



Shir Tikvah  
שִׁיר תִּקְוָה

## *Racial Justice Task Force Report*

September 18, 2019

The Shir Tikvah Board of Trustees formed the Racial Justice Task Force in 2016 with a mandate to infuse on-going understanding and practice of racial justice in all aspects of Shir Tikvah.

**Racial Equity**

**Racial Inclusivity**

**Racial Justice**

These are the goals of the task force. How do we get there?

- Assess the systems and attitudes at Shir Tikvah and measure progress toward these goals
- Add combatting racism to the education curriculum for adults and youth
- Change programs, worship modes, systems, and structures to be more inclusive & equitable
- Reach out to organizations of People of Color in our community
- Learn from other Jewish leaders and groups who have done this work

Our progress to date;

**Assessments** – The task force conducted structured interviews with members of Shir Tikvah’s board, each committee, clergy and staff in 2017 and found that racial justice had not informed the work of the committees in the past, that there was a strong willingness on the part of the congregation to undertake the work of identifying racism at Shir Tikvah and undoing racism as a community and an institution.

**Education Curriculum** – task force members meet frequently with Forrest Yesnes, our Director of Youth Education and Programming, Rabbi Rappaport and religious school faculty to develop an overarching approach to teaching a racial justice curriculum as well as creating an inclusive and welcoming atmosphere in the classrooms.



Among our congregation's students, 8-18% have been Jews of Color over the course of the past few years; we also have adult members of our community who are Jews of Color and white congregants with children or grandchildren of Color.

The task force conducted a series of trainings with the religious school faculty in early 2019 about white privilege and how better to serve our students. The task force will also lead adult education course in November focused on racial justice with the working title: **American Jewry's Response to Slavery and Racism and Strategies for Combatting Racism.**

**Commitment to Racial Justice and Outreach:** On March 11, 2019 the Shir Tikvah Board adopted a statement confirming the Congregation's commitment to racial justice. It is now posted on Shir Tikvah's website at: <http://shirtikvah.net/Racial-Justice/>. The task force is working with the clergy and staff to broadcast this statement in our membership and other outreach materials.

**Central Reform Congregation of St. Louis** – We use materials of this congregation as a resource. Our statement of Shir Tikvah's Commitment to Racial Justice was inspired, in part, by a similar statement of CRC. In addition, this year's Haggadah for the JCA Freedom Seder on April 14, at the suggestion of a task force member, incorporated a modern take on the four questions from a Haggadah prepared by CRC geared toward racial justice.

**Training and Education:** On Thursday June 13, 2019, Yavilah McCoy conducted a training for task force members. Yavillah's work was a foundation of the congregational assessment that the task force conducted in 2017. She is an African-American Orthodox Jew and the founder of Ayecha, a nonprofit organization providing educational resources for Jewish Diversity and advocacy for Jews of Color in the United States. She is a teacher, writer, editor, and diversity consultant.

And this Yom Kippur, between the conclusion of the morning service and before the start of the afternoon service, Tamar Ghidalia and other task force members will lead a study of Naaseh V'Nishmah: commitment to undoing racism as Jews at Shir Tikvah.



**Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday Weekend** – The task force added discussions about racial justice to the service activities of the weekend in 2018 and 2019. In 2018 & 2019, respectively, Jim Rubenstein and Dave Snyder inspired the volunteers at the synagogue on Sunday morning by sharing their personal experiences in racial justice work. A new event was added in 2019 on Saturday afternoon when a member of the task force led a study session analyzing Dr. King’s “I Have a Dream” speech as if it were a Talmudic text. In the spirit of Dr. King and the obligation of Jews for Tikkun Olam, repair of the world, plans are in the works to keep the conversation on combatting racism, in all its forms, as an ongoing theme for the congregation in anticipation of the 2020 MLK Day observance.

Respectfully submitted,

Tamar Ghidalia and Jim Rubenstein, task force co-chairs.