

TASK FORCE REPORT

Renew Report of the Ad Hoc Task Force Committee - May 3, 2006

(edited May 25, 2006)

Introduction

This report summarizes information gained from class meetings on Thursday, April 6, 2006, and describes the general plans for making EHS a more welcoming community.

During this school year there has been an unacceptable level of racial disharmony. Specific instances which brought things to a head included racial slurs written on a brick wall surrounding the oak tree in the sophomore courtyard. In addition, a noose appeared in the April Fool's edition of the student newspaper; as soon as it was distributed on Friday, March 31, faculty and parents, both white and those of color, understood the noose to represent the worst possible kind of racial insensitivity. This, added to the slur in the sophomore courtyard (and other incidents this school year), brought things to a head.

Some students stated that they did not understand why we adults are so concerned. In order to convey the concern, we conducted a special chapel service on Tuesday, April 4th, to explain the noose as a symbol of lynching as well as the characteristics of a Christian community living by the standard of agape, and how the two are mutually exclusive.

On Thursday, April 6th, we held meetings by grade and gave students the opportunity to ask questions, to make comments, and to sign up for a task force to address the problem. The first sections of this document report on those class meetings. The last section details the direction in which we are heading to improve the character and quality of Episcopal as an intentionally Christian school. The report is divided into four parts:

- A. Comments/suggestions from our class meetings
- B. The next step: a challenge to action
- C. Task force volunteers
- D. Action steps

A. Comments/suggestions

Consider a few of the comments and suggestions we gathered from all the class meetings and boxes. Just listen to the various perspectives your peers offered in their observations:

- We should have class meetings every month. An open forum to discuss serious and important issues can only benefit us all.
- We must start with ourselves, make a consistent effort to shatter stereotypes, break down racism, and control what we say. Think about how everything will be interpreted. Avoid making jokes at the expense of others. We can do this, we must control ourselves, and we'll beat the forces that we oppress each other with. The problem is people, and we are people, so we can overcome our differences, for it is our differences that make us similar because we all have them. "If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone." - Romans 12:18
- Certain students need to calm down and stop overreacting to every little thing.

- The Episcopal community is at a fork in the road and we need to decide to either be color-blind or actually respect and celebrate our differences.
- While I understand the school's need to do immediate damage control, it seems the school has only managed to polarize the campus. More and more blacks have been added to EHS over the years and I've never been aware of any friction, but now you have galvanized them, united them in a "cause", and racial tension is becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy.
- Most of us simply don't have the same experience as our elders, and therefore are not having the same reaction.
- The Holocaust speaker reminded us of those who died. It was important because she personalized the issue. We need to see our friends when we hear racial comments. Make it personal to you. This will make you deal passionately, not apathetically. Make it hurt.
- I think that there are also many other races that are stereotyped and misunderstood. I think that there should be mandatory cultural studies of black history and several other ethnicities. To me, ethnicity is beautiful.
- Police yourselves. Know when you are doing wrong. Just stop.
- Last year I went to a huge school. This school is small enough that we can solve this.
- I may not know what is offensive to specific races, but we need to try to understand why people are hurt even if we don't have the same perspective. We need to be more understanding of different cultures. We need to grow and learn from this and not be ignorant.
- Love thy neighbor as thyself. Take everything personally.

B. The next step: a challenge to action.

- 1. Statement of purpose**
- 2. Preliminary task force report formation**
- 3. *A response to the events and issues of recent weeks at EHS***

A community can measure the quality of its members' character formation by the level of diversity it enjoys. The capacity for productive and creative diversity is in direct proportion to the level of trust among community's members. Good character makes trust possible.

Diversity grows and matures in any environment in which respect is the norm and people are responsible for their behavior, truly caring about each other. Diversity cannot be imposed on a toxic environment; conversely, it's impossible to prevent diversity from flourishing in an environment which invites and supports it. We have lots of room to improve!

True diversity occurs by attraction; people will gravitate toward a community that articulates and lives by norms of genuine virtue, wholesome behavior, and civil discourse. Any community that enjoys these norms has learned to monitor itself and to hold each member accountable to clear standards.

Socially-constructed versions of diversity, imposed from outside or above a community's genuine life, have historically led to polarization and violence. We have had enough of polarization. Let us rise to the challenge of coming together by God's grace to get things right.

We must demand from ourselves, and expect from anyone who joins this community, the following:

1. **Commitment** to respectful behavior and conversation at all times and in all places of our common life.
2. **Will** to work on personal character formation along the lines of traditional virtues in all aspects of our shared life.
3. **Courage** to trust each other.
4. **Fortitude** to persevere in just discipline, forgiveness and hope in the face of the occasional shortcomings of both peers and leaders.

Let us unify in this, and take concrete steps to assure that the Episcopal High School community is unequivocally the place in which true virtue will grow deep and strong. Then, and only then, will we be able to call ourselves diverse.

