

Racial Justice and Inclusion: some Questions and Answers

The PCC Vision Statement on Racial Justice and Inclusion is intended to help All Saints to tackle racism in all its forms.

To do this effectively, we will need to be strategic: to address issues of governance, how we welcome people to church, how we conduct our liturgy, and the type of resources we provide in church (for example the library).

The following questions and answers are offered in support of the Statement.

All Saints is a member of Inclusive Church. Does this mean that we now care more about Racial Justice than other forms of exclusion?

No, all forms of exclusion identified by Inclusive Church are equally against the teaching of Christ.

Our Mission Action Planning process has a task group to look at *every aspect* of Inclusion at All Saints.

However, we have not moved ahead at an equal pace in every area.

We need to seize the moment to address this specific issue. But we will remain vigilant in our monitoring of other types of discrimination – for instance towards LGBT+ people, women, those with disabilities, those with mental health issues and those who are economically disadvantaged.

Of course, some people experience multiple exclusions.

Recommendations for action in some of these areas may emerge alongside Racial Justice and Inclusion in our Mission Action Plan.

The PCC aims to ensure that at least two of its members moving forward are from a black or ethnic minority. Isn't this a form of racism? Won't black and ethnic minority people feel insulted if they feel they are being asked to stand for the PCC on the basis of their skin colour?

It's important to recognise that every single one of us has different opinions about this issue – as well as about the PCC, and All Saints itself. We can't generalise. But the simple fact of the matter is that at the time of writing (September 2020) *not one member* of the current PCC would identify as being black or from an ethnic minority. This makes it very difficult for the PCC to develop a credible strategy for overcoming racial prejudice and discrimination.

There *is* a risk that some will think they are being asked to consider standing for the PCC for the wrong reasons.

On the other hand, others have already said that they have been hoping and praying that All Saints will become more diverse – in some cases, for years.

'Two' is the lower limit we have set ourselves, but ideally we would like more.

The Statement talks about 'racism' in the church. Are we really racist?

Sadly, there have been examples of behaviour at All Saints that fall short of Inclusive Church values in relation to ethnicity and race.

'Casual' racism (as opposed to overt, threatening or abusive racism) is a widespread phenomenon in our society. It is often linked to 'unconscious bias', and a failure to understand the impact of our words and actions on others.

Which is why we need opportunities to learn together – not least through unconscious bias training.

What is ‘unconscious bias’?

Unconscious bias describes stereotypes or social attitudes that are present – although hidden – in our response to others. The way others look – for example, their skin colour or features – often has a much deeper impact on how we treat them than we realise. (The same may be said about how they speak or move). Many organisations are now undertaking training to enable their employees and volunteers to overcome biases that have been reinforced since childhood. This is always going to be a challenging ongoing process.

I have always found All Saints to be a welcoming church. Are you saying it isn’t?

Not everyone has the same experience of All Saints. Some white members of our congregation may have to work hard to understand this. One way of doing this would be to attend acts of worship at a Black majority church – either as single person or with another person (but not in a group). An experience such as this can help white people to catch a glimpse of how it can feel to be in an ethnic minority. But bear in mind that even then the experience will be limited. White people often have more social power and privilege than black people, so they may be more protected from painful feelings of exclusion. Secondly, barriers to inclusion are often only gradually revealed.

Are you saying that everyone in a certain racial, ethnic or cultural group has the same experience and point of view?

Not at all. Deep differences of opinion and experience can exist even in the same household. We shouldn’t ‘lump’ people together, as if they have no individuality. This does not do service to our belief that each one of us is made, uniquely, in the image of God. It is part of our Christian calling to celebrate global diversity, as we praise God for the glorious diversity of creation. Lifestyles, cultural expressions, food, political and religious beliefs and so many other factors differentiate people even within broad ethnic ‘groupings’. To speak of ‘race’ – as if all black, Asian or indeed white people are the same – may involve an element of simplification. But it is *necessary* if we are to bring to light *real experiences* of prejudice and discrimination. Not everyone will have the same experience – but this is something we need to learn about as well.

Isn’t the phrase ‘Black Lives Matter’ racist? Don’t all lives matter?

Yes, all lives do matter. We are all beloved children of God. Some people think that to say ‘black lives matter’ is to imply that black lives matter *more* than everyone else’s. This is to miss the point that – as things stand – ‘black lives’ matter *less* than ‘white lives’. This is borne out by statistics around issues such as mental health, imprisonment, the behaviour of the police, educational achievement and career advancement – as well as in daily social interactions. ‘Black lives matter’ is a statement that focusses our attention on *inequality* in our society. This does not mean that the church supports the Black Lives Matter organisation. To make this clear, we now speak of ‘Racial Justice and Inclusion’.