

Emmanuel Episcopal Church

Anti-Racism Project and Outreach for Racial Equity

January 2021

2020 will be remembered as the year for heightened awareness of racial inequity in Baltimore and the US. At Emmanuel Church, that heightened awareness started some years ago when many of us attended the training sponsored by the Episcopal Diocese's Social Justice and Reconciliation Commission. That led to the formation at Emmanuel of the Anti-Racism Project (ARP).

Our first steps:

- Discussions, readings, and guests – over 50 meetings to date.
- Participation in the Diocese's "Trail of Souls" – a continuing journey toward the truth of our racial history and struggle for racial reconciliation.

Discussion leads to action:

Following these initial efforts, the ARP participants asked ourselves how to translate new understandings and good intentions into action. The group decided to form a meaningful relationship with two nonprofit organizations in Baltimore that work at the intersection of providing direct services and advocacy to bring about systematic change toward racial equity. Here are our partners:

Helping Oppressed People Excel (HOPE). HOPE is an organization that lives up to its name, bringing hope to individuals who need it most.

HOPE is a descendant of the Public Safety Compact (PSC) which provided services for the early release of qualified prisoners who would need assistance on the outside. The program was highly successful. Only 9% of PSC graduates released from prison in 2011 and 6.5% of the graduates released 2012 returned to prison after three years, a remarkable number when compared to the State's reported recidivism rate of 40.5%. Persons released from prison met regularly at Emmanuel Church for case management, peer support, dinners, and bus passes. Antoin Quarles, a graduate of the program, was hired by the PSC as a leader. In time he was also hired by Emmanuel as a part-time sexton. Unfortunately, in 2015 Governor Hogan terminated the program despite its success. Antoin and a few others refused to let the program die. He founded HOPE to provide continued peer support and connection to resources for fellow returning citizens. They continued to meet at Emmanuel and receive financial support from the church.

ARP has partnered with HOPE since early 2018 to accomplish the following:

- Two Emmanuelites serve on a five-person Board of Advisors and have helped with grant writing. HOPE has received funding from three major Baltimore foundations, allowing it to increase its budget substantially and increase the support it provides to those returning to the community from prison.
- Emmanuelites have:
 - Helped expunge criminal records to facilitate job searches.
 - Provided short-term job to HOPE member.
 - Packed back-to-school backpacks for distribution to school children.
 - Warmly welcomed HOPE participants at the parish's special gatherings and dinners.
 - Provided many boxes of in-demand face masks for distribution in West Baltimore.
- Until COVID-19, Emmanuel Church continued to donate meeting and kitchen space for monthly meetings.
- Emmanuel continues to receive contributions to benefit HOPE and provide back office financial management.

HOPE not only provides a support network for people coming out of prison, it also meets with political leaders and criminal justice advocates to fashion a fairer and more equitable criminal justice system.

HOPE has an outstanding record of success. They have mentored 94 people; 36 have found stable employment. There have been only two arrests, both of which were technical not new criminal charges. Compare that to the estimated Baltimore City recidivism rate of approximately 73%! The ARP is committed to continue its support of this worthwhile group. The ongoing support provided prisoners returning to Baltimore continues even while health concerns preclude in-person monthly meetings. With church services being conducted remotely for now, Antoin has more time to serve as our ambassador to the wider community where he and other members of HOPE get out the vote, partner with housing advocates, collaborate with the police to distribute food and face masks, and continue to help ex-prisoners find jobs and housing.

No Boundaries Coalition (NBC). [NBC](#) is a resident-led advocacy organization building a unified and empowered Central West Baltimore across boundaries of race, class, and neighborhoods. The Coalition mobilizes neighborhoods in zip code 21217 to address racial and economic inequality and improve the quality of life in West Baltimore. It has become the largest grassroots organization in West Baltimore with over 200 individual members. They advocate for gun violence prevention, closing the digital divide, more opportunities for young people, and increased voter turnout. Additionally, they sponsor the West Baltimore Buying Club to provide direct delivery of fresh produce, home goods, and toiletries. They have a budget of \$725,000 and a small but effective professional staff.

After interviewing a number of local social justice organizations, ARP decided to partner with NBC. Our commitment was not to try to tell them how to address issues in West Baltimore, but to help them do what they have focused on as essential community initiatives.

Since ARP has partnered with NBC we have:

- Attended their annual galas in large numbers.
- Donated to the silent auction at the galas.
- Interviewed youth leaders.
- Sold fresh produce at their stall in the Avenue Market at 1700 Pennsylvania Avenue. Their stall in the public market is “Fresh at the Avenue.”
- Helped clean up vacant lots.
- Helped set up the annual block party.
- Provided counsel to new Executive Director about working with her Board of Directors.
- Provided counsel about IRS regulations for receipts for the purchase of gala tickets.
- Provided counsel about how to present financial results in their annual report.
- Helped with “Get Out the Vote” – phone bank and driving voters to the polls.
- Participated in door-to-door canvassing resulting in significant increase in voter turnout.
- Regularly attended their monthly meetings.
- Served on the gala workgroup for both in-person and virtual galas.

Next steps:

The ARP will reaffirm our partnership with HOPE and NBC and again ask them: How can we help you? Are there specific ways you think members of Emmanuel Church can be helpful to your mission? We plan to publish what they tell us, and many of us will continue to take direct action in the struggle for racial equity. We welcome and encourage others to join us as we pursue this important work.