

Understanding and confronting racial injustice

BY GREG & SUSAN ZOIDIS

We attended Plymouth's Racial Justice Journey workshop, *Personal Lenses & Collective Environments*, last month, and we want to encourage all to participate in this deep discussion of racial issues.

We had never before participated in a racial justice event and the most impactful parts of the program were the simulations that gave us a felt-sense experience of the systemic racism in our culture. The seminar revealed to us the feelings of frustration, disbelief and collapse that we had really never linked to racism. Intellectually we have always acknowledged the existence of our white privilege, but through the seminar's exercises we experienced just an inkling of how racism feels—and defeats us all.

In the first session we confronted our privilege that we've always taken for granted as coming from us—from our personal efforts. We saw how societal norms in fact hold some people back (based on race/ethnicity/gender/sexual preference) while allowing others (white males mostly) to freely move forward. In the second session we enjoyed a simulation until we no longer understood what was going on. Frustration built to the point of just wanting to give up.

The effect of the two evenings was to experience a little of what it might be like to be “on the other side” of systemic racism. We could feel compassion for people who suffer from racial injustice—not just acknowledge that it exists but feel the impact. In the third and final session, we gathered in a listening group on the evening after the Presidential election. As each person in the group shared their feelings and experience from the prior two sessions and emotional responses to the election, it became clear to us that we have a responsibility to do something as Christians about a system that's rigged in favor of some and against others.

It can be easy to continue to ignore racial injustice since it benefits us. But as people of faith, we feel called to confront the injustice of the system from which we have benefitted.

As Christians, we feel called to stand alongside, behind and even in front of our sisters and brothers who have been systemically punished, knowingly and unknowingly. The experience of the seminar was an awakening of this understanding. Where do we go from here? Our hope is that others will join us on this journey to create action as a congregation to truly step into Christ's call for racial justice.

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Pictured are our Racial Justice Journey Consultants. **Colette Campbell** is the founder of Working Better 2Gether. She assists organizations with workplace conflict resolution and training and does coaching for business executives. Her husband, **Jonathan Stuart**, specializes in writing and teaching for business and educational purposes and offers workplace mediation and meeting facilitation services. Together they have been navigating culture and difference both personally and professionally for 20 years.