

# Racial Justice Charter



DIOCESE OF  
**YORK**

## Foreword from the Archbishop of York

My desire is for us to be a Christ-like and Jesus-shaped community that reflects every race and heritage in the Diocese of York: in our mission, our congregations and our leadership.

This charter is the first step in discerning who we are called to be in Christ, a people united in our shared humanity, as people created in the image of God, and our shared faith and mission as disciples of Christ. Jesus calls us to exercise a profound hospitality and generosity in our discipleship. Jesus also calls us to challenge unjust structures, by speaking out against injustice and inequality. The prophetic vision of Scripture is one where silence about exclusion is exposed, where prejudice is challenged, where truth confronts ignorance, and where we willingly and eagerly welcome all people as our neighbours.

My prayer is that we, as individuals, as worshipping communities, as a diocese, embody this in all that we do and say, so that the Diocese of York may be a place that truly reflects the Kingdom of God.

I commend the work which begins with this Charter, in leading the diocese to a more just, welcoming and hospitable place and thank the York Racial Justice Task Group for their work.

*Stephen Cottrell, Archbishop of York*

## Introduction

“There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female;  
for you are all one in Christ Jesus”

Galatians 3:28

This charter is part of the response by the Diocese of York to movements for racial justice in wider society such as Black Lives Matter and to the Church of England’s strategy to be “Growing more Diverse” as a church. The charter outlines how the Diocese of York intends to put into practice recommendations from the report *From Lament to Action* published in 2021. That report is a powerful call for action, for culture change, and for inclusion in the face of shameful accounts of racism, injustice, and exclusion. We, as a Diocese, acknowledge that the report calls for a radical revolution both of the human heart and of the structures of church and society to eradicate the sin of racism. We are committed to working across the Diocese to respond positively to the challenges that the report sets.

In an address to the General Synod of the Church of England in November 2021, Lord Boateng described racism as a “gaping wound in the body of Christ.” The work of healing that wound motivates this charter. It calls for a move from generic and vague commitments around racial justice to specific actions and changes of behaviour which are intentionally anti-racist. It describes a vision where the church is a sign of the inclusive and multi-ethnic kingdom of God and a body which witnesses against the structural, communal and personal sin which lies at the heart of racism.

Theologically, this work is rooted in our common baptism as Christians which confers on us an identity as those who belong to Christ and to one another. Baptism is a public action which reminds us of the fundamental dignity of every human being and of our unity in Christ as part of the body of Christ. In the promises that we make in baptism about resisting sin, we set our faces against racism and face towards a belonging to the body of Christ throughout the world.

## A word about language

The Charter intentionally moves away from the use of BAME (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic) to describe members of “non-white” communities and replaces it with GMH (Global Majority Heritage) which is the phrase commended by those communities to more accurately describe themselves.

## Living Christ's Story

This work of racial justice, of becoming anti-racist, is woven into all four headline statements of our common Diocesan vision of Living Christ's Story.

**Becoming more Christlike:** Being a baptised disciple of Christ is about being called into the community of Christ, one where we, through God's grace, become more Christlike. In keeping company with Christ and with those who he kept company with, we become more fully human. Through the fruit of the Spirit produced in our lives we become more like Christ. What marks out a disciple and indeed what marks out a church of disciples is that fruit which is produced as we love Christ and one another. In practical ways, it is demonstrated as we live out the marks of discipleship or the Marks of Mission. In our telling, teaching, tending, transforming and treasuring, we are living out Christ's story. Anti-racism practices don't simply touch the transforming of unjust structures, they lie at the heart of the good news we tell about the ways in which Christ breaks down barriers between people and offers a vision for an inclusive community of followers. Anti-racism practices don't just stop at tending and caring for those who continue to disproportionately bear the effects of the climate emergency but equally seeks to ensure that in our teaching of the faith, we listen together to the stories and voices of those Global Majority Heritage (GMH) Christians from around the world, from whom we all have so much to learn.

**Growing churches of missionary disciples:** George Floyd's murder in Minneapolis in 2020 revealed the extent to which racism is embedded in the structures of society. In England, the murders of Bibaa Henry and Nicole Smallman in 2020 and the subsequent police investigation shone a similar light into how racism pervades the structures of society. The Black Lives Matter movement, born before those events but galvanised through them, challenges humanity to see the deep interconnections which bind us together. Or in other words spoken by Sonita Alleyne from Cambridge, "if one man (George Floyd) cannot breathe, then we all cannot breathe". Or expressed in the words of Jesus: "Whatever you do for the least of these my brothers and sisters, you do for me". Discipleship is not the work of an individual, it is communal. We are called to be a body, a diverse community of the new humanity which witnesses to what God does in our midst and what God is doing to create one humanity out of two.

So growing churches of missionary disciples will involve churches engaging as communities with the five marks of mission. But more than this, it involves a vision of the church as a body where we acknowledge that we are incomplete without others, incomplete and diminished without the gifts of those who we have overlooked or not welcomed either in the past or the present. This is about participation and inclusion, about how we welcome and how we ensure that our churches are safe places. It is about seeing the ways in which we have failed to listen and to act. It is also about very practical issues. It is about the language we use in our liturgy and about what voices and traditions we use to teach our lay and ordained ministers. It is about the missional impact of anti-racist practice on a generation of people who are alert to issues of injustice and who can spot the effects of a dominant culture of whiteness.

**Reaching those we currently don't:** As part of that building a hospitable community, of being a community of disciples on a mission with Jesus, we follow Jesus into those places and amongst those people who he keeps company with. Reaching those we currently don't is both a missionary imperative but also an act of profound inclusion and rehabilitation of past exclusions and wrongs. We reach out both as an act of God's love and yet in profound sorrow for the ways in which our past and present activity and attitudes perpetuate a church only for some or a gospel only for a few. Anti-racism work challenges us to be engaged with those who are different from us, to be a church better representative of the diverse communities of the Diocese and indeed of the world with which we are so interlinked. This will have implications for our mission work. It also has implications for the composition of those called to lay and ordained ministry in the Diocese that they might better represent the diverse communities of the diocese.

**Transforming our finances and structures:** Black Lives Matter protests instigated a national conversation on Black History and the nature and effect of the country's historic slave trading past on contemporary racialized attitudes and systemic racism. Monument and plaques in our churches are physical symbols of that history and are one area which will need research and reflection as to how best we tell that history. This is not about either revising history or being blind to the implications of the past.

Participation in the structures of governance within the Diocese of those from GMH communities is another area where "Growing more diverse" makes connections to Living Christ's Story.

As a Diocese, we stand firmly alongside the many people whose bravery in telling their story has shone a light into past and present complicity with prejudice. We are committed to ensuring the missional work of transforming unjust structures of society will lie at the heart of its ongoing work.

This work will need courageous action and engagement with a culture change which starts with each of us as we hold up a mirror to all our actions which can help us see what we cannot otherwise see. Such culture change is not about accommodation but about a deep process of rooting out and dis-embedding racism from the very fabric of society.

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