

Racial Equity and CHFM

In response to a request by the Piedmont Friends Fellowship and Yearly Meeting for a summary of activities concerning anti-racism in Monthly Meetings, Chapel Hill Friends Meeting (CHFM) would like to share the following.

CHFM is becoming more diverse in terms of race and ethnicity. The 11:00 AM worship usually attracts 70-80 participants. Of this number, often 10-15 bring a variety of skin colors. Included are regularly attending individuals, and inter-racial couples and families as well as visitors from the university and community. They bless us with their participation in the life of the Meeting. At each Meeting for Worship, a member of the Ministry and Worship Committee reads the following statement: "We joyfully embrace the full spectrum of the Light within, made visible through the participation of all people, no exceptions."

Due to many years of work with the Orange Correctional Center, the Chapel Hill Friends Meeting's worship experience is much more diverse, racially and socioeconomically, than ever before. The spiritual benefits are incredible. Members of the CHFM community participate in the Yoke Fellows program to be directly involved with the Orange Correctional Center (OCC) in Hillsborough, including sponsoring inmates to attend Meeting for Worship. The majority of inmates welcomed to our Meeting are African American. Chapel Hill Friends are grateful for regular opportunities to worship with current OCC inmates as well as former inmates who have become regular attenders.

CHFM's Transition and Support Committee has a mission to serve and support men at OCC as they transition from incarceration to the community. Also, the Returning Citizens Financial Assistance Committee accepts and disburses funds to help men coming out of OCC and joining our community. The committee works with the Transition and Support Committee, which serves as a clearinghouse for information for resources within the community to which the men can be referred for help.

Other activities include the participation of CHFM members in workshops on racial equity conducted by the Racial Equity Institute. Participants learned about research findings on racial inequity and how to be a catalyst for change.

In education, ongoing Meeting support of Carolina Friends School, including annual financial donations, four CHFAM members serving on the Board of Trustees, and shared facilities, honors the school's founding mission to be inclusive and diverse. Trustees have received training from the Racial Equity Institute.

A member of CHFAM initiated and sustains a local group of "Coming to the Table," an organization "Working together to create a just and truthful society that acknowledges and seeks to heal from the racial wounds of the past, from slavery and the many forms of racism it spawned."

Members of CHFAM have participated as individuals in numerous other community efforts to promote racial equity:

- The Hate-Free Schools Coalition's work with the Orange County School Board resulted in a ban on the confederate flag as well as other symbols of hate and derision.
- Orange County Justice United is working with the Orange County School Board and Orange County Schools to add African American and Hispanic staff and teachers. The School Board has augmented recruiting efforts among African Americans both for teachers and teaching assistants.
- Orange County Justice United organized five public actions and raised funds to launch a new affordable housing pilot project, involving master leasing.
- Successful organizing that banned the "check-box" in Chapel Hill, Carrboro and Hillsborough whereby application forms for public jobs no longer ask applicants to indicate if they have been convicted.
- Friends support efforts to reduce the large racial and ethnic disparity in incarceration in North Carolina.
- Friends are involved with community organizing against mass deportation of immigrants.
- CHFAM members regularly participate in peaceful counter-demonstrations at Ku Klux Klan and other white supremacist rallies in Orange County.
- Friends are active with the local NAACP.

Racism remains a challenge in North Carolina, and Chapel Hill Friends Meeting members have expressed a desire to do more in support of racial equity within and outside of the Meeting community.