

Share any positive experiences or key learnings that you could share with our community.

What did you find most valuable or engaging about the experience?

I was in spaces that were very significant to African Americans throughout our presbytery districts and hearing directly from people who had made a life in those spaces – or whose ancestors had – despite obstacles, threats and acts of violence, and the denial of full personhood.

What positive outcomes or benefits did you receive from participating in the one-day excursions?

Because the trips gave me access to personal stories, exhibits, period photographs, legal and historical documents, conversations, historical sites, video links, and book recommendations, I have a better understanding of “structural racism” and “systemic poverty” and have more tools and colleagues in the presbytery who also want to work towards the Matthew 25 vision of the PCUSA to “dismantle structural racism” and “eradicate systemic poverty.”

How to use the experience and move toward action:

How do I translate these experiences back home/in my church community?

Back in my home church community, I have delved into historical writings about my church to better understand its own history and what attitudes leaders carried regarding the enslavement of people. I want to know how they responded to emancipation and when/if they participated in the movement for civil rights for all. I intend to ask questions of long-time church members. I think about the location of the church and the racial make-up of the nearby community. I notice that some of the art and photos on the church walls are not welcoming to persons of all races and I mention this to the Church Visioning Task Force. I participate in community worship services and studies with other churches when I can to build relationships across cultures and denominations and keep enlarging my community of people working to dismantle racism in the Church and community. I submit blurbs for the bulletin and newsletter with Presbytery and community offerings that can expand our thinking.

How will this trip impact me moving forward (takeaway)?

The Spirit of God is stirred up within me when I am looking for the light of Christ in every person I meet. I will continue taking advantage of learning opportunities and conversations that reveal to me where racism is lurking in me and in the community and structures in which I live and participate.

What can we do at [church community] to continue our learning/share our experience?

We can explore our church histories and decide what we want written about our church during our season of involvement. If we want our church’s histories to include actions to “dismantle structural racism” and “eradicate systemic poverty,” we can discern with others actions we will take to write that story.

Goal for Self (internal work)

Keep joining learning opportunities, reading, watching videos and movies with the goal of gaining more knowledge and tools to dismantle structural racism and eradicate systemic poverty

Goal with Others (working together)

Stay in conversation with others on these topics and bring up these themes in more detail in the settings in which I find myself

Goal for Systems (learning about or working to change)

Utilize new words if old words are fraught with negative connotations, develop new ways to convene or organize if people are being left out because of race or resource

- Deanie Strength