless. Meanwhile, Northern pro-colonizationists supported colonization because they feared the activism of free African Americans and their insistence on full citizenship rights”.

For an analysis of Lincoln and the reasons behind the colonization movement, please see “Abraham Lincoln and the Politics of Black Colonization” by Michael Vorenberg, University of Michigan. The text can be found at: <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/j/jala/2629860.0014.204/--abraham-lincoln-and-the-politics-of-black-colonization?rgn=main;view=fulltext>

An example of the extent to which the web of the slave economy was tied to the wealth of Hartford families and our founders is illustrated by the case of Reverend Francis Goodwin, an early rector of Trinity from 1865-1871. The Goodwins were among the wealthiest and most influential families in New England, and they gave substantial funds to Episcopal church projects in Connecticut, including the founding of Grace Church in the Parkville section of Hartford as well as to Hartford public parks. Trinity's Goodwin Hall is named in honor of a family member. The Goodwin fortune came in part from direct ties to the Morgans of Hartford, through Rev. Francis Goodwin's mother, Lucy Morgan. Morgan Bank owned branches in Louisiana in the mid

nineteenth century that secured loans with plantation land and enslaved persons as collateral. Rev. Goodwin's wife, Mary Alsop Jackson, came from the Drayton/Fenwick families of South Carolina, who were plantation owners. However, as we will learn, Reverend Goodwin's views on which people were part of the family of Trinity is an example of the complexity of racism in our church's history.

Era 2: Reconstruction to WWI - Segregation in Hartford - Trinity Episcopal Church's Complex Story

Post Civil War Hartford was a prosperous but highly segregated city. Black churches created the social centers of the city for their congregations. For example, although Hartford Public Schools admitted Black students, parents felt their children were safer and less likely to be harassed at one of the city's African American church schools. Christopher Collier writes of this struggle - In Search of an Education, Seventeenth to Nineteenth Centuries (African American Connecticut Explored):

“Segregated public schools nevertheless continued to function in Connecticut for eight years after they had been declared illegal [in 1864] by the General Assembly.”

Amid the climate of Jim Crow segregation found in houses of worship, housing and education in Hartford in the 19th century, we found an important exception within Trinity Church parish. One of our rectors during this period was particularly responsible for spreading the idea in the city of Hartford that there should be no segregation in worship.

Rev. Ernest DeFremery Miel, (Rector from 1895-1925) schooled in the Social Gospel from his training in NYC, had a profound impact on the worshipping community of Trinity Church and greater Hartford.

“Miel comes from a curacy in NYC under Rev William Rainsford from St. George's Church which resulted in Miel's focus on the church's social mission”. (Burr's The History of Trinity Episcopal Church)

Articles from the archives of the Hartford Courant provide important perspective on the work of Rev. Dr. Miel to promote racial understanding during the time of Jim Crow segregation in Connecticut:

“All Races Attend Open Air Meeting”, Hartford Courant July 4, 1904. The article describes the first meeting of a summer series at Riverside Park, organized by the Brothers of the 1st Baptist Church, at which Miel was the speaker. The article states:

“The playing [of the cornet] brings people of all stations and races and colors from all the four corners of the park.”

On July 11, 1904, the Hartford Courant relates another occasion where Rev Miel played an important role, and provides details about Episcopal people of color in the city’s churches:

“At the Episcopal convention held at New Haven last month, Rev. E. deF. Miel of this city recommended the extension of the work of the church among the colored people..... There are about fifty colored people who are members of different Episcopal churches in the city including St. John’s, St. Thomas’s, Christ Church and Trinity Church.....”

In 1905 St. Monica’s Church is founded in Hartford. We learned that Rev. Miel was against segregated worship, calling it “unchristian segregation”. Trinity may have contributed to the funds to build St. Monicas, but substantial funds came from other African American churches in Connecticut such as St. Lukes New Haven. Lucy Roberts, an African American laundress, donated her life savings of \$5000 to found St. Lukes, which went on to largely fund the founding of St. Monicas. (Stacey Close, pg 189 of African American Connecticut Explored)

It is in this historical context that we learn more about specific people of color who were members of Trinity Hartford. Two of these individuals were honored along with others in a photographic

memorial (found in our kitchen hallway) of Trinity Missioners. We refer to the legends of the final two photos:

Rev. Robert Josiah Johnson, Baptized in 1886 and Confirmed in Trinity Church. Became a priest in 1920 and served on a mission to Durham North Carolina.