C. Task force volunteers

Students

John Edward Balbona, 8
Chanel Bowden, 8
Kaye Green, 8
Robert Highsmith, 8
Jaime Revollo, 8
Jessica de la Torre, 9
Amanda Huynh, 9
Emily Lewis, 9
Anna Almand, 9
Leila Nabizadeh, 9
Jade Hill, 9
Chip Nealing, 9

Carlisle Goff, 10
Walter Ware, 10
Stewart Cox, 10
Nat Disston, 10
Gaige Flint, 10
Mike Jenness, 10
Peter Lebharr, 10
Chris Moses, 10
Janae Nelson
Trace Schilling, 10
Robert Squires, 10
Kenisha Cromity, 11
Brian Wagers, 11

Matt Garland, 11
Holden Link, 11
Caitlin McElroy, 11
Jonathan Bracken, 11
Terrell Campbell, 11
Orlando Evans, 11
Gabby Chavis, 11
Kate Gorman, 11
Joey Ziebelman, 11
Kristin Otterson, 11
Kimberly Oliver, 11
James Poindexter, 11

Faculty & staff

Pat Andrews
Mimi Bryant
Pat Crandall
Candy Edwards
Peggy Fox
Bert Harrell
Mary Hartley
Debbie Hodge
Christy Hodges

Bill Hoffman
Tracy Jester
Dana Martin
Aimee McCarthy
Annetta McCoy
Sis Van Cleve Miller
Heather Oulton
Marta Pauly

Amelia Palfy
Nancy Prendergast
Ryan Riggs
Gerri Robbins
Deanna Scheffer
Dee Shea
Taylor Smith
Margie Stevens
Steve Whitehead

Parents

Jim Bailey
Pat Blanchard
Mikee Brown
Valerie de la Torre

Alberto de la Torre
Carla Henson-Bowden
Connie Parsons

Derrick Smith
Selena Terrell
Lewis Venson
Felecia Wimbish

Students, you can still sign up! Give your name to your homeroom advisor, who will forward it to Father Bob.

D. Action steps

1. Learning about tolerance and diversity
2. Becoming a “transformed community”
3. Transforming the character of our community

What happens next?

Learning about tolerance and diversity. We have engaged Dr. Thomas Lickona (Lie-cone'-a) to begin helping all faculty, parents and students to learn how to respect each other and to be responsible members of our community.

Some have asked for definitions of tolerance and diversity. Quoting from Dr. Lickona in his article, “Making Sense Of Tolerance and Diversity,” (*Newsletter from The Center for the Fourth and Fifth R’s: Respect and Responsibility*, Winter 2002, Volume 8, Issue 2, previously emailed to all faculty and available at www.cortland.edu/character), here are some definitions:

- Tolerance as an ethical virtue does not require us to accept other people's beliefs or behaviors. Tolerance does require us to respect every person's human dignity and human rights, including freedom of conscience. Freedom of conscience, however, is not absolute.
- Diversity is learning to value and, when possible, directly experience the richness of human diversity found within other races, religions, countries, and cultures. Appreciating diversity means trying to find the best in all people, just as we want them to find the best in us.
- We obviously can't ask people to “appreciate” values and behaviors that violate their conscience. “Appreciating diversity” can complement, but should not replace, tolerance on the list of character education virtues, because some diversity is morally controversial. We need tolerance in order to address, with honesty and civility, that which divides us.

Becoming a “transformed community.” Episcopal High School has long valued the benefits of our ability to celebrate the richness a broad exposure to many cultures can bring to our community, through language studies, student exchange programs, and organizations like the International Club.

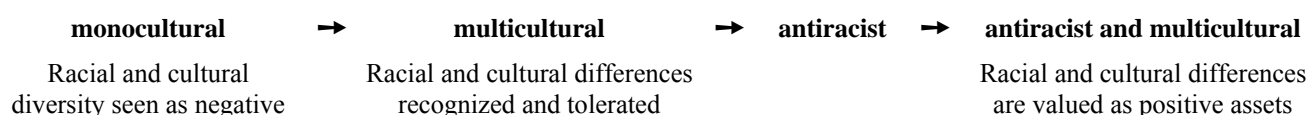
At the same time, we have come to appreciate the fact that in any environment, the dominant culture typically does not perceive any problem with race. “What’s the big deal?” is often heard from the dominant culture. “Race isn’t an issue. We’re color-blind around here.” For the dominant culture, race is not considered a “problem” because, by definition, race is not a problem for a dominant culture.

The following chart, “An Antiracist Transformation Continuum for Congregations and Religious Organizations”, plots our direction. Faculty and staff have been given this material, and asked to reflect on where they would place themselves on the continuum and where they would place Episcopal. We are hesitant to publish this chart, because it’s only one part of a curriculum under development by the Episcopal Church; this curriculum is called Seeing the Face of God in Each Other: A Manual for Antiracism Training and Action. At the same time, it’s important for students, parents, faculty and staff to know that there *is* a direction in which we are headed.

