

# SHIR TIKVAH RACIAL JUSTICE TASK FORCE

## Annual Meeting Report to the Congregation June 14, 2020

Shir Tikvah is committed to practice and pursue racial equity, racial inclusivity, and racial justice, both within our congregation and in the greater community. We strive to identify racism and to undo racism as a community and an institution.

In the fall of 2016, the Shir Tikvah Board of Trustees formed a Racial Justice Task Force whose mandate was to infuse on-going understanding and practice of racial justice in all aspects of Shir Tikvah. This report covers our main activities since the last annual meeting on May 5, 2019.

### Black Visions Collective

Motivated by the tragic murder of George Floyd at the hands of the Minneapolis Police Department, we asked the Board to authorize the Task Force, on behalf of the congregation, to establish a relationship with Black Visions Collective, one of the Black-led organizations in our community that is focused on a long-term response to the murder of George Floyd. At its June 4, 2020 meeting the Board enthusiastically and unanimously expressed its support and authorized the Task Force, on behalf of the congregation, to establish a relationship with BLVC and further define what that relationship is. Jewish Community Action is also working with BLVC, and we plan to coordinate our efforts. At the Board's July meeting, the Task Force will further define the relationship and lead a conversation about the future of the Minneapolis Police Department and what it means to support BLVC.

### Congregational Assessment

As you are probably aware by now, the Task Force developed the survey to generate a detailed understanding of how we are doing as a congregational community in supporting our practice and pursuit of racial justice. All members from the 7<sup>th</sup> grade and older were invited to participate. The campaign for participation was halted by the novel coronavirus pandemic and the death of George Floyd. Even so, administrator Bori Csillag, who was also instrumental in designing the assessment, has done a great job keeping track of the responses. She reports that so far, as of June 11, 2020, 144 people have logged on to the Assessment and 100 have completed it. For those who have completed the assessment, thank you. For those who have not, there is still time to respond. Here is the link: [Racial Justice Assessment](#). Please do your best to complete it before June 19.

## Adult Education

One aspect of the work of the Task Force is to provide ongoing education on issues of racial justice. Last November, in recognition of the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the beginning of slavery in the United States, the Task Force launched a pilot adult education program entitled **American Jewry's Response to Slavery and Racism and Strategies for Combatting Racism**. Over three sessions the Task Force faculty of Tamar Ghidalia, Gayle Zoffer and Jim Rubenstein led adult learners through an overview of the history of slavery, Jim Crow and discrimination against African Americans in the United States and ways to address the still persistent racism in our modern society.

## Other Activities

- In June 2019, the Task Force sponsored a luncheon training session at Shir Tikvah for Task Force members and adult and teen members of color with **Yavilah McCoy** in partnership with Liz Loeb, Co-Director of the St. Paul-based Kaleo Center. Yavilah McCoy is a black Jew who has spent the past 20 years working extensively in multi-faith communities and partnering specifically with the Jewish community to engage issues of diversity, equity and inclusion.
- During the break in last Fall's Yom Kippur services the Task Force conducted a study session "**Naaseh V'Nishmah**" (**we will understand through action**) that can be reflected in the commitment to undoing racism as Jews at Shir Tikvah. The room attendance was over 50 people.
- **Back to school.** Over the summer and throughout the school year, the Task Force worked with the Religious School faculty to create a more inclusive and welcoming atmosphere in the classrooms.
- **Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday Weekend** – Services and a second annual Havdalah racial justice study session on Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Day weekend were cancelled due to a snow storm, but for Sunday the RJTF wrote a message to the volunteers who were performing Mitzvot in the community that was read by each of the site leaders. At Shir Tikvah, Tamar shared her story with the families who performed Mitzvot at Shir Tikvah and spoke of why we need to engage in this work.
- In February and March the RJTF launched its movie and book club with a viewing and discussion of **Race: The Power of an Illusion**, a three-part documentary series that investigates the idea of race in society, science and history. Unfortunately, the onset of the pandemic forced cancellation of the third session, but we hope to power up the club soon.
- Planning was underway with Rabbi Lekach-Rosenberg for a service to be led by **Jews of Color** on March 20, but this also is postponed pending the pandemic.

### Work during the Pandemic

- Joining JCA campaigns—Omer/criminal justice and Covid 19 Calls
- Jews of Color participating in JOC work around the country and in the Midwest with Edot HaMidwest, the Midwest Regional Jewish Diversity Collaborative with Shahannah McKinney Baldon, the director located in Madison, WI and Lasha Tilsen in the Twin Cities.

### Since the uprising

- Organizing with Shir Tikvah/JCA and the Black community (petitions/phone calls etc.) to put pressure on local officials.
- A group from the Task Force, led by Harry Adler, recently undertook the task to obtain about 30 children's books for the Shir Tikvah library to support conversations on race, racism and resistance. Donations to support this effort can be made to the Library Fund with a note that it is for the racial justice project. If there are any excess funds, the Task Force will look to acquire adult books on these topics.
- Another Task Force effort, led by Stacy Rudoy, was just created to help connect Shir Tikvah-ites with a network of churches to provide donations of diapers, food and other needed items of items in North and South Minneapolis.
- Working with Rabbi LR to support our Shir Tikvah JOC

**Big thank you to our fearless Rabbi LR for her leadership with the RJTF and the entire Racial Justice Task Force for the sacred work they do!**

Respectfully submitted by Tamar Ghidalia and Jim Rubenstein, Racial Justice Task Force co-chairs.