A search in our parish archives of baptisms from 1886 performed by Rev Stores Ozias Seymour lists Robert and his sisters and mother as baptized on May 23, 1886. His parents were Robert and Madeline Johnson, and Robert Johnson presented his wife and children Libertha, Louisa, Daisy, Eleanora and Robert all for baptism that day. As the memorial notes, Robert Josiah, the youngest of the group, goes onto become an episcopal priest, ordained in 1910 in Durham, N.C. Our church register notes that their baptism was sponsored by the Rev. Francis Goodwin (retired).

Miss Frances Marion Shaw was baptized in 1889 in Trinity Church, attended Hartford Public Schools and went on mission service for Trinity.

We located Frances Marion Shaw in our parish archives as well. Although we could not find her date of baptism in the record, we found her in a large group of confirmands recorded in the book by Rev. Miel on April 3, 1904. Her mission service to Tryon, N.C. would have been a challenging undertaking for a woman of color in the 1890's. Further research into these individuals and other families could yield more information about the extent to which Trinity welcomed non white worshipers during this time of Jim Crow segregation in Hartford. There is no recording of race in our parish register at this or any other time. It is important to note that these people remained part of the parish of Trinity after their baptisms and confirmations.

In 1906 Trinity Church School had 38 teachers and 300 students. As recorded by Nelson Burr in The History of Trinity Episcopal Church,

“The parish strove to equal the standards of the secular schools...the school missionary league, met in Advent and Lent

to make up mite boxes, chiefly for Indian and Negro missions” (Burr pg 19).

We conclude that Black students were unlikely welcome to attend the Trinity church school during this time period, but this would require detailed Census analysis to prove conclusively.

“During WWI, as black migration out of the south to northern industrial cities increased, Hartford’s African American population rose from 1500-4000”. There was “ a groundswell of pressure to set up separate schools for black immigrants - but not white ones, of which there were tens of thousands in the city”. (C. Collier, African American Connecticut Explored).

After WWI and continuing through the Depression and WWII, we read occasional racist language in the Trinity Parish Records, (which was the Trinity annual rectors and wardens report) such as disparaging remarks about Mexico and Mexicans.

We also see the economic and social pressures (classism) of the time reflected in the letters of the Rector and Warden of Trinity Church:

1932 Rectors Report: (Cunningham) “We are doing our duty as a neighborhood church...strangely enough there are those who feel the results are 'too democratic' for safety. We need to realize that the Church must serve all classes of people”.

1932 Jr. Warden’s report: “Our population in this neighborhood is no longer the well-to-do family... but is a somewhat transient population which necessarily has little of that old inherent loyalty to Trinity built up, it presents a need of Church fellowship which is something of a challenge to us”.

Era 3: Post War Period and the Fight for Civil Rights at Trinity

By the end of WWII and the beginning of the civil rights era, Black Americans made up about 6.5% of the total population of Connecticut. The city of Hartford's non white population grew steadily in the pre and post war period as farming, manufacturers and insurance companies attracted workers to the state. New waves of immigration from the Caribbean in the late 1940's through the 1960's as well as farm labor from the American South also added to the growth of Hartford's BIPOC population. Well paying jobs were difficult to obtain for Black residents who served in WWII, including within the area's most prominent businesses. This lack of opportunity as well as equal education and housing became important causes for the NAACP, the Black Panthers and other civil rights groups local to Hartford. Their efforts eventually led to the expansion of college education for Blacks in Connecticut and through affirmative action, openings for non-whites in management within the insurance industries and defense manufacturers.

“As late as 1959 - five years after Brown vs Board - ... 37 percent of whites in Connecticut opposed integrated residential neighborhoods” (C. Collier ,African American Connecticut Explored)

Trinity has an extensive collection of photos of the parish and its members during this period including church worship, fellowship and Sunday School attendees. We do not see any people of color in the photos taken at Trinity during the pre and post WWII period, until photos from the early 1960's and 1970's start to show a parish that includes many people of color.