It take a lot of intentional work to bring our community from where we are to the point where we can begin to describe ourselves as a “transformed community,” because we in the dominant culture are attempting to examine issues encompassed not so much with wrongly-held views as with blind spots.

An Antiracist Transformation Continuum for Congregations and Religious Organizations¹

	1. Exclusive	2. Passive (the Club)	3. Compliant (affirmative action)	4. Antiracist	5. Redefining	6. Transformed
Characteristics & practices	Supports the racist status quo and excludes people of color from policies, practices, and decision making at all levels	Maintains the privilege of those who have traditionally held power, with the exception of a very limited number of people of color with “acceptable” credentials.	Supports multiculturalism on a “symbolic” level, yet essentially reflects an assimilation format. Sees itself as antiracist and “inclusive,” but with little change in culture, policies, and decision making	Growth in understanding of white privilege and racism as a hindrance to multiracial community. Develops an intentional antiracist structure and strives for deeper understanding of and accountability to oppressed communities	Makes intentional choices to rebuild organizational life. Acknowledges: 1. that racism is inherent in all institutions; 2 that racism is historic and current; 3 the need for a commitment to change; 4 the need to put mechanisms in place to facilitate change; and 5 the need for collective action.	Holds a future vision in which racism no longer limits human potential. Institutional life fully reflects shared power with diverse racial, cultural, and economic groups.
Actions	Denies the realities of oppression. May suggest “color-blindness” as a way of denying racism.	Is aware of oppression, yet does not act to stop these behaviors due to fear, ignorance, or other factors.	Is relatively unaware of ongoing patterns of privilege, paternalism, and control. Takes action to learn more about oppression, and participates in antiracism programming.	Recognizes that unlearning racism is an ongoing and lifelong vocation. Desires to move beyond educational approaches to multiracial dialogue, yet structures continue to maintain white culture and white privilege.	Audit and restructure all aspects of community life for full participation of people of color. Form allies’ groups and join coalitions to speak out against oppression.	Full participation in decisions that shape institutional structures, mission, and ministry.
Social justice	No social justice initiatives, but may give money to charity.	Token social justice programs in the spirit of “noblesse oblige.”	Focus on social justice projects and some advocacy. A fairly common response is to invite an “ethnic” congregation to share the facility.	Participation in initiatives that address and seek to change the power imbalances between whites and people of color.	A collaborative approach to social justice: stand with oppressed as allies and learn how to be allies.	Porous boundary between the organization and wider community
Change strategies	Begin by learning to appreciate diversity and raise awareness of oppression issues	Moving to the next stage requires that groups develop the skills to understand oppression and the need for collective action	Basically a conflict-avoidance stage. Racism can remain unaddressed unless privilege is addressed. A desire for inclusion may support the recruitment of people of color, but it remains symbolic without other structural changes.	Generally, with specialized assistance, begins to audit and dismantle oppressive practice, yet remains within the norms of the dominant worldview.	Involved in making structural changes through sharing power and decision making.	Works to form alliances and networks in support of efforts to eliminate social oppression and to educate others to do the same.



¹Adapted by Sheryl Kujawa-Holbrook 2003, from the work of Avazian, Branding, Griffin, Hardiman, Harro, Holvino, Jackson and James.

Transforming the character of our community. Students in Bible 7 & 8 classes working on ethics projects during the last two years have stated that in addition to racial incidents, other problems exist in our Episcopal High School community, such as lying, cheating, stealing, gossiping, using God’s name in vain, swearing, cursing, name-calling, fighting, bullying, and hazing...not to mention inappropriate touching, dress-code violations and generally disturbing the peace. This kind of unacceptable behavior is indicative of a community where there is a lack of respect for other people and a lack of responsibility by members of our community to correct when needed and to lead by example.

We are going to do the hard work necessary to become a transformed community as defined by the previous chart. In addition, we are committed to the hard work necessary to improve the very heart, the very character of our school community.

Here’s what’s planned for the next four months; details may change, but dates will not. Dr. Lickona will fly in at 5:00 p.m. on the 23rd , and fly out at 5:00 p.m. on the 24th .

May 23, 2006, 7:30 p.m.	Dr. Lickona with EHS parents.
May 24, 2006, 8:30-11:30 a.m.	Dr Lickona with faculty and staff
May 24, 2006, noon-2:30 p.m.	Dr. Lickona with adult task force members
June 26-29	Some adult task force members attend training at SUNY
August 17-18	Senate is prepared for its part in next year’s action

Closing thought

Agape: a decision to live in a covenant relationship with others such that you leave them better off than when you found them. Our founders’ hope was that Christian ethic of agape would feed the heart and character of this community. We pray that the efforts we are undertaking will be fruitful. We pray that if we are accused of being a Christian school, there will be sufficient evidence to convict us of the charge.

Respectfully submitted,
 Mr. Bert Harrell
 Ms. Christy Hodges
 Ms. Dana Martin, PhD
 Father Bob Marsh