

Origin of *"We Have a Dream: A World Without Racism"* at St. Vincent de Paul Church

I had always been appalled reading about the cheering crowds in the Colosseum in ancient Rome, bystanders enjoying a lynching of a black man in the U.S., or one race enslaving another, treating others like animals, but considered it history, not something happening now. I never analyzed the consequences. After I watched the killing of George Floyd and the nonchalance of those around him, I immersed myself in webinars, books and podcasts about racism in this country, and learned how little I knew. I was horrified to learn that Hitler studied how the United States managed its marginalized groups and guarded its ruling white power, to model his extinction of the Jewish people, after us. Nazi Germany looked to America for inspiration! Hundreds of years of black oppression led to white comfort. My personal complicity in the injustice, because of my ignorance, lack of "racial" education, and naivety from growing up in a white suburb, needed to stop. I committed to work for change and some form of reparation.

We are not "one body in Christ" when racism divides us. What could I do to dismantle it? My joining Black Lives Matter rallies was not enough to change hearts, practices, culture and laws. Many need to be part of the solution, to move from protests to social action, to allow God to change us. I knew I didn't have "street credibility" and wanted to work with a friend who was an African American with knowledge, a different perspective and a leader in the community. So I asked Skipp Sanders if he would join me in beginning discussions in our parish to work for change. We started monthly meetings with parishioners on September 23, 2020, and began with our country's history to help us understand how racist policies entered every artery of our society, and how individual biases perpetuated injustices. We won't eliminate personal and systemic racism, but with the Spirit's help, we plan to shake it up where we are!

Peggy Meyer