To illustrate the lingering pervasiveness of racism in this period, we can reflect on the story of one person who is memorialized in an oil portrait hung prominently in Goodwin Hall. Jessie Mallory was our sexton for many years (including during the Civil Rights era) and is fondly remembered by parishioner Nancy Crandall. Nancy “grew up” at Trinity and her parents were close friends of Jessie and his wife. “Jessie and his wife were beloved by many church members” she recounted, but some people were shocked when Trinity first hired a

Black sexton. She also remembers that not all church members were pleased that Jessie and his wife were an interracial couple. Mr. Mallory served Trinity for many years, and he became an integral part of the Trinity family. Despite the lingering racism of some individuals, Nancy also recalls that by the 1960's there were numerous Black professionals and their families who were warmly welcomed to worship at Trinity.

During this period, Trinity Church welcomed increasing numbers of BIPOC worshipers, and engaged in community civil rights causes. During the 1960's, the Hartford Community Renewal Team is founded, with six of its members coming from Trinity Church. Trinity began offering classroom space for study to students of Hartford H.S. and Trinity endorsed the work of the Episcopal Metropolitan Mission or EMM which had office space offered by TEC. Trinity Church incorporated the fight for justice, resolving in its 1974 annual meeting to "the nomination of public servants who would serve justice and remote the rights and dignity of all".

However, during the last half of the 20th and early part of the 21st century, despite our growing diversity of the congregation, Trinity's lay and clergy leadership remained largely white males. The first woman, Betsy Steven, was elected to the vestry in 1965 and the first non white (assistant) rector, Horace Johnson, was called several decades later.

We were asked at the beginning of this project by one of the members of our Community for Racial Justice the very important question of "so, then what?". In other words, what do we do with this information that we have uncovered? Telling our story is the first step. Acknowledging and talking about our history of white privilege and racial injustice along with all its contradictions is the next step, and we will start that conversation during the adult forum today. We should honor the pioneering people of color from our congregation who who have been identified in this study, and do further research on their personal histories. Importantly, the work for racial justice continues at Trinity Church today. We have been invigorated by the leadership of Rev. Dee Littlepage to faithfully continue the work begun by groups like the EMM. With the approval of the Vestry, Trinity recently decided to

become a part of the Greater Hartford Interfaith Action Alliance (GHIAA). It is by action that we can cement the work of justice based on the Gospel and our love of this community into our future path. In 2023 you will hear more about opportunities to join us as we partner with GHIAA. In the words of Steven Charleston, Choctaw Elder and Episcopal Bishop, “When we claim hope for our home-when we make it the guiding energy of our faith-we transition from being scattered individuals who wish things would get better into being active partners with the Spirit, reshaping the balance of life toward mercy, justice, and peace. Hope becomes our goal”. (Ladder to the Light). Trinity Episcopal Church Hartford today is a church where all are welcome, and is one of the most diverse parishes in the diocese. We hope that the telling of our full story can help us acknowledge the enduring legacy and history of racism in Hartford and our own complicity with racism while setting a path for ongoing conversation and action as we grow together spiritually to heal these wounds.

Regarding our sources and the people who made this study possible: the two previously published histories of Trinity by Nelson R. Burr and James Bradley provided key historical information for this report. Other sources included the archival records of Trinity Church; the critically important collection of essays about Black history in our state published in *African American Connecticut Explored* (Wesleyan University Press, edited by J. Normen, S. Close, K. Harris and W.F. Mitchell); online archives such as the Hartford Courant, genealogical resources as well as other scholarly papers published by Nelson R. Burr and *The Transatlantic Slave Trade from the Equal Justice Initiative*. Our work notes and bibliography are detailed in a database in the Trinity Church Realm system.

In closing, this work was made possible by Liz Kirpatrick, our church archivist, who introduced us to the treasure trove of documents in our own archives: by research performed by Ann Green on the genealogy of the Goodwin family: Enid Oberholtzer, who researched Trinity and the founding of St. Monica’s parish and by Linda MacGougan, who did a deep dive into the archives of the Hartford Courant and Rev. Dr. Miel and who first noticed the photos of the Trinity missionaries. Nancy

Crandall provided memories of Trinity parish from the 1950's to the 1980's. Invaluable guidance and perspective was provided by Walton Foster, and instruction from Greg Farr, ECCT archivist, along with advice from the ECCT history working